



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Republican vice presidential nominee Jack Kemp was expected to kick off celebrations among Jewish delegates and activists at the Republican national convention.** California Governor Pete Wilson, convention keynote speaker Rep. Susan Molinari (R-N.Y.) and San Diego Mayor Susan Golding were also scheduled to attend the event sponsored by the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee and National Jewish Coalition.

■ **Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy refused to attend the weekly Cabinet meeting after his aides publicly complained that he has been left out of all foreign policy decisions.** Aides to Levy and officials close to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were continuing to seek agreement for an effective working relationship between the two.

■ **Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat concluded two days of meetings in Cairo with the warning that the Israeli Cabinet's recent decision to allow settlement construction could kill the peace process.** In an interview, Arafat said he would seek international arbitration if the Likud government frustrated Palestinian aspirations.

■ **An Israeli Arab journalist who visited Syria two years ago said he saw the graves of three Israeli soldiers who were reported missing in the 1982 war in Lebanon.** The journalist's remarks prompted families of the MIAs to press the Israeli government to intensify efforts to locate the bodies. [Page 4]

■ **Lawyers for former SS Capt. Erich Priebke called for the resignation of Italy's justice minister.** Meanwhile, military prosecutors in two northern Italian cities began investigating possible war crimes carried out in and around the concentration camp of Fossoli. [Page 4]

■ **Israeli Education Minister Zevulun Hammer announced he would set up a special committee to deal with the phenomenon of teen-agers idolizing Yigal Amir.** His comments came after Israel Television broadcast an interview in which three religious high school girls said they were Amir's admirers. [Page 2]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Foreign workers in Israel a potential social time bomb

By Gil Sedan

TEL AVIV (JTA) — There is a social time bomb ticking away in Israel, and Israeli authorities have been doing little to defuse it.

With each closure Israel imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the wake of repeated onslaughts of Arab terror, thousands of Palestinian workers were prevented from working in Israel, primarily at low-paying agricultural and construction jobs.

To make up for the shortfall in unskilled workers, the Jewish state began authorizing the import of workers from farther afield — Thailand, Romania, Turkey, the Philippines.

The number of such workers now stands at about 250,000 — of whom some 150,000 are working illegally, said government officials.

Many of the illegal workers originally came to Israel as tourists and decided to stay. Others came to Israel under valid work permits and remained beyond the one-year legal time limit.

Their wages, far below the wages of the average Israeli worker, are nonetheless higher than what they can expect at home.

So they remain in Israel, often living in cramped, substandard housing.

They are not a burden to social services, so long as they have valid visas, which are issued by the Interior Ministry only after the applicant has received a work permit from the Ministry of Labor.

But once the permits expire, they have no one to pay their health bills.

If they have families, they are not entitled to any of the social benefits given to Israelis, including education.

Nor do the illegal workers have much hope for any improvement of their lot.

They can become Israeli citizens only if they marry an Israeli. If they have children while in Israel, their offspring also remain illegal aliens.

President Ezer Weizman recently warned of the dangers of hosting a large foreign community without the proper facilities.

Many of the construction workers, for example, live in improvised housing provided by their employers. There are often as many as eight people to a room, where they live in slumlike conditions.

Warnings from the Interior Ministry

In another sign of growing alarm from government officials, the Interior Ministry has warned that if the illegal workers remain deprived of medical attention they may become a source of serious diseases that could spread throughout the country.

Although police officials say the rate of crime among illegal workers is no higher than in Israeli society at large, some are concerned that poverty and substandard living conditions will in time ratchet up the crime rate among them.

In an effort to clamp down on illegal workers, inspection teams from the Ministry of Labor go on daily raids at construction sites to check foreign workers' papers.

But the inspection team numbers only 70 officials — hardly a sufficient force to cope with a quarter million foreign workers.

The scope of the problem has recently come under the scrutiny of the Interior Ministry.

Some 40,000 illegal workers come from the former Communist bloc, according to ministry figures.

Another 45,000 come from Asia and Africa, 15,000 from Latin America and 10,000 from Arab countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Morocco.

Most of the construction workers are Romanians and Turks; most of the farm workers Thais; Filipinos are very popular as nannies or as companions for the elderly; and most of the African workers are doing cleaning jobs.

With an unemployment rate of 6 percent, the Israeli economy can well tolerate the presence of legally imported foreign workers. As a result of

the influx of the foreign workers, the look and feel of many Israeli neighborhoods are changing.

An international gallery of people, mostly from Ghana and Nigeria, can be seen in the area around the former Central Bus Station in southern Tel Aviv.

A large Tel Aviv coffee house, Turkish Coffee, plays host to scores of Turks who come after working hours to play backgammon and cards or to watch Turkish television and drink tea.

At Herzliya Pituah, the luxury quarter of Herzliya that is home to diplomats and Israel's high society, one can see Filipino nannies taking children out for strolls or taking the boss' car for a shopping errand.

"The Israelis like us, they trust us. Why should they replace us?" said Simo Delfin, 46, of the Philippines.

Delfin, who came to Israel eight years ago after he divorced his wife, left six children behind in Manila.

He cleans homes and offices in Herzliya and Tel Aviv, makes at least \$2,000 a month and sends \$800 home to his children.

But he dares not leave to visit them, for fear that the Israeli authorities will not allow him back in. Originally allowed into Israel on a tourist visa, he is now illegally employed in the Jewish state.

But while he questions why Israel wants to deport him, the Interior Ministry recently said that it was seeking to remove 100,000 foreign workers.

The deportations, which can be contested in court by workers or their employers, may possibly reflect a broader political motive.

The recently installed government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has partially lifted the closure on the West Bank and Gaza in order to ease the prolonged financial hardship it has caused to Palestinian workers.

The closure had been imposed after the first of four Hamas terror attacks on Israel in late February and early March.

As part of the relaxed closure, an additional 10,000 Palestinian workers were recently issued work permits, bringing the total number of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip allowed to work in the Jewish state to 35,000.

Ten years ago, some 160,000 Palestinians held jobs in Israel.

Closures are regularly imposed by Israel in response to terror, but they have brought repeated criticisms from the international community, which points to a markedly decaying Palestinian economy.

Foreign workers may have to be displaced

And some Israeli officials, while not attacking the policy of temporary closures, have recently argued against those seeking to establish a permanent separation between the Israeli and Palestinian populations as a way of coping with terror attacks.

The separation plan, these officials say, would only serve to give Palestinians an additional argument for the formation of an independent Palestinian state that would have borders drawn roughly along the same lines that are de facto being established by the repeated closures.

Clearly, if the closures are ever fully lifted, many of the foreign workers in Israel would have to be displaced to make room for their Palestinian counterparts.

Moreover, authorities cannot tolerate a situation of "soft borders" where illegal workers insinuate themselves into the fabric of Israeli society.

Given these concerns, the issue of foreign workers — both legal and illegal — may well start moving to a position of greater priority on the agenda of the Netanyahu government. □

Israeli leaders voice concern over assassin's teen-age fans

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A television interview with three teen-age girls who professed to be members of a "Yigal Amir fan club" has prompted a storm of debate over whether there is widespread admiration among Israel's religious youth for Yitzhak Rabin's convicted assassin.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement that if indeed it was a widespread phenomenon, it must be "uprooted immediately."

Education Minister Zevulun Hammer ordered the creation of a special committee to investigate the matter.

Rabin's widow, Leah, said that nine months after her husband's murder, she fears that Amir has a huge following.

The controversy follows a report broadcast on Israel Television's Weekend Magazine program in which three 17-year-old girls from the Kiryat Gat area in southern Israel spoke about their deep admiration for Amir, who is serving a life prison sentence for murdering Rabin last Nov. 4.

The girls, whose faces were concealed by straw hats, said they sent Amir love letters, made scrapbooks with his pictures and newspaper clippings about him, and videotaped television segments about him.

They said they were drawn to him by his "cute smile," adding that the former law student who shot Rabin because he opposed the premier's peace policies was "a national hero."

Amir had sought religious justification for his act, saying that Rabin's policies with the Palestinians were putting Jewish lives at risk.

The students, who attend the Gross State Religious School in Kiryat Gat, said their parents knew of their infatuation and did not interfere.

They added it was clear that some teachers at their school supported Amir's actions, even if they did not express this openly.

"You can see that some of the teachers supported the murder," one of the girls said.

"They won't say that explicitly. They prefer to be quiet. But when we pressure them, you can clearly see they support it."

'Isolated act of adolescent craziness'

Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau said he planned to be at the Gross School when the school year opens later this month.

He reportedly said that if the teachers did indeed support Amir, they should be put in jail.

Hammer described the girls' sentiments as grave, but described them as "an isolated act of adolescent craziness.

"The state religious schools do not condone murder in any way, and certainly not the murder of the late prime minister," Hammer told Israel Radio.

But former Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein of the left-wing Meretz Party said many of Israel's young — especially from the national religious camp — had developed anti-Rabin sentiments as a result of the heated rhetoric directed against the premier in the months preceding his assassination.

"It's the inevitable result of this vilification campaign against Rabin, who was described as a traitor, depicted as a murderer," he told Israel Radio.

Members of Rubinstein's Meretz Party demonstrated outside the Gross School on Sunday, where teachers and administrators convened an urgent meeting to discuss the situation. □

Evangelical trappings at show upset many Jews in audience

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Hundreds of angry Jewish concert-goers walked out of a gospel music concert here recently when the event assumed the trappings of an evangelical prayer service.

The Aug. 1 concert, billed as a "Celebration of Gospel Music" by the Jerusalem municipality and the Jerusalem 3000 organizing committee, caused a stir when it took on definite missionary overtones.

While Jewish members of the audience said they were well aware that gospel music is Christian in content, many appeared shocked when Max Lucado, the event's master of ceremonies, repeatedly urged the audience to give prayerful thanks to "the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior."

Nor were they prepared to hear two Israeli performers, Barry and Batya Segal, sing "gospel" songs in Hebrew.

The Segals, who perform at many Christian gatherings held in Israel, are Messianic Jews.

For many, the last straw was receiving Hebrew-language leaflets distributed by Christian missionaries inviting members of the audience to accept the love of Jesus.

Although Israelis often attend music festivals held in churches across the country, the concerts tend to be non-sectarian in nature.

Those events intended solely for a particular audience — such as concerts for Orthodox Jewish women — are usually advertised accordingly.

Many who attended the gospel concert complained that the event was falsely advertised.

"I expected to hear gospel music centered around Christian themes, but instead the music was presented in a proselytizing manner," said Eddie Harwitz, a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

"It was advertised as a gospel concert, but it was essentially a prayer meeting."

Harwitz, who left the event early, said he felt "terribly uncomfortable" when Lucado gave "what amounted to two sermons," then asked the audience to stand and pray to Jesus.

"Both sermons addressed the issue of non-believers, and the evening wasn't a celebration of music or culture, but of Jesus Christ," Harwitz said.

"Last month, an American Christian group declared that its mission is to convert Jews, and the concert seemed to express this desire."

'Great insensitivity'

Debra Litwack, a teacher at a Toronto Hebrew day school, said "the purpose of the concert was misrepresented."

"Had it been presented properly, there are many people, including myself, who would not have attended," she added.

"Encouraging people who were obviously not of their faith to pray to Jesus as their Messiah showed great insensitivity."

Others disagreed.

A Christian student who identified herself only as Lena said, "When you come to a gospel concert you can expect to be witnessed to."

"Still, I'm sorry that some people were made to feel uncomfortable."

Eduardo Hubscher, the producer of Jerusalem 3000, said his office had received about 20 complaint calls about the concert.

He stressed that the event, which was part of a weeklong gospel festival, had been sponsored and organized by the American Gospel Association.

"It is a pity that people were offended, and perhaps parts of the evening were distasteful," Hubscher said.

"What you have to understand is that [prayer] is a part of [the Christian] way of living.

"The message of Jerusalem 3000 is universality. Jerusalem is loved not only by Jews. In their unique way, the concert expressed" the Christians' love for Jerusalem.

Hubscher added that at a time when many tourist groups are avoiding Israel for security reasons, the 2,000-strong delegation of gospel enthusiasts never considered canceling its visit.

"They're very pro-Israel and very pro-Jewish," he said. "They're here to show their support and attachment to the people of Jerusalem.

"After the bombings in Jerusalem this winter, the drop in tourism was almost catastrophic. They're here in spite of this."

Jim Groen, the chairman of the gospel festival, admits that the concert offended many in the audience.

"Please realize that we authorized no distribution of [missionary] material and no selling of merchandise. We said, 'No, no, no,' to anyone who called. The emcee of the evening was not authorized to speak or sermonize. I told him to offer a prayer for [Jerusalem] Mayor [Ehud] Olmert, for the municipality, the people of Israel and the peace of Jerusalem. Frankly, we were all shocked. It put a damper on the whole evening."

Vowing to learn from this experience, Groen said, "I want to offer a sincere and genuine apology. We didn't mean to offend anyone. We respect the people and the land." □

Recent Ben-Gurion graduate not everyday college 'senior'

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An 83-year-old Israeli recently completed his bachelor's degree in Jewish history, proving that no one is too old to be a student.

At first, octogenarian Ya'acov Vilan of Kibbutz Negba was a bit apprehensive about how his classmates at Ben-Gurion University in the Negev would treat him.

But he soon discovered that his studies yielded a learning experience beyond what is found in any book.

"I thought they would see me, as the saying goes in Hebrew, as 'an old Zalman,'" Vilan said. "But I enjoyed their company. Each of them saw in me a bit of their own grandfathers."

Vilan also found that he enjoyed perks as a result of his longevity.

"I never had to wait in the [line] for the printing machine," he told Israel Radio. Students "would bring me materials and get books from the library which were in lower places that were difficult for me to reach."

His teachers also enjoyed his participation.

"One said to me that I am a living witness of things that happened," he said.

Vilan already has his sights set on a master's degree.

But he will have to first overcome some logistical problems.

"I would not be able to go three days a week," he said.

"I don't drive anymore, and it's an hour-and-a-half bus ride each way. But I was told that when [I register] I could possibly work out a program with the teachers to study more at home." □

Priebke's lawyers demand justice minister step down

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Lawyers for former SS Capt. Erich Priebke have called for the resignation of Italy's justice minister for having ordered Priebke re-arrested after a military court set him free.

At the same time, prosecutors in two Italian cities have re-opened an investigation into two other former Nazis suspected of carrying out war crimes at a World War II concentration camp in northern Italy.

Priebke, 83, was declared guilty on Aug. 1 of involvement in the March 1944 massacre of 335 civilians, some 75 of them Jews, at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome. But the military court said after a three-month war crimes trial that Priebke could not be punished because the crimes fell under a 30-year statute of limitations.

Protesters, including militant young Jews, kept Priebke barricaded in the courthouse for eight hours, until Justice Minister Giovanni Maria Flick ordered him re-arrested and taken to a civilian jail.

Flick at the time said he was ordering Priebke arrested while Italian authorities considered a request by Germany for his extradition.

At a news conference Saturday, lawyer Carlo Taormina, who recently joined Priebke's defense team, maintained that Germany had not made such a request at the time Flick ordered Priebke jailed. Taormina said he wanted Flick investigated for abuse of office or illegal arrest, and he called for his resignation.

Meanwhile, military prosecutors in the northern Italian cities of Verona and La Spezia have begun investigating possible war crimes carried out in and around the concentration camp of Fossoli.

They are looking into the activities of Karl Titho, the Fossoli camp commander, and his assistant, Hans Haage. Titho is now 85; Haage is 90. Both men are living in Germany.

"Prosecutors have placed Karl Titho and Hans Haage under investigation for violence and homicide against civilians and repeated violence against prisoners of war," Defense Minister Beniamino Andreatta said in a statement last Friday.

Thousands of Italian Jews, political prisoners and foreigners were shipped to Nazi death camps from Fossoli, which is located in northern Italy near Modena. Writer Primo Levi was interned there.

Investigators say Titho and Haage carried out the execution of 67 prisoners on July 12, 1944, in reprisal for the killing of seven German soldiers in Genoa.

An Italian investigation into the massacre was interrupted in 1960 under unclear circumstances. The case was reopened two years ago after hundreds of files documenting Nazi crimes were discovered during the Priebke investigation. □

Israeli Arab journalist claims 3 MIAs are buried in Damascus

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The families of three Israeli MIAs have called on the government to intensify efforts to obtain information about their sons.

The request came after an Israeli Arab journalist from Nazareth said that during a visit to Syria two years ago, he was taken to a Palestinian cemetery near Damascus where he saw the graves of three Israeli soldiers who were reported missing in the 1982 war in Lebanon.

The journalist reportedly said there were ten graves of Jews or Israelis in the cemetery.

Among those buried there, the journalist maintained, were MIAs Zechariah Baumel, Yehuda Katz and Zvi Feldman. The three soldiers were declared missing after they were taken prisoner during the 1982 Operation Peace for Galilee.

Their families have since launched an international effort to obtain information regarding their whereabouts.

Palestinian security sources reportedly said last month that they had located three Palestinians in Jordan who claimed to have buried the three bodies in the cemetery under Palestinian names and without the knowledge of Syrian authorities.

Also in July, the bodies of Israeli MIAs Yosef Fink and Rachamim Alsheikh, killed in Lebanon in 1986, were returned to Israel as part of a prisoner and body exchange with Hezbollah that had been mediated by Germany.

Later last month, Israeli search teams ripped up part of a major road near Palmahim, located along the Israeli coast, to find what they believed were the remains of Ilan Sa'adon, an Israeli soldier kidnapped and murdered by Hamas terrorists in 1989.

The teams made the find as the result of information provided by Palestinian security officials.

Searches continue at that site, where the remains of a skeleton and some articles of clothing have been found, in an effort to positively identify the remains as Sa'adon's.

Last week, search teams found remains of a skull that was sent to a forensics lab for further testing. □

Talks with Arafat tied to bid by Costa Rica for U.N. council

By Brian Harris

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (JTA) — A recent meeting between Costa Rica's ambassador to Israel and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat may have as much to do with the United Nations as aiding the Palestinians.

The Aug. 4 meeting in Jericho was the first high-level meeting between a representative of the pro-Israel Central American country and a Palestinian leader.

Costa Rican Foreign Minister Fernando Naranjo said Ambassador Manuel Lopez expressed to Arafat Costa Rica's support for the Middle East peace process and offered the Palestinians aid in establishing a preventive health care system.

Naranjo said the meeting did not represent a step toward establishing diplomatic relations with the Palestinian Authority, although he did rule out the possibility of the Palestinians opening an interests office here.

Since casting the deciding U.N. vote in 1948 in favor of establishing the State of Israel, Costa Rica has enjoyed close ties with Israel and is only one of two countries maintaining its embassy in Jerusalem.

In April, however, Costa Rica joined in a U.N. vote condemning Israel for its bombing raids in southern Lebanon. It was the first time Costa Rica had cast a vote against Israel. Israeli officials at the time blamed Costa Rican aspirations to win a seat on the U.N. Security Council for the vote.

A Costa Rican diplomatic official said last week's meeting with Arafat was done with the campaign for a U.N. Security Council seat in mind. "This cannot hurt our election possibilities," the official said.

Jamie Weisleder, president of the Costa Rican Israeli-Zionist Center, said "there is no change in Costa Rica-Israel relations per se," but Costa Rica has taken steps recently regarding the Middle East that are linked to its quest for a U.N. Security Council seat.

"It leaves me with a certain amount of hesitation, but I feel things will return to normal after the elections" for the security council in December, he said. □