

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **U.S. special envoy Dennis Ross is slated to head to the Middle East to try to salvage the peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians.** Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department asked Israel to resume reimbursement of taxes and other fees it pays the Palestinian Authority. Israel suspended the payments, which account for two-thirds of the authority's revenue, in the wake of last week's twin suicide bombing in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market. [Page 1]

■ **The Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas issued a new leaflet calling for attacks on Israel.** Meanwhile, the Arab League called Israel's crackdown on the West Bank and Gaza Strip a "declaration of war" against the Palestinian Authority. [Page 2]

■ **Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said Israel should continue talks with the Palestinians because the peace process is the only way to avoid further terrorism.** Mubarak spoke after meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy in Cairo. Meanwhile, Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan and Prime Minister Abdel Majali are scheduled to visit Israel on Wednesday.

■ **Israel's High Court of Justice ruled that a representative from the Reform movement should be appointed to the Netanya religious council.** The court said that candidates for membership on the council could not be disqualified because of their religious convictions. [Page 2]

■ **An Italian military tribunal rejected a request to release former SS Capt. Erich Priebke from detention.** Priebke was sentenced to five years in jail July 22 for his role in the World War II massacre of 335 Italian men and boys. He will be eligible to be freed within a year because of time he served during his trial and pre-trial detention.

■ **Latvia's Jewish community protested the state's decision to build a monument to German soldiers in a forest where thousands of Jews were killed during World War II.** Authorities also decided to erect a monument to the Jews who were executed.

NEWS ANALYSIS**A tense Middle East awaits critical visit from U.S. envoy**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Middle East is in a tense state as it awaits an American diplomatic initiative aimed at salvaging what's left of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

At the same time, Israelis are hoping and praying that the July 30 twin suicide bombing here was not the harbinger of a new wave of bloody violence.

The new American effort to restore some dynamism to the crumbled relations will initially take the form of an open-ended mission by U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross slated for the end of the week.

Ross' mission, postponed from last week, has taken on a new urgency in the wake of the terrorist attack that claimed 13 victims.

Already tense relations between Israel and the Palestinians hit rock bottom this week as the two sides traded vehement rhetoric and cut off virtually all contact.

Unlike his previous shuttles since the peace process became stalemated in March, Ross is believed to be armed this time with some pointed letters from President Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright that are aimed at both Israel and the Palestinians.

In what pundits have called both "a package proposal" and "an ultimatum," the Clinton administration is expected to urge Israel to desist from further settlement construction in the near future while talks between the two sides resume.

The talks would be aimed at addressing issues still unresolved from the 1995 Interim Agreement as well as the permanent status of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem.

From the Palestinians, the Clinton administration is expected to demand a total war on terror and unfettered cooperation with the Israeli security services in preventing acts of terror and eliminating terrorist organizations.

This demand is expected to come with redoubled urgency after last week's attack on Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market, which also left at least 170 people wounded.

The attack prompted Israel to round up more than 150 suspected Islamic militants in areas under its control.

Israel also threatened to enter the self-rule areas to carry out further arrests if Palestinian Authority officials did not do so themselves and imposed a closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It halted the payment of tax revenues it has regularly transferred to the Palestinian Authority under the terms of the signed accords.

Israelis demolish homes

Israeli officials this week also demolished at least six homes that they claimed this week were built illegally by Palestinians.

Israel had withheld a payment of tax revenues, which Palestinian Finance Minister Mohammed Nashishibi said amounted to \$41 million. He charged that Israel was making it impossible for the Palestinian Authority to pay salaries and expenses.

Palestinian officials also said the closure of the territories, which prevents tens of thousands of day laborers from entering Israel, was a "collective punishment" against the Palestinian people.

They also charged that the punishment was misdirected, claiming that the bombers, whose remains have not yet been identified, had come from abroad and had nothing to do with the Palestinian people.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai countered this week that even if the bombers did not come from the self-rule areas, they would not have been able to carry out the deadly attack without help from the terrorist infrastructure operating in areas under Arafat's control.

In the aftermath of the bombing, the Israeli Cabinet this week took aim at what it described as Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's refusal to honor the self-rule accords, particularly its commitment to fight terror. If Arafat did not clamp down on terrorists and their infrastructure in

the territories, Netanyahu told the Cabinet on Sunday, "we will not unilaterally honor our agreements, and the agreement cannot survive."

U.S. officials apparently shared Netanyahu's charge that Arafat was not doing enough to fight terror.

"The security cooperation has been uneven," Samuel Berger, the U.S. national security adviser, said Sunday on CBS television's "Face the Nation." He added that the Palestinian effort against terror "has to intensify."

U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich had even sharper words for the Palestinian leader in an interview Sunday, saying, "I think there are very few people who believe anything [Arafat] says, and I think he has squandered what was a great opportunity to build general peace in the region."

Congress has recessed until September without extending a law that makes it possible for the Palestinian Authority to receive American aid and maintain offices in the United States.

In Israel, meanwhile, security forces were on high alert throughout the week amid warnings that more terror attacks were likely.

Hamas, which claimed responsibility for the Mahane Yehuda attack, threatened this week to launch a series of attacks against Israeli targets.

Meanwhile, the measures adopted by the Israeli Cabinet in the aftermath of the bombings prompted criticism and appeals from European countries.

The 22-member Arab League also criticized Israel, saying the measures it adopted amounted to "a declaration of war" against the Palestinian Authority. The league also held Israeli policies responsible for last week's attack.

Washington also sought to persuade the Israeli government to reconsider its actions.

On Tuesday, the State Department specifically called on Israel to transfer the tax revenues it owed to the Palestinian Authority.

In this environment, Ross and his superiors clearly have their work cut out for them to re-establish the trust and goodwill needed to relaunch meaningful negotiations.

Yet some observers have suggested that the very precariousness of the current situation may actually bolster the American envoy's chances of obtaining a package deal with Netanyahu and Arafat.

Albright likely to follow

If Ross succeeds, perhaps even more so if he fails, his mission is likely to be followed up by Albright herself, who has yet to visit the region since her appointment.

Both Albright and Clinton have repeatedly rejected the theory that American officials are turning away from energetic involvement in Middle East peacemaking to let the two sides "stew in their own juices" for a while.

While waiting for Ross, regional players have been at pains to engage in high-profile diplomacy of their own.

Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak held separate meetings in Cairo with Arafat and Foreign Minister David Levy.

Jordanian King Hussein invited Arafat to Amman and telephoned Netanyahu to set up a visit of his own to Israel. The king later changed his mind, deciding instead to dispatch his brother, Crown Prince Hassan, for a visit this week to Jerusalem.

Within Israel itself, recent events have intensified political discord. Labor Party leader Ehud Barak urged his colleagues to hold off from criticizing Netanyahu until after the mourning period ends for the Mahane Yehuda victims.

But, in closed door meetings that were quickly leaked to the media, Barak attacked the prime minister's policies and his recent boasts that his government, unlike the previous Rabin-Peres administration, had put a stop to terrorism against Israel.

Nonetheless, the premier and Barak met alone Sunday — an event that has given rise to renewed speculation about a possible unity government.

Netanyahu also met with President Ezer Weizman in the face of headlines that Weizman would make a state visit to the United States next month — his first since taking office more than four years ago — and that he would use the visit "to salvage the peace process."

These reports maintained that the invitation to Weizman was itself a reflection of the Clinton administration's distaste for Netanyahu's policies.

The premier and his aides reportedly were upset over the invitation to Weizman.

But Netanyahu rejected that speculation. He publicly welcomed the news of the impending presidential conclave at the White House — although he added pointedly that he had first learned of it from the media. □

High Court upholds Reform bid to fill seat on a religious council

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Reform Jewish woman has won the backing of Israel's top court to take her place on a local religious council.

The High Court of Justice ruled Tuesday that the Religious Affairs Ministry must allow Joyce Brenner to sit on the Netanya council. The ministry was given one week to register Brenner and make her appointment official.

The court also ordered the ministry to pay the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center more than \$8,000 for legal costs related to the case.

Uri Regev, the center's director, called the ruling "a moral victory" in the non-Orthodox movements' campaign to gain legal recognition in Israel.

The court has ruled on several occasions that non-Orthodox representatives cannot be barred from religious councils on the basis of their religious beliefs, but no religious council has permitted a Reform or Conservative representative to participate in its proceedings.

The Reform movement voiced gratification over the court's quick action on the Brenner case, which was filed in June. But the ministry indicated that it would oppose this latest ruling.

"Our ministry opposes the inclusion of representatives who declare, in advance, that their intention" is to provide religious services from a Reform perspective, and not from the Orthodox "perspective accepted by more than 99 percent of the population of the State of Israel," said a spokesman for the Religious Affairs Ministry.

The local religious councils, supervised by the Religious Affairs Ministry, have exclusive jurisdiction over marriage, kashrut, burial and other religious matters for all Jews living in Israel.

Forty-five percent of each religious council is appointed by the local municipality, with another 45 percent appointed by the religious affairs minister and 10 percent by the local rabbinate, an Orthodox body.

Another petition, pertaining to religious councils in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa and Tivon, is pending.

That petition, filed last month by the Reform and Conservative movements, asked the court to force the ministry to permit non-Orthodox representatives to sit on the religious councils in those four cities.

The ministry spokesman indicated that the Orthodox parties may try to block appointments of non-Orthodox representatives to religious councils through legislation in the Knesset.

Regev said Orthodox legislators might introduce such a bill, but "it's not at all clear that they have the votes to pass it. They shouldn't be too confident." □

Senators introduce legislation to accommodate religious needs

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Two senators have introduced legislation intended to prevent religious discrimination in the workplace by forcing employers to accommodate their employees' religious needs.

The bill, known as the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, has strong backing from just about every leading Jewish group.

Its proponents, including sponsors Sens. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) and John Kerry (D-Mass.), hope to convene hearings and make a concerted push for the measure after Congress returns from its August recess.

Supporters are taking pains to distinguish it from the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, 1993 legislation that was recently struck down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional.

The Workplace Religious Freedom Act is more narrowly focused on religious freedom on the job.

"For many religiously observant Americans, the greatest peril to their ability to carry out their religious faiths on a day-to-day basis may come from employers," said Richard Foltin, chairman of a broad coalition of religious and civil liberties groups supporting the legislation.

Current law requires employers to "reasonably accommodate" the needs of religious employees unless it causes the employer "undue hardship." The law, however, does not define undue hardship.

The courts have interpreted undue hardship broadly, resulting in several rulings giving employers a high degree of latitude in deciding whether to accommodate the religious practices of their employees.

The proposed new standard, based on similar language in the federal law protecting the handicapped against job discrimination, would require employers to prove a "significant difficulty or expense" if they decided not to accommodate a worker's religious needs.

"Though we know that only a minority of employers refuse to make reasonable accommodations for employees to observe the Sabbath or other holy days, the fact of the matter is that no worker in America should be forced to choose between a job and violating deeply held religious beliefs," Coats said in a statement.

The new bill is a modified version of similar legislation Kerry introduced at the beginning of the current 105th Congress. Other workplace discrimination bills were introduced in the previous two Congresses, but no action was taken, mostly because of time constraints.

A companion bill, introduced in January by Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) in the House, is pending. □

Pollard cancels Israelis' visit, says he's being 'stabbed' in back

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jonathan Pollard was on the verge of receiving his first visit from an Israeli Embassy diplomat when the convicted spy abruptly called off the meeting.

In a letter to Israel's ambassador to the United States, Eliahu Ben-Elissar, Pollard lambasted a renewed strategy by Israeli Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi to have Pollard transferred to an Israeli prison.

"Mr. Ambassador, it is not possible for me to receive an Israel Embassy official while the government of Israel is actively engaged in stabbing me in the back," Pollard wrote, according to a copy of the letter provided by his wife, Esther. □

"Only a government without honor would publicize a bogus prisoner transfer plan which they knew full well was not viable," Pollard wrote.

Pollard, a former navy analyst, is serving a life sentence in a federal prison in Butner, N.C., for spying for Israel.

But in a sign that the Pollard camp called "good news," the Israeli Supreme Court scheduled a hearing for Oct. 29 to hear a petition that Pollard filed with the government.

According to Esther Pollard, the government will have to answer whether the Israeli government had approved of Pollard's spying operation.

But the news of the court's hearing did not soften the Pollards' contempt for Hanegbi.

An international treaty on prisoners recently signed by Israel would allow Israel to request that the United States transfer Pollard to a jail in Israel.

Pollard recently secured Israeli citizenship.

But Hanegbi's plan incensed Pollard, who sees his life sentence as "a terrible injustice," according to Rabbi Avi Weiss of New York, who speaks frequently with Pollard.

Esther Pollard said Hanegbi's statements undercut their primary strategy to get Jonathan out of jail.

Supporters of Pollard argue that his life sentence is unjust and he should be freed.

The visit was tentatively scheduled for Aug. 7, according to an Israeli Embassy official.

Among the issues that had yet to be resolved was an embassy request to meet with Pollard without his wife present, according to the official.

But, the official added, Esther Pollard agreed to a meeting only if she or "a rabbi from New York" were present.

For her part, Esther Pollard said the issue was resolved and she would have been at the meeting.

Before the issue was resolved, however, Jonathan Pollard called off the meeting.

The meeting, which according to his supporters was requested by the embassy, would have been the highest-level visit by an Israeli since the early 1990s when two members of Knesset went to Pollard's prison.

A representative of the Israeli Consulate in Atlanta visited Pollard once.

Now, Pollard will only accept a visit from the ambassador himself, Esther Pollard said.

Originally, a lower-level Israeli diplomat was slated to go.

The embassy has not yet answered Pollard's letter.

"We're formulating a response and considering the situation in view of the letter," the official said. □

Israel kills five Hezbollah gunmen

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Fighting escalated again this week in southern Lebanon.

A day after Israeli soldiers killed five Hezbollah gunmen, including two area commanders, in a clash north of the security zone, Israeli planes rocketed suspected Hezbollah targets Tuesday in the Bekaa Valley.

After reporting hits, all the pilots returned safely to base.

Unconfirmed reports from Lebanon said two civilians were killed and four others wounded in the raid.

Israeli forces have been on heightened alert for possible retaliation for Monday's killings.

The deputy secretary of Hezbollah, Sheik Nae'em Kassem, told a crowd at the funeral in Nabatiya for four of the gunmen that Hezbollah would carry out suicide attacks against Israel to avenge their deaths. □

Jews in Yugoslavia fear new wave of widespread nationalism

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Jewish community leaders in Belgrade fear a wave of mounting intolerance fueled by Serbian nationalism and political, social and economic insecurity.

“Lately in our society, with increasing frequency and severity, declarations are being made which instigate national, religious and racial hatred and xenophobia,” the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia said in a statement issued last week.

“This resulted in several acts directed against persons and property not belonging to the majority nation or religion,” it said, expressing “regret and concern” at the situation.

The acts include the desecration of tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Zemun, a town outside the Serbian capital of Belgrade, as well as the persecution of Croatian Catholics in the same town.

They come at a time of mounting frustration at the slow pace of reconstruction nearly two years after the signing of the Dayton peace accords.

The Jewish community’s statement indicates a rare outspokenness on the part of the Yugoslav Jewish community, which has generally maintained a low profile since the breakup of the country and the bloody ethnic wars with neighboring Croatia and Bosnia.

Yugoslavia today is made up of the republics of Serbia and Montenegro. About 3,000 Jews live in Yugoslavia, most of them in Belgrade. The Jewish community’s statement — which was widely publicized in the media and received support from political and religious figures — did not mention anti-Semitism specifically.

But it was issued five days after the desecration last month of the Jewish cemetery in Zemun, a town that is ruled by the Serbian ultranationalist Radical Party, and said it expected the perpetrators to be found and punished.

Nine tombstones were toppled or damaged in the attack against the cemetery July 24, which took place in broad daylight.

The attack on the cemetery was just the latest in a series of suspicious incidents involving Jewish property.

In February, a window in the Belgrade synagogue was broken, but community leaders said they did not believe it to be a deliberate anti-Semitic act and did not report it to the police.

In the spring, however, a crude fire bomb was thrown into the synagogue’s fenced-in yard at about midnight. The fire caused only limited damage.

Climate began to deteriorate

Police said they could not find the perpetrators but promised to increase surveillance of the synagogue and community center buildings.

Community members say the climate in Zemun began to deteriorate after the the Radical Party’s Vojislav Seselj, one of the most notorious Serbian nationalists, was elected mayor late last year.

In order to obtain funds, the Zemun municipality rented out property — including the former synagogue building, which the Jewish community had sold to the city for a nominal sum several years ago. Seselj’s administration rented it out for used as a “kafana,” or downscale coffee house, which some Jews saw as a deliberate affront.

Brane Popovic, president of the Belgrade Jewish Community, said the current conditions have fanned the flames of anti-Semitism.

“It is easy to spread that feeling because of the poverty and insecurity,” he said. □

Book used in Latvian schools demeans Jews, Russians, Poles

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Jewish and human rights activists in Latvia have demanded that the country’s Education Ministry withdraw from schools a history textbook that they charge contains statements insulting to the Baltic nation’s minorities.

The book, “Latvian Eulenspiegel,” a reference to a popular character of German and Latvian folklore, contains disparaging references to Jews, who are referred to as “zids,” originally a neutral word that now has only a pejorative connotation.

After Latvia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Jewish community protested the use of the word, prompting Latvian officials and the press to avoid the insulting term.

The book, which describes the nation’s history before World War II, contains “terrible insults” about Latvia’s minorities, including Jews, Russians and Poles, said Mikhail Avrutin, director of the Baltic-American Bureau on Human Rights, an affiliate of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews that is based in the Latvian capital of Riga.

Along with anti-Semitic myths that are presented as truth, the book refers to Russians as “quite primitive” people who always use dirty language.

Two months ago, copies of the work were delivered as a gift to the country by Latvians living in the United States. The Latvian Education Ministry subsequently distributed the books to all schools in the country — with the recommendation that it be used as a companion to history texts already in use.

Nazi occupation viewed as lesser evil

The Dubnov Jewish Day School in Riga was among the institutions to receive a copy, according to Grigory Bikson, who teaches at the school.

“Clearly, officials haven’t browsed through the book before they approved it,” said Abik Elkin, a Jewish journalist from Riga.

The Jewish community and the Baltic-American Bureau on Human Rights sent a letter to Latvian President Guntis Ulmanis expressing “bewilderment over the book’s distribution” and asking that it be withdrawn from schools.

Officials have not yet reacted, but Avrutin predicts that the book “will probably be withdrawn.”

One member of the Latvian Parliament has also protested the government’s support for the book.

On the eve of World War II, the Jewish community of Latvia numbered about 95,000. More than 90 percent of Latvia’s Jews perished in the Holocaust, many of them killed by Latvian nationalists before the 1941 German invasion.

There are currently some 16,000 Jews living among the country’s 2.7 million population.

Two years ago, Ulmanis prompted outrage in the Jewish community by presenting a school with a book by a Latvian nationalist, Adolph Shilde, who collaborated with the Nazis during the German occupation.

Ulmanis later expressed regret over the incident.

According to Elkin, Jewish activists believe that such incidents have become common in post-Soviet Latvia because most Latvians view the German occupation during World War II as a lesser evil than the subsequent period of Soviet domination.

An independent state from 1918 to 1940, Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940.

The country did not regain independence until August 1991. □