



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli President Ezer Weizman and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat concluded talks at Weizman's private home in Caesarea with a call for an end to violence and renewed efforts to advance the peace process. Speaking at a joint news conference, Arafat promised that Palestinian police would not fire on Israeli soldiers.

■ The coordinator of activities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip warned that new violence could erupt there at any time. Addressing the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Maj. Gen. Oren Shahor said additional violence could threaten the entire peace process.

■ U.S. Rep. Benjamin Gilman's (R-N.Y.) hold on \$10 million in aid to the Palestinian Authority will remain in effect until October 1997. Despite rumors to the contrary, the aid is based on a two-year spending pattern and did not expire last week. Gilman is the chairman of the House International Relations Committee.

■ Ariel Sharon, Israel's infrastructure minister, kicked off a two-day Israel-North America Business Conference in New York City. Hundreds of U.S. companies and investors are expected to attend and to bid on \$50 billion worth of Israeli projects in telecommunications, transportation, electrical power, gas, tourism and construction, sponsors said.

■ The U.S. Attorney's Office formally launched an investigation into voting fraud in Kiryas Joel, a village north-west of New York City. The probe comes after a local newspaper uncovered a voting scam involving yeshiva students.

■ Federal prosecutors revived charges against a Brooklyn Chasidic rabbi who was accused of fondling a teen-age girl on an international flight last year. [Page 3]

■ Austrian far-right leader Jorg Haider added a Jewish author to his party's list for the upcoming elections to the European Parliament. Haider's Freedom Party, the strongest far-right party in Western Europe, is also expected to do well in Vienna's municipal elections. [Page 3]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Amid tense times for peace, U.S. Jewry hangs in balance

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Jewish community's relief is nearly palpable now that Israelis and Palestinians have replaced the street with the negotiating table as the venue to resolve their disputes.

But there is a widespread feeling that last week's Washington summit only bought some time and that the current talks at the Erez crossing are painfully fragile.

There is a wariness that any breakdown could spell an explosion of simmering tensions over differences on the peace process both among American Jews and between the Israeli and U.S. governments, putting Jews in the middle.

The American Jewish establishment rallied to a nearly monolithic defense of the government of Benjamin Netanyahu after Palestinian police fired on Israelis in the region's recent deadly clashes.

The "trauma" of witnessing the violence of Israel's peace partner served to unify the Jewish community, "regardless of whether people agree" with Netanyahu's policies, said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

But forged as it was in the face of crisis, that unity has its limits.

For the roughly 80 percent of American Jews who polls have shown support the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords, those limits could be tested if the renewed talks do not bear fruit because the Likud-led government is perceived as dragging its feet. "A majority of the American Jewish community wants to see the peace process continue and a good-faith effort by the Netanyahu government" to that end, said Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, executive director of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation.

That determination is "hanging in the balance," he said.

"In order for American Jewish leadership to maintain its ethical and moral respectability, it has to be honest and straightforward in calling on the government to uphold the agreements that have been made," said Liebling.

The community's traditional aggressive advocacy for the Israeli government also could be challenged after Election Day if President Clinton is re-elected and the two governments find themselves increasingly at odds over hot-button issues such as Israeli redeployment in Hebron and the expansion of Jewish settlements.

With Clinton unfettered by his current political constraints, some fear that he would take a harder line with Israel and that confrontations could occur — with Jews left to mediate. Indeed, the memory of high U.S.-Israel tensions during the Shamir-Bush years makes it impossible to dismiss the prospect of difficult scenarios if the two administrations diverge, especially on final-status issues such as Jerusalem.

'A lot will depend on events'

However, the prime minister met last week with about 35 Jewish leaders and made "no appeal for counterpressure," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Rather, Netanyahu offered an "honest and sober analysis" of the problems and "reiterated his commitment" to move ahead with the peace process, Hoenlein said.

"The president does not want to impose an agenda," Hoenlein said, but "a lot will depend on events in the region."

Secretary of State Warren Christopher's trip to the region this week and his call for an urgent need for both sides to reach "concrete results as soon as possible" were clear signs that Israel will be expected to demonstrate with concessions the sincerity of its commitment to the process.

A lot "depends on what Netanyahu does," said Gail Pressberg, director of the Washington office of Americans for Peace Now. If the talks on Hebron "become another way to drag things out, it won't work."

"If we see a stubborn Israel that angers the U.S. government, we'll have very tense relations."

Already, some tension was evident when the United Nations Security Council adopted a critical resolution Sept. 28 after Israel opened a new

entrance to the ancient tunnel near Jerusalem's holiest sites, triggering the Palestinian violence.

Some quarters privately expressed disappointment that the United States did not veto the resolution.

But such disappointment was marginal, with most insiders saying that the United States had to abstain in order to retain enough credibility to convene last week's summit. Indeed, most lavished high praise on Clinton for the investment he has continued to make in the peace process and the fine line he has managed to walk as a broker. They said the summit helped bring both Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat back from the brink while not putting untoward pressure on Israel for concessions.

Martin Raffel, associate executive vice chairman of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, suggested that "core principles" and "verities" would prevent the United States from levying undue pressure on Israel and prevent Israel from bowing to such pressure.

"I'm confident," he said, "that Israel will not be moved beyond bedrock security concerns regardless of external pressures" and "the United States understands that and has always expressed that understanding."

Dr. Joseph Frager is one community activist on the right who is far less sanguine.

'There is an agreement to be implemented'

The entire Israeli-Palestinian accords were an "Americanized deal" that was "bad from the start and that went from bad to worse. I always thought it was illogical at best and self-destructive and suicidal at worst," said Frager, president of the Jerusalem Reclamation Project/American Friends of Ateret Cohanim, a yeshiva in Jerusalem's Old City.

He called the events of the past few weeks both a "bad omen" and a realization of a prediction "that arms being given to former terrorists would be used against us." At this time, he said, American Jewish responsibility "to reduce the pressure exerted on Israel is tremendous."

On the other side of the political spectrum, Peace Now's Pressberg said that while the community is united in agreement that "Arafat must do everything within his power to control violence," it is far from being uniformly behind this government.

Most people's "sense is 'enough is enough,'" she said. "There is an agreement to be implemented. Netanyahu can't just say he's in favor of peace."

Said Raffel: "To the extent that there is dissent from Israeli government policy, the question will be whether [the dissenters] are prepared to publicly manifest it, and how. Will it be inside the tent or out?"

The pressure to keep it inside already was much in evidence in recent days. Foxman said he found "distressing" certain statements from Jewish and other quarters that he felt demonstrated "moral equivalency" between Israeli and Palestinian actions.

"Let's say opening the door to the tunnel was a horrendous mistake, or motivated by animus," he said. Still, "it can't be equated with the Palestinian police turning guns on Israelis."

Foxman's outrage prompted him to take out a full-page ad on behalf of the ADL in the The New York Times on Oct. 2 condemning Palestinian violence.

One statement issued by the American Jewish Congress drew a lot of attention for its criticism of "both sides."

"Israel cannot afford to attack Palestinian sensibilities unnecessarily as it defends its sovereignty over Jerusalem," said the statement. "At the same time, it is no less necessary for the Palestinians to abjure all actions and

rhetoric which promote violence and to deploy their police force to ensure maintaining order."

Phil Baum, AJCongress' executive director, said he was surprised to be "confronted" by both Israelis and Jewish leaders "taking me to task" for criticizing the Israeli government. "This was not our intention. Our intention was to reflect the anxieties of many American Jews over the explosion of violence. We had hoped those days were behind us." □

Israeli security officials warn of new fundamentalist terror

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli security officials have warned of possible terror attacks this month.

Fundamentalist groups such as the Islamic Jihad traditionally carry out attacks during October, the officials said this week.

The prime minister's adviser on terror, Yigal Pressler, pointed out that Oct. 26 would mark the first anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Fathi Shakaki, the Syria-based leader of Islamic Jihad who was shot five times in the head in Malta. Islamic Jihad holds Israel responsible and has vowed revenge. Israel declined last year to say whether it was behind the shooting.

Meanwhile, the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported Monday that Palestinian police had arrested a suicide bomber on his way to carry out a terror attack in Jerusalem. According to the report, the youth was apprehended at a roadblock near Bethlehem last week.

The youth did not have any explosives on him, but Palestinian security sources said he was going to receive the bomb from Hamas operatives in eastern Jerusalem.

During questioning, the youth confessed to his plans to carry out an attack, according to the newspaper.

Israeli security officials refused to comment on the report. □

French group seems to forgive Netanyahu for declining invite

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — French Jewish leaders appear to have made peace with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after he spent his only evening in Paris with the French branch of his Likud Party.

During a recent trip to France, the Israeli premier angered Jewish community leaders when he declined to attend a traditional dinner for visiting Israeli leaders. But Netanyahu agreed to meet at his hotel with a delegation from CRIF, the umbrella organization of secular French Jewish organizations. According to a spokeswoman, CRIF President Henri Hajdenberg told Netanyahu during their brief meeting why French Jewish leaders felt slighted.

The prime minister promised to dine with CRIF representatives on his next visit to France.

The brushoff had been all the more controversial given the extreme hard-line stance of Jacques Kupfer, president of France-Likud. Kupfer once said he regretted the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin because "he deserved to be tried for what he did."

Last week, the CRIF's Hajdenberg told the daily Le Monde that Netanyahu "has unfortunately allowed himself to be maneuvered into supporting an event organized by a marginal group in the Jewish community."

Jewish sources said Netanyahu chose to spend time with France-Likud representatives because he wanted to thank them for raising considerable funds for his campaign and because CRIF had supported the previous Labor government's peace policies. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Austrian Jew may represent
rightist party in E.U. Parliament***By Marta Halpert*

VIENNA (JTA) — In a bid to increase his acceptance at home and in the European community at large, far-right leader Jorg Haider has stunned critics by including a Jewish author on his party's list for elections to the European Parliament.

Haider's Freedom Party, the strongest far-right party in Western Europe, already holds five of Austria's 21 seats in the European Union's Parliament.

Political forecasters say the party is poised to increase its representation in the Oct. 13 vote for the Parliament and could move up to the second position in the Austrian delegation, after the governing Social Democratic Party.

Haider recently offered Peter Sichrovsky, 50, the second slot on the party list, which virtually assures the author a place among the Freedom Party's representatives to the Parliament.

Haider said the presence of a Jew in the anti-immigrant Freedom Party could improve his group's standing in the Parliament, which routinely deals with such issues as human rights, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

"We will probably be less vulnerable, less open for attacks" with Sichrovsky in the party's parliamentary delegation, Haider said in an interview.

He added that he included Sichrovsky on the list to prove that his group "is an open party. In our Freedom Party, it does not matter which religion you have."

According to an American Jewish Committee survey released last year, one in three supporters of the Freedom Party manifests strong anti-Semitic prejudice.

The party, which has explicitly called for a ban on immigrants, won nearly a quarter of the votes in Austria's general elections last year.

Haider's naming of Sichrovsky to the party list prompted outrage from Jewish critics, who referred to Sichrovsky as a traitor.

In the interview, Haider referred to this criticism as "petty, small-minded anti-Semitism."

'Trying to modernize Austria'

Sichrovsky, 50, the author of 15 books and several dramas, defended his decision to join the Freedom Party, which he described in an interview as "one of the most interesting and most modern opposition parties, mainly because they are trying hard to modernize Austria."

Sichrovsky, who described himself as a political conservative, attempted to deflect the criticism that many members of the Freedom Party have a Nazi past and are close to numerous anti-Semitic and right-wing groups.

"The other 'democratic' parties in Austria have just as many anti-Semites or old Nazis," said Sichrovsky, whose parents fled to Britain from Austria before World War II. "The [Nazi] 'tradition' between 1938 and 1945 did not disappear and it is not exclusive" to the Freedom Party.

Sichrovsky also had harsh words for his critics.

"I am probably the widest-read Jewish author in the world. If these people criticize me it means that they are living in the past, because they cannot differentiate between heritage and political opinion."

Sichrovsky had once been among Haider's critics.

After Haider praised in 1991 some of Hitler's policies, Sichrovsky described him as "the scum that floats to the top, even when you add fresh water."

But in recent interviews, Sichrovsky said he believed that Haider had changed his views.

In a related development, Haider's Freedom Party has become the target of criticisms over its campaign for Vienna's municipal elections, which also take place Oct. 13.

The party claims that too many foreigners — particularly Turks, Serbs and Arabs — have been allowed to live in Vienna and that the city's quality of life has declined as a result.

"Vienna Should Not Become Like Chicago," reads one of the party's posters — a reference to the crime rate in Chicago during the era of Al Capone.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter was visibly taken aback by the party poster during a recent trip to Vienna.

Chicago Mayor Richard Daley reacted to the poster by saying, "To judge Chicago by an infamous person of the past would be like judging Vienna by Adolf Hitler."

In Vienna's 1991 elections, the Freedom Party won 22.6 percent of the vote, which for the first time put it in second place behind the Social Democrats.

Political observers forecast that the party will win 26 percent of next week's vote. □

**Prosecutors revive sex charges
against Brooklyn Chasidic rabbi***By Tom Tugend*

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Federal prosecutors have revived charges against a Brooklyn Chasidic rabbi accused of fondling a teen-age girl on an international flight last year.

The original complaint against Rabbi Israel Grunwald of "knowingly engaging in a sexual contact with a 15-year-old female," stemmed from charges by the girl that she had been groped and fondled by Grunwald and by his assistant Yehudah Friedlander in May 1995.

Friedlander subsequently pleaded guilty and is serving a 22-month sentence in federal prison.

However, the charges against Grunwald were dropped by Assistant U.S. Attorney Debra Yang, though she reserved the right to reopen the case.

Yang now said she had continued the investigation and felt that the time was appropriate to proceed against Grunwald, who will be arraigned Oct. 15 before a U.S. magistrate judge.

Rex Beaver, Grunwald's attorney, said his client continues to proclaim his innocence.

Grunwald leads a faction of some 100 Pupa Chasidim in the Borough Park section of Brooklyn. He is the son of the late Josef Grunwald, the Hungarian-born founder and grand rabbi of the 12,000-member Pupa movement.

On the founder's death, the title was passed on to his older son, Yakov Grunwald, who heads the main Pupa community in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. □

Headstones overturned in Scotland*London Jewish Chronicle*

LONDON (JTA) — Scottish police have been treating the overturning of 94 headstones in Edinburgh's Piers Hill Jewish cemetery as a racial attack because only those in the Jewish section of the graveyard were vandalized.

The Jewish section has more than 600 graves, dating back some 50 years.

"This was the work of strong adults, not children," police Sgt. Terry Imrie said. "These gravestones are extremely heavy."

Imrie said no one had claimed responsibility for the attack, which took place during Yom Kippur. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

New twist in 'get' wars enables men to remarry without divorce

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's a "first wives club" that no member is able to escape.

In the past year, a dozen Orthodox men have been given special rabbinic permission to date and even remarry without divorcing their first wives, say advocates for "agunot," the women whose husbands refuse to free them.

A handful of rabbis in the New York boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens have issued the special rabbinic permission — called a "heter" — permitting a man to get on with his life without granting the Jewish divorce his wife needs to get on with hers.

Many more husbands are threatening to obtain heters if their wives dare to ask for alimony or child support, said Susan Aranoff, a co-director of Agunah Inc.

Agunah Inc. is a Brooklyn-based volunteer group of three Orthodox women who advocate for women unable to obtain a "get," or religious divorce, which, according to Jewish law, can be issued only by the husband.

Until now, an Orthodox man has been able to keep his wife chained to a dead marriage — even if they were long living apart and civilly divorced — by refusing to give her a get.

And while that has prevented her from remarrying, it has prevented him from doing so as well.

It was the one bit of leverage women had in such situations, said Aranoff.

Now even that bit of power is being taken away from the women, she said.

One woman paying the price for this new development is Liat Besterman. Besterman is a modern Orthodox woman from Elizabeth, N.J., who just celebrated her 25th birthday.

Although her husband, Ariel Hacohen, promised a judge in civil court to give her a religious divorce, he has since refused.

'Not married and not single'

He has also obtained permission from Rabbi Solomon Herbst of Queens, N.Y., to date other women without giving Besterman the get that she requires to be able to socialize, remarry and begin a new family.

In a telephone interview, Besterman said she left her husband about 18 months ago, after two years of what she described as an emotionally abusive marriage.

Neither Hacohen nor Herbst returned repeated phone messages requesting interviews, but three other rabbis familiar with the case confirmed its details.

Besterman said her situation "feels like a nightmare" and that she feels like she is being held captive by Hacohen and Herbst during the best years of her life.

"I'm in 'limboland,'" she said. "I'm not married and I'm not single, whereas this man is allowed to get on with his life."

"He's telling his rabbi that he's too depressed to give me the get, but he's not too depressed to go out and date," she said.

This use of heter is a "rabbinic reaction to the empowerment of agunot," Aranoff said, referring to recent successful efforts to publicize the plight of women who are unable to obtain Jewish divorces.

It is part of the same backlash as other recent developments, she said, citing as examples the phenomenon of "kedusha ketana," in which two Orthodox men married off their young daughters to spite their estranged wives, and the rumor that some Orthodox men have threatened to take concubines, or "pilgashot."

It is also "a backlash against women for going to civil court," she said.

Even fervently Orthodox women now frequently turn to civil courts to adjudicate custody arrangements and financial settlements because they do not get a fair hearing in religious courts, she said.

They often obtain civil divorces without getting the Jewish divorce that they really require in order to get on with their lives.

That threatens the power of the rabbis in charge of the religious courts, who want all divorce-related matters to be settled in religious courts, Aranoff said.

As a result, the rabbis, along with the husbands, are punishing the women by withholding their Jewish divorces, she said.

The only reason that a man would do such a thing is "revenge or spite," said Rabbi Ephraim Bryks, an Orthodox rabbi in Queens who opposes the practice.

"To me it sends the wrong message to the Jewish community, that men can close the book and heal, while women are left to suffer, and that's wrong," said Bryks, who added that, as a judge in religious courts, he has mediated more than 3,000 divorces.

A leading Orthodox rabbi, Emanuel Rackman, said he is aware of a growing number of heters being given to men and that he is trying to form a new religious court to address such issues.

Rackman, who is chancellor of Israel's Bar Ilan University, said he hopes to, under Jewish law, annul some marriages in which a wife is being held captive by her estranged husband and his rabbi, and free the woman to get on with her life.

The current use of heters is not the way that they have been traditionally employed.

When Rabbeinu Gershom, a 10th-century Talmudic scholar, banned bigamy and prohibited the divorce of a woman against her will, his rulings were accepted across the European Jewish world. They have continued to be accepted as the norm in almost the entire Jewish world.

Rabbeinu Gershom allowed two types of exemptions from his prohibitions, permitting men to remarry without divorcing their first wives, and set stringent conditions for their use.

'He couldn't abandon her'

In the first case, if the wife was incapacitated because she was in a coma or severely mentally ill, and unable to give her legal consent to a divorce, then a man could get a heter.

Obtaining one was designed to be difficult. The man had to obtain written permission from 100 different rabbis from three different countries who had to familiarize themselves with the case before granting their assent. In addition, the man was required to continue to support his first wife by putting money for her care in escrow.

"He couldn't abandon her," Bryks said. The heter has been employed from time to time, "but it wasn't a license for men to get on with their lives at the expense of women's rights."

Rabbeinu Gershom also allowed a second type of exemption, if a woman has had an affair and refuses to accept a divorce from her husband, or if the husband wants to move to Israel and the wife refuses, and also refuses to accept a divorce.

That type of heter, Bryks said, requires only the permission of a religious court, which is generally composed of three rabbis. This type of heter is much more common, he said, noting that he has used it on numerous occasions. This new type of heter is apparently based on neither set of circumstances permitted by Rabbeinu Gershom, said Bryks. □