



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ At least 10 people were injured in Jaffa after an Israeli Arab drove his car into a group of tourists and then attacked the British and Canadian visitors with a sword. The man, in his early 30s, was reported to be a supporter of Hamas from Nazareth. [Page 2]

■ Russian President Boris Yeltsin rejected a bill that would have placed restrictions on religious freedom in Russia. The bill now goes back to the Russian Parliament, which could override the veto after its summer recess. [Page 2]

■ An Italian court handed down reduced sentences to two former Nazi officers after convicting them for their roles in a 1944 massacre near Rome. [Page 4]

■ The author of a "Religious Freedom Amendment" to the U.S. Constitution came under tough questioning at a hearing of a House Judiciary subcommittee. Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) said his measure, which would allow for prayer in schools, is needed to remedy court decisions, but several lawmakers countered that the First Amendment already guarantees religious freedom in America. [Page 3]

■ Jewish groups and the Polish government have reached an agreement that expands the restitution of communal property in Poland. Under the agreement, a foundation comprised of the World Jewish Restitution Organization and Jewish communities in Poland will be established to negotiate with the government on property restitution. [Page 4]

■ The U.S. Justice Department filed a lawsuit to revoke the citizenship of a suspected Nazi guard living in Connecticut. Walter Berezowskyj allegedly worked at slave-labor and concentration camps during World War II and lied about these activities when he applied for U.S. visa and citizenship.

■ Israel and South Korea agreed to establish a \$6 million industrial research and development fund to encourage joint ventures. Israel has similar funds with the United States, Canada and Singapore.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Efforts to revive peace talks undeterred by alleged police plot

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It was a week of contradictions in the Middle East.

Allegations that senior Palestinian security officials were involved in terrorist plots against Israelis threatened to further hobble the peace process.

At the same time, a flurry of meetings involving Israeli, Palestinian, European and American officials signaled new hope for reviving the stalled Israeli-Palestinian talks.

In Brussels, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy met with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat on Tuesday in the highest-level meeting since April.

These parallel developments illustrated the complexities involved in breaking the stalemate.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself appeared fully aware of the difficult path.

While charging that the involvement of Palestinian police in planning terror attacks would be the gravest violation yet of the Israeli-Palestinian accords, Netanyahu also dispatched Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh to Washington with proposals for renewing the talks that have been frozen since March.

He also called on the Palestinians to move immediately to the final-status negotiations in order to make progress.

"I propose we focus our efforts and creativity in a comprehensive agreement between us and the Palestinians," he told reporters in Jerusalem.

"This is much better and it can provide what we both want — peace."

In his call for talks, it appeared that the Israeli leader had accepted the premise that Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat was not aware that members of his security apparatus were involved in planning terrorist acts.

If he was aware — and it were proved true — then the peace process could face a total collapse.

Even a situation in which top-ranking Palestinian security officials were acting on their own to deliberately escalate the already tense situation could have dire ramifications, suggesting that Arafat was not in control of his own people.

Arafat pressured from all sides

The United States cautioned the Palestinians to take the Israeli charges seriously, and Netanyahu sent a senior Israeli intelligence official to implore Arafat to take action, both for his own self-preservation and for the sake of Israeli-Palestinian ties.

The allegations surfaced after Israeli officials arrested three Palestinian police officers last week near the West Bank town of Nablus.

Israel suspected them of planning to carry out a terror attack on the Jewish settlement of Har Bracha, located near Nablus.

The three reportedly confessed to opening fire on Jewish settlers and conspiring to commit terrorist acts.

Israeli officials subsequently called on Arafat to launch an inquiry into whether Palestinian police are cooperating with the Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas or acting independently to carry out terrorist attacks.

According to information obtained by Israel, two senior Palestinian security officers — Brig. Gen. Ghazi al-Jabali and Col. Jihad Masimi — were involved in planning the attacks, the head of the Shin Bet domestic security service, Ami Ayalon, told the Israeli Cabinet.

Jabali is the Palestinian police commander in the Gaza Strip.

An Israeli official reportedly said Sunday that Israel had intercepted orders for the attacks that Jabali had sent to Masimi, a senior Palestinian police officer in Nablus.

Last week, Ayalon met with Arafat at Netanyahu's request and told him how seriously Israel regarded any involvement by Palestinian police in planned terror attacks. He also reportedly warned Arafat that the same

elements who were preparing an all-out confrontation with Israel could turn against the Palestinian leader himself.

Arafat promised to investigate the allegations. This week that commitment appeared to yield some results.

Arafat's associates leaked word to the media that he had ordered the arrest of any member of the Palestinian police who had associated with terrorists, regardless of his rank.

Indeed, Masimi and at least three other police officials were detained Sunday for questioning in connection with the allegations.

In what may have been another gesture toward the Jewish state, Palestinian security agents announced Monday that they had uncovered a Hamas bomb factory near Bethlehem.

Palestinian officials said they had found 10 large explosive devices ready to be used by Hamas suicide bombers, along with yarmulkes, tallitot and army uniforms that the terrorists could have used to pose as settlers or Israeli soldiers.

Ayalon told a Knesset committee this week that a developed terrorist infrastructure of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups exists in the territories.

But he said Arafat is not interested in terrorist activities that would totally cut off relations with Israel.

Arafat's recent moves signaled a turning point in the frayed relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Arafat may have been affected by Ayalon's warnings that he was losing control over his security forces.

But he may also have been preparing for a resumption of American involvement in the peace process.

For weeks, U.S. officials have been saying that it was up to the Israelis and Palestinians to find a basis for resuming negotiations, but the badly deteriorating situation may have prompted U.S. officials to re-evaluate that stance.

European officials, too, had been trying to get the two sides together to advance the stalled peace process.

Brussels meeting a 'breakthrough'

Neither Arafat nor Levy gave details of their hourlong meeting during a European Union gathering in Brussels, but both said in a news conference afterward that it was a breakthrough.

"I am sure we are now going to be able to establish the confidence necessary to proceed," Levy said.

But it remains unclear what proposals would restart the negotiations.

Over the weekend, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said U.S. officials at the highest levels were working on a "package deal" to restart the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Erekat spoke after talks in Washington with senior administration officials. He gave no further details, but said any resumption of negotiations required a halt to Jewish settlement activity.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that the prime minister's foreign affairs adviser, Uzi Arad, discussed the American initiative during his visit to the United States two weeks ago.

Naveh said little after meeting with State Department officials on Tuesday.

According to the newspaper, the proposal included a postponement of the second Israeli troop redeployment in the West Bank scheduled for the fall, a move to accelerated permanent-status talks, a commitment from the two sides to refrain from taking any unilateral actions and a restoration of full security cooperation.

Without a doubt, the Palestinians will introduce

their own counter-proposals. These are likely to include a demand that Israel halt its construction at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem.

But at this point, it is becoming clear to both sides that without a resumption of talks, there may be little to look forward to beyond street clashes and an escalating death toll.

A recently conducted war simulation conducted by the Israel Defense Force indicated that Israel would lose hundreds of soldiers if it attempted to retake the Palestinian population centers of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and that the Palestinian death toll would reach into the thousands. □

(JTA correspondent Gil Sedan in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

Russian president vetoes bill restricting religious activities

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin has vetoed a controversial bill that would limit religious activity.

The measure had elicited stiff criticism from the United States, the Vatican and some Jewish groups. The U.S. Senate voted 95-4 last week to cut Russia's \$195 million in foreign aid if Yeltsin signed the bill.

The bill would deprive religious groups that have been registered in Russia for less than 15 years the ability to own or rent property, hold public worship or do charitable work. It now goes back to the Russian Parliament, which is in recess until September.

Yeltsin's veto Tuesday could be overturned by a two-thirds majority of both houses of Parliament — which is a distinct possibility, given that the two chambers overwhelmingly supported the measure. The bill has been sharply criticized by Russian and international human rights activists as discriminatory.

The Va'ad, the umbrella for Jewish groups in Russia, had urged Yeltsin to reject the measure. Roman Spektor, the acting president of the Va'ad, said that the bill was "especially dangerous" to adherents of Reform Judaism and other streams of Judaism that have come to Russia in recent years.

Backers of the bill — including Russian Chief Rabbi Adolph Shayevich — said it would protect Russia against foreign cults such as Japan's doomsday sect Aum Shinri Kyo, which in March 1995 launched a Sarin nerve gas attack on a crowded Tokyo subway, killing 11 people and injuring more than 5,000. □

Israeli Arab attacks tourists in Jaffa

JERUSALEM (JTA) — At least 10 people were injured Tuesday night in Jaffa after an Israeli Arab drove his car into a group of tourists and then attacked the British and Canadian visitors with a sword.

The man, in his early 30s, was reported to be a supporter of Hamas from Nazareth.

An off-duty border policeman detained the assailant. Israeli police said the man was refusing to cooperate and was claiming that he could not remember what happened.

Earlier Tuesday, a Palestinian woman stabbed and moderately wounded an Israeli border police guard near the Jewish settlement of Netzarim in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian police prevented Israeli security forces from capturing her.

A Palestinian liaison officer said that Palestinian police apprehended the woman, who was reportedly released from a mental institution last week. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Proposed religion amendment faces wide array of vocal critics

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The author of a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow for prayer in public schools is being challenged on all sides.

Calling the First Amendment an impediment to religious freedom, Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) and his supporters urged Congress this week to alter the law of the land through a "Religious Freedom Amendment."

The so-called Istook amendment would give the go-ahead to government subsidy of religion, prayer in schools and other forms of religious expression on public property. While it has the support of the House leadership and about 140 cosponsors, the proposed measure faces tough critics both on and off Capitol Hill.

Amending the Constitution requires the approval of two-thirds of Congress and three-quarters of the states.

Despite the uphill battle ahead, Istook was firm in his testimony before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution on Tuesday. "We seek a constitutional amendment because the courts have left us no other choice," he said, referring to court decisions in recent years that he says have been hostile toward religion.

Istook said his measure would correct those rulings that have prohibited silent prayer in public schools, graduation prayers and the ability to post the Ten Commandments on public property.

The amendment would add the following language to the Constitution:

"To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience: The people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage or traditions on public property, including schools, shall not be infringed. The government shall not require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity, prescribe school prayers, discriminate against religion, or deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion."

But Istook was challenged not only by fellow lawmakers, but also by church-state watchdogs, who were out in full force.

"Simply put, the proposed amendment to the Constitution is not only unnecessary, it is also tremendously hazardous," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

"Religion is a deeply personal issue," Lynn testified at the hearing. "Any effort to create a religion amendment to the Constitution will undoubtedly upset the delicate balance between church and state that has enabled religion to flourish in our nation for over 200 years."

Amendment serves 'no necessary purpose'

Lynn's view was echoed by several Jewish groups, most of whom are adamantly opposed to a constitutional amendment. The amendment serves "no necessary purpose," Robert Rifkind, president of the American Jewish Committee, said in a statement submitted to the committee.

"The religious expression concerns that it ostensibly addresses are already protected by current law," he said, noting, for instance, that students are already entitled to pray and public employees may engage in religious worship.

The proposed measure also met forceful protest from Democrats on the panel.

"The amendment we are now considering is touted by supporters as the restorer of religious freedom. Nothing could be further from the truth," said Rep. Robert Scott (D-Va.), the ranking Democrat on the subcommittee.

"I don't understand what you're trying to do,"

said Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.). "You can't do better than the Constitution, which has guaranteed us freedom of religion."

Several lawmakers expressed concern that if the door is opened to prayer in schools, equal access would demand that all religious practices — Satanic worship included — be accommodated.

But Istook also had his supporters on the subcommittee. Rep. Bob Barr (R-Ga.), a cosponsor, called the amendment "a common sense proposal that will result in more religious freedom."

Even among Istook's supporters, however, there were expressions of some concern.

The measure's main Democratic co-sponsor, Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-Ga.) continued to voice support for the amendment, but backed away from its explicit reference to God.

Bishop said that reference should be replaced with a more general reference to "the people's right to freedom of religion according to the dictates of conscience."

Meanwhile, the idea of using Istook's measure as a vehicle to restore protections for religious practice voided by a recent Supreme Court decision received scant attention at Tuesday's hearing.

Some supporters of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which the court struck down as unconstitutional last month, have called for a constitutional amendment as a way to counter the ruling.

At a hearing before the same committee last week, lawmakers indicated that they would seek legislative remedies rather than a constitutional amendment as a way to counter the Supreme Court's ruling.

Istook suggested adding a section to his proposed amendment that would guarantee support for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. No one at the committee hearing followed up on that proposition Tuesday. □

State Department spokesman called 'vulgar Zionist cowboy'

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It took U.S. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns almost three weeks to condemn the call by the Palestinian Authority's justice minister to murder Arabs who sold land to Jews.

But it only took a day for Burns to give Freih Abu Medein a Bronx cheer when the latter decided to resign.

"We had a major disagreement with the Palestinian justice minister because he condoned — publicly, on the record and quite openly — political assassinations for those people who were suspected of dealing land to Jews and Israelis in Israel and in the West Bank," Burns said Monday.

"We haven't shed any tears over his resignation because here's someone who tried to pour oil on the flames and incite violence against Israelis."

Abu Medein erupted, calling Burns a "cowboy, a vulgar cowboy with a Zionist attitude."

It appears that Burns will get the last word.

In his last briefing as spokesman before moving to an expected posting as U.S. ambassador to Greece, Burns said, "I'm proud to be called a vulgar cowboy with a Zionist attitude if, in fact, he's upset with me for calling him someone who's been irresponsible in public office and who doesn't deserve to hold public office."

Burns, who has been criticized for leaning toward the Palestinians during his two-a-half-year stint as spokesman, ended his tenure on what seems to be a pro-Israel note. Jamie Rubin, who will assume the role of spokesman later this week, will become the first Jew to hold the post since Bernard Kalb resigned more than 10 years ago. □

Court gives former Nazi officers reduced sentences for massacre*By Ruth E. Gruber*

ROME (JTA) — The light sentences handed down against former Nazi SS Capt. Erich Priebke and former SS Maj. Karl Hass have evoked concern.

In the latest controversial development in the Priebke saga, a Rome military court judged him and codefendant Hass guilty of taking part in the March 24, 1944, mass execution of 335 Italian men and boys at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome.

About 75 of the victims were Jews.

The court sentenced both defendants to jail, but cited extenuating circumstances and drastically reduced their jail terms.

Tullia Zevi, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, said the reduced sentences the two received Tuesday were a disappointment, but that "an important principle has been asserted — that there are no statute of limitations on crimes against humanity."

Rome Mayor Francesco Rutelli told reporters, "I imagine that some people might think that this sentence is too lenient, but it is not our role to judge that."

The court sentenced Priebke to 15 years but reduced the term to five years. It sentenced Hass to 10 years and eight months, but reduced the sentence to eight months. Because Hass had been under house arrest since last November, he will not serve any time in jail.

Priebke may have as little as six months and 15 days left to serve because of time already served in jail, according to his attorney, Carlo Taormina.

Military prosecutor Antonino Intelisano estimated that Priebke would face 18 months imprisonment.

Both former Nazi officers are in their 80s and in frail health.

The high security courtroom at Rome's Rebibbia Prison was crowded with friends and relatives of the victims, representatives of the Jewish community and local dignitaries, including Rome's mayor. Some friends and family of the victims wept as they heard the sentence.

This was the second trial against Priebke for his involvement in the massacre.

Last August, another military court ruled he was guilty of having participated in the massacre, but said that because of extenuating circumstances and a statute of limitations he did not have to be punished.

That verdict sparked a public outcry. It was later annulled on appeal and a new trial was ordered. Hass, who was a prosecution witness in the first trial, was also charged after he admitted taking part in the massacre.

Priebke and Hass admitted killing two people each during the massacre. Both men claimed that they were following orders from the Nazi high command and would have been killed themselves had they refused.

The court accepted this defense as a "mitigating circumstance" that served as the basis for reducing their sentences. □

Poland agrees to enhance Jewish property restitution*By Rebecca Phillips*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish groups and the Polish government have reached an agreement that will expand the restitution of communal property in Poland.

Under the agreement, a foundation comprised of the World Jewish Restitution Organization and Jewish communities in Poland will be established to negotiate with the government on property restitution.

Last November, Polish leaders expressed opposition

to a foundation that would represent the 1,500 Jewish communities that existed in Poland in 1939. Warsaw said then that only the nine existing Jewish communities can make claims on communal property.

Some 3.5 million Polish Jews perished in the Holocaust, and an estimated 8,000 Jews live in Poland today.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, called the agreement a "fundamental breakthrough."

The foundation is expected over the next five years to submit claims for the return of at least 6,000 pieces of Jewish communal property now in the possession of the Polish government. These properties include old synagogues, cemeteries, schools and mikvahs.

Many of these properties exist in areas of Poland where no Jews currently live. The foundation will ask for the return of property "whether or not there is a Jewish community there now," Steinberg said.

If property cannot be returned, Steinberg said he expects that the Polish government will offer compensation. Returned properties that are no longer of use to the Jewish community will be sold.

Proceeds will go primarily to aid Holocaust survivors in Poland, Steinberg said. □

Mandela condemns bombing of South African Jewish home*By Suzanne Belling*

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — South African President Nelson Mandela has joined religious and political leaders in condemning the firebombing of a Jewish home in Cape Town.

"I wish to reassure the Jewish community that the government is sensitive to its concerns regarding the terrible bomb attack which took place in Cape Town," Mandela wrote in a letter to Marlene Bethlehem, national chairwoman of the South Africa Jewish Board of Deputies.

"The government condemns this act and all other actions which disturb the harmony of our society.

"We appeal to all our citizens to live together in peace and to respect the religious convictions of all communities."

On July 14, gasoline bombs were thrown at the home of Ivan Maron, an observant Jew who operates a Jewish book center.

An estimated \$50,000 damage was caused to the home, which was left uninhabitable.

It took place days after a crowd of Muslims marched on the Israeli Embassy in Cape Town shouting anti-Semitic slogans.

Both of the incidents were believed to have been sparked by the June 27 distribution of flyers in the West Bank town of Hebron that depicted the Islamic prophet Mohammed as a pig stepping on the Koran.

Cape Town has a large, militant Muslim community. But some Islamic clerics joined Jewish and political figures in condemning the firebombing.

Meanwhile, a vacant home in Johannesburg has been the target of an anti-Semitic and racist attack.

Jewish and local security officials believe the incident to be unconnected to the Cape Town bombing.

The townhouse had been purchased by Jews last week. But before the new owners moved in, the home was gutted by fire, vandalized and defaced with anti-Jewish and racist graffiti.

Bethlehem said in an interview this week that she had inspected the property and that the culprits appeared to be "rank amateurs, who obviously don't even know what swastikas look like." □