

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Violence escalated throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip as Palestinian security forces and Israeli troops engaged in intense gun battles. At least 11 Israelis and 42 Palestinians were killed in two days of armed fighting set off by Israel's decision to open a new entrance to an archaeological tunnel near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City. [Page 1]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned to Israel, cutting short a trip to Germany to deal with the crisis in the territories. [Page 1]

■ Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai announced a state of emergency in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The territories have already been sealed off, and curfews are in place in certain areas. [Page 1]

■ Syrian President Hafez Assad, in a taped interview from Damascus, said Syria had reached an agreement with the previous Labor government that Israel would withdraw from the Golan Heights in exchange for peace. A senior U.S. official said Assad was "overstating" the agreement.

■ Republican vice presidential candidate Jack Kemp again praised Louis Farrakhan's self-help message as one that "all of us, white and black, need to think about as we go into the 21st century." Kemp came under fire from Jewish groups for making similar comments earlier this month. [Page 4]

■ Jewish activists are mobilizing supporters in the Senate for an all-out assault on provisions in the immigration bill that include strict bans on federal cash assistance to legal immigrants. The measure, which passed the House yesterday, may never reach Clinton's desk because Senate Democrats are threatening a filibuster.

Because of the Sukkot holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Sept. 30.

NEWS ANALYSIS**Eruption of the peace process could shift political landscape**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ponders how to cope with the war-ravaged peace process, Israel's political community is assessing the possible domestic repercussions of this week's bloodshed in the territories.

Speculation has heightened over the prospects of Netanyahu being forced to invite the opposition Labor Party into a broad coalition.

That speculation intensified in the wake of intense clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. The clashes, triggered by Israel's opening Monday of a new entrance to an ancient tunnel alongside the Temple Mount, spread throughout the West Bank and approached settlements in the Gaza Strip.

The fighting, which included armed battles between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian police, resulted in the deaths of at least 11 Israelis and at least 42 Palestinians by Thursday. The total wounded numbered in the hundreds.

The possibility of a political shift focused on the fervently Orthodox Sephardi Shas Party, whose 10 Knesset seats form a vital element in Netanyahu's rightist-religious coalition.

While constitutionally, Netanyahu would continue in office even if he loses his majority in the Knesset, in practical terms he would find it impossible to govern for long if Shas refused to support him on votes.

Shas' spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, is known to be increasingly uneasy with the deterioration of the Israeli-Arab peace process during the Netanyahu government's first 100 days in office, which was marked on Thursday.

Labor leader Shimon Peres is due to pay a Sukkot visit to Yosef on Sunday, with Shas' parliamentary leader, Knesset member Aryeh Deri, likely to attend.

Political pundits say that could mark the beginning of a move to shake up the political constellation after this week's disastrous developments in the territories.

These pundits say Natan Sharansky's party, Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, could be another catalyst in a process designed to broaden — and moderate — the current government.

The assumption is that if Netanyahu brings Labor in, elements on the right of Likud, as well as the ultra-hawkish National Religious Party, might well secede from the coalition.

Such a reshuffle would be predicated, of course, on a prior decision by Netanyahu and his key ministers to move ahead expeditiously with the redeployment of Israeli forces from Hebron.

No indications Netanyahu plans to soften stance

The prime minister heard in no uncertain terms from Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak on Thursday morning, in a telephone conversation from Europe, that only a speedy implementation of the redeployment accord in Hebron could bring about a return to quiet in the territories.

There are no indications, however, that Netanyahu, who arrived back Thursday night from a truncated trip to Europe, is contemplating softening his government's positions in the wake of this week's violence.

Until now, he has insisted on renegotiating the security provisions of the Hebron accord with the Palestinian Authority.

And now, with elements in the Palestinian police having proven not only unreliable but actually hostile — and in many cases deadly — the prime minister would doubtless face redoubled pressure from his right if he moved to pull the Israel Defense Force out of most of Hebron, leaving the Jewish settlers there less protected than they are now.

Beyond the political machinations, there is growing concern across a wide swath of the political spectrum that Netanyahu, 46 years old and without previous Cabinet experience, is proving ill-equipped to handle the job of prime minister. Thus, for instance, the premier has been subject to implied — but unequivocal — criticism from voices within his own camp over his decision to open the new entrance to the ancient tunnel in the Old City.

Yitzhak Mordechai, the minister of defense, made it clear Thursday

that he was not comfortable with the decision-making process in that instance.

Ronnie Milo, mayor of Tel Aviv and another important voice in the Likud, said he had believed sincerely that when the new prime minister was elected, he was committed to the peace process.

He still thought so, Milo said, but he would have wished to see "much more resolute and unequivocal action during the first 100 days," especially the implementation of the Hebron accord.

On the Labor side of the Knesset, doubts regarding Netanyahu's fitness for the premiership were being voiced openly. "He lacks the abilities and he lacks the good judgment," said Uzi Baram at a Labor leadership meeting Thursday. Labor officials, in a deliberately provocative gambit, issued a statement Thursday urging Mordechai "to show national responsibility and take over the reins of power."

Labor Party figures are divided over the coalition government scenario, with some urging Peres to join if asked and others warning him to stay out. The latter camp fears that Peres would be forced to share in the blame for the blunders already made by the Netanyahu camp.

One key figure not yet heard from during the past three days of escalating disturbances is Ariel Sharon, the hard-line minister of infrastructure whose uncomplimentary assessment of Netanyahu's leadership qualities is well-known. Sharon, despite his tough views on Arafat and the peace accords with the Palestinians, is believed to be anxious to bring Peres and other Laborites into the government.

Netanyahu's supporters, meanwhile, were hoping Thursday night that the premier's return to the country to take direct control of the crisis would provide a high-profile opportunity for him to demonstrate national leadership and score well in public opinion.

Netanyahu's close Cabinet ally, Acting Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi, rebuffed criticism of Netanyahu's decision on the tunnel in Jerusalem.

Instead, he blamed the killings on the previous Labor government.

"We warned you and warned you, do not give them guns," Hanegbi said. "Now those guns have been turned against our people." □

Tourists visit disputed tunnel as Palestinians riot in Old City

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Israeli police and Palestinians clashed in the narrow alleyways of Jerusalem's Old City, it seemed as if the intifada had started all over again.

Angered by Israel's decision earlier this week to open a new entrance to a tunnel next to the Western Wall and Temple Mount, scores of Palestinian men and boys scuffled Thursday with hundreds of police in riot gear.

Although sporadic and relatively short in duration, the clashes had all the earmarks of the intifada, the 1987-1993 Palestinian uprising, with Arabs lobbing rocks and bottles at police, who pursued the rioters through the winding streets.

Because of a general strike by Arab shopkeepers, and perhaps frightened away by the sight of police armed with tear-gas canisters and billy clubs, fewer people than usual appeared to be in the vicinity.

Even so, several young Arab children on their way home from school, and dozens of European tourists, many watching the clashes with a combination of fascination and fear, managed to snake their way through the police and protesters.

In a clear indication that the tunnel opening was just one part of a larger grievance, many Palestinians vented their rage at anyone who would listen.

At the height of a riot taking place in the Muslim Quarter, one man in his 40s shouted, "This is the start of a new intifada, but this time it will be much more intense than before. Netanyahu was asking for this."

Pointing to Israeli police stationed on a nearby rooftop, he added, "Look at them up there. We've been on the road to peace, and all this time the Israelis have been on the road to war."

Another Palestinian, watching the clashes from the sidelines, said, "It is impossible to make peace with the Likud," referring to the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"It's been three months since Netanyahu became prime minister, and all he's done is confiscate land, destroy Arab buildings, issue permits for more housing in the settlements and maintain the closure" on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians has been virtually frozen since Netanyahu's election in May, as the two sides have not been able to agree on further implementation of the self-rule accords.

Palestinian Authority official Faisal Husseini, who was lightly injured in a scuffle on the Via Dolorosa, said in an interview, "What is going on within Israeli society has nearly ended the peace process. If the peace process is stopped, [the situation] will regress to where it was before."

While Israelis and Palestinians clashed throughout the day in the West Bank and Gaza, the tunnel that sparked the fighting was peaceful.

Hundreds of people, both Israelis and tourists, religious and secular, visited the subterranean path, which runs from the Western Wall plaza to the Via Dolorosa.

"I heard about the controversy, but it certainly didn't dissuade me from seeing the tunnel," said Iget Blacquiere, a Dutch tourist. "Personally, I don't know how the Palestinians can claim that it is hurting their holy site."

Although she denied feeling any fear, Blacquiere did say, "My parents are quite worried. They called me yesterday to say they will be glad to have me home."

Incredibly, there were some tourists who had not yet heard of the violence taking place nearby.

"Honestly, we just arrived from New York a few hours ago," said a member of the Goldstein family, in Israel on a Sukkot vacation.

"But if we had known, we probably would have come. The only thing that would have kept us away was a direct threat, and as you can see, it's very quiet here." □

Moscow would nix Israeli envoy

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Yuli Kosharovsky, a leading candidate for the post of Israeli ambassador to Moscow, would not be welcome by the Russians, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Citing unnamed Israeli aides who met recently with a Russian deputy minister in Moscow, the paper said the Russians' message is that Kosharovsky, formerly a key figure in Zionist activism among Russian Jews, is regarded unfavorably as a dissident who emigrated.

Kosharovsky ran unsuccessfully as a Likud candidate for the Knesset in the May national elections.

The current envoy to Moscow, Professor Aliza Shenhar, who was appointed by the previous Labor government, ends her two-year contract this autumn, and the new government has indicated that it intends to replace her with its own appointee. □

Voter guide spurs debate over political role for Jews

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The first-known voter guide tailored to the Jewish community is testing how far synagogues and Jewish institutions can — and will — delve into electoral politics.

A legal and ethical row has erupted over the recently released "1996 Jewish Community Voter Guide."

The guide, published by the Chicago-based JAC Education Foundation, lists the votes of all members of Congress "on issues of concern to the Jewish community," including foreign aid, abortion, school prayer and welfare.

The JAC foundation, established last year by leaders of the pro-Israel and pro-choice political action committee, JAC PAC, says it has distributed copies of the six-page pamphlet to Reform and Conservative congregations across the country and to groups such as Hadassah and the National Council of Jewish Women. Most Jewish federations and community relations councils across the country have also received copies of the guide.

Less than six weeks from Election Day, the voter guide has become a political hot potato as Jewish groups have begun to debate how and whether they should distribute it to their members.

At issue is the line between political advocacy and political education. The Internal Revenue Service forbids tax-exempt non-profit groups from engaging in partisan politics. They are, however, allowed to educate voters.

Legal experts familiar with the guide disagree on whether the effort amounts to partisan endorsements. But they agree that the distribution of the guide raises difficult questions about the appropriateness of voter education efforts around election time.

At the same time, the National Jewish Coalition has charged that the guide was "clearly designed to make Republicans look bad" by "highlighting liberal, not Jewish issues," said Matt Brooks, the Republican Jewish group's executive director.

'Not a liberal document'

The JAC foundation is staunchly defending its efforts. The guide is "not only a permissible activity, but a desirable activity," said Linda Sher, president of the JAC Education Foundation. She added, "Our goal is to let people know how federal legislators voted on issues of concern to the Jewish community. This is one of many resources for when people go to Capitol Hill, vote and even watch local news."

On the question of partisanship, Sher said, "This is absolutely not a liberal Democratic document."

"If we truly were trying to shape a document, we would have left the welfare vote out," she said, referring to the recent overhaul of the welfare system. That legislation drew support from many Democrats in Congress but was opposed by most of the organized Jewish community.

Concern that Jewish groups could endanger their tax-exempt status by distributing the guide prompted the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council to convene a conference call last week of legal experts on the issue. While most of the experts agreed that the guide could be distributed without violating IRS rules, NJCRAC is "urging caution" to its member agencies.

The guide does not rate or endorse candidates and does not identify which members of Congress are running for office this year. It does, however, list 11 Senate votes and 14 House votes of interest to the Jewish community and reports how the members voted. JAC foundation officials said they plan to release updates as soon as there are enough votes to report on in the next Congress.

One of the issues of concern to pass IRS muster is that groups must distribute such guides on a regular basis, not just around election time.

Much of the controversy also surrounds JAC's descriptions of the votes. The guide describes one House vote on a spending bill for the District of Columbia as a bill that "proposes a voucher system which would violate the separation of church and state." And a vote on the balanced-budget amendment is described as legislation that "attempts to balance the federal budget largely through cuts in social programs that would hurt people served by Jewish and other social service agencies."

Some Jewish groups are not opposed to school vouchers and others have expressed support for a balanced budget. These descriptions "clearly imply who voted right and wrong and states that that should be taken into account," said Marc Stern, co-director of the legal department of the American Jewish Congress. "That's not education, it's endorsement of a candidate."

The JAC foundation disagrees with Stern's claims.

"This is not a guide to tell you how to vote. It's to tell you how they voted," Sher said. "Right and wrong is up to the interpretation of the person holding the guide and reading it."

Most troubling for Stern is what he termed the "similarity" to the Christian Coalition's guides. Those guides have drawn sharp criticism from many Jewish organizations concerned about the political influence of the religious right. The group is also under investigation by the Federal Election Commission for its guides.

"This will expose the Jewish community to the charge of hypocrisy regardless of how the tax question is answered," said Stern, who said he would advise AJCongress chapters not to distribute the guide.

'Guide is dangerous'

Responding to the comparisons with the Christian Coalition guides, Sher said, "We do not rate candidates in the guide and do not tell people how to vote." Unlike the JAC voter guide, the coalition guides include numerical ratings and frequently compare incumbents to challengers.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, argues in a memo to Reform congregations that the JAC foundation guide "is different both in degree and in kind from the political activity engaged in by the Christian Coalition."

Whether the guide is similar to the Christian Coalition's is not important to Brooks, who argues that the guide is dangerous because it "makes long-standing friends of ours look bad."

For example, Brooks cited how Florida Republican Sen. Connie Mack fares in the voter guide.

"Mack is one of the strongest friends Israel has in the U.S. Senate. To say that he is wrong with the Jewish community 64 percent of the time is outrageous," he said, citing his interpretation of the voter guide.

But for this very reason, the JAC foundation argues that the document is an important tool. "I think maybe Sen. Mack might look at it and say, 'I didn't think that the Jewish community was interested in this issue,'" said Sher. "It's a positive, not a negative."

The controversy does not appear to have slowed the JAC foundation's effort. Officials said they have already sent out about 50,000 guides. As Election Day rapidly approaches, some Jewish groups are mobilizing to distribute the guide.

In the memo to all member congregations of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the umbrella body of Reform congregations, Saperstein wrote: "Voting records like the '1996 Jewish Community Voter Guide' are extremely useful information sources." □

Kemp reiterates his support for Farrakhan's self-help message

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Less than three weeks after Jack Kemp drew the wrath of many Jewish activists for praising Louis Farrakhan, the Republican vice presidential candidate has again voiced support for the Nation of Islam leader's self-help philosophy.

In an interview scheduled to be aired Friday night, Kemp told David Frost that Farrakhan's message of self-reliance is one "that all of us, white and black, need to think about as we go into the 21st century."

Kemp also said of last year's Million Man March in Washington: "Part of the message was to be admired."

At the same time, Kemp told Frost, "I have asked him publicly to renounce anti-Semitism, which is repugnant to me as a Christian and is repugnant to our American democracy."

The Frost show also features interviews with Vice President Al Gore and Reform Party vice presidential candidate Pat Choate.

Kemp set off a firestorm of criticism earlier this month when he praised part of Farrakhan's philosophy in an interview with the Boston Globe.

When asked his opinion of the Nation of Islam leader's self-help philosophy for the black community, Kemp said, "It's wonderful, it's wonderful," according to a transcript of the interview provided by the paper. Kemp said at the time, "Racism, bigotry, scapegoating and anti-Semitism are evil and must be eradicated at every turn if we are to move forward as a society, one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all."

Like Kemp's earlier remarks, his latest statements drew fire from Jewish Democrats.

"He doesn't understand," said Stephen Silberfarb, deputy associate director of the National Jewish Democratic Council. "You can't separate the messenger of hate from the messenger."

"What whites and blacks need to think about going into the 21st century is working together, not working with an anti-Semitic, bigot racist."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said, "It's sad that Jack Kemp continues to persist in misunderstanding how this issue impacts on the Jewish community."

'Statements ring hollow'

"You simply cannot separate Farrakhan's anti-Semitism from his message of self-reliance," said Foxman, who has protested Kemp's earlier remarks in a letter to the editor sent to the Boston Globe.

Kemp's latest statements came as the chairman of the Republican National Committee, Haley Barbour, lambasted Jewish Democrats for criticizing Kemp earlier this month.

Your statements "ring hollow given the clear lack of action on the part of the National Jewish Democratic Council and the DNC in dealing with racists and anti-Semites in your own party," Barbour wrote in a letter to the NJDC.

"Rather than playing political games like this, you would be better served by working within your party to bring the Democrats' record up to that of the Republicans on this issue," he wrote.

Barbour was referring to the Democratic National Committee's delay in refusing to participate in a voter registration drive with Farrakhan and the NJDC's silence earlier this year as Republicans called on the State Department to revoke Farrakhan's passport after he visited Libya.

Silberfarb called Barbour's charges "laughable"

and "ridiculous," saying the Democrats are proud of their record of standing up to the Nation of Islam.

"Had there been an agreement, we would have responded. To equate that with Jack Kemp's open embrace of part of Louis Farrakhan's message shows that Mr. Barbour doesn't get it," Silberfarb added. "Barbour claims to stand up to Farrakhan but has nothing to say about his vice presidential candidate cozying up to Farrakhan's message."

Jewish Republicans defended Kemp in the wake of the latest flap. "In an attempt to explain himself, Jack Kemp has reignited the issue," said Matt Brooks, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition. "Regrettably the only voice in the black community talking about these issues is Louis Farrakhan. I wish [Kemp] could find a better example to prove his point." □

France drafts bill to toughen country's laws on hate speech

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — The French government has drafted a bill that would toughen the country's hate-speech laws and make anyone who utters a racist statement subject to one year in prison.

Justice Minister Jacques Toubon hopes to present the bill to Parliament at the start of its autumn session next month.

But he has first asked the opinion of the National Consultative Human Rights Commission, which is headed by Jean Kahn. Kahn also serves as president of the Consistoire, the organization responsible for the religious needs of France's 600,000-member Jewish community.

Kahn said in an interview that the commission is "in the process of reflection and study," adding that it would present Toubon with its opinion of the bill after it meets later this week.

The drafting of the bill came after extreme-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen openly espoused racial inequality, causing an uproar across the country and prompting calls for legal action or a ban on his anti-immigrant National Front Party.

"To say that the races are unequal is a fact, an unremarkable statement," Le Pen said in a radio interview earlier this month.

Inciting racial hatred is a crime in France, which along with Germany and Belgium, has some of the most stringent laws against espousing racial hatred in the 15-nation European Union. But Toubon decided to plug up loopholes and broaden the scope of existing legislation after it was found to be too vague to prosecute Le Pen, who once dismissed the Nazi gas chambers as "a mere detail in the history of World War II."

In a related incident, Le Pen engaged this week in verbal sparring with Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Paris who was born Jewish but converted when he was a child during World War II.

Lustiger, whose mother died at Auschwitz, vigorously denounced Le Pen's recent racist remark, saying that the theory of racial inequality "leads to horror."

Asked by a radio interviewer about Le Pen's professed Catholicism and desire to meet the pope, who at the time was on a four-day trip to France, Lustiger replied: "I am very pleased to hear that, especially if it means he will be able to hear the pope's message and to convert, not only in his intentions but in his heart."

Le Pen, who won 15 percent of the vote in the 1995 presidential elections, retorted in a blatant reference to Lustiger's childhood past: "I don't have to convert because when I was born, I was baptized, into a religion that I had never renounced." □