



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's call for a freeze on West Bank settlements and home demolitions. After meeting with both Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, Albright said there was still "a long way to go." [Page 2]

■ Republican leaders in Congress vowed to step up U.S. efforts to fight religious persecution around the world. The Freedom From Religious Persecution Act, however, faces opposition from the Clinton administration. Most Jewish organizations support the idea of the bill, but remain opposed to some provisions.

■ A group made up of mostly Orthodox rabbis sued New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage on several grounds, including the fact that the museum memorializes homosexual victims of the Nazis. The Holocaust museum is slated to open Sept. 15.

■ A consortium headed by the American investor Ted Arison acquired a controlling share in Israel's Bank Hapoalim. The sell-off of 43 percent of government-owned shares in the bank, which went for an estimated \$1.3 billion, is Israel's largest privatization bid.

■ Authorities continued searching in southern Israel and the Gaza Strip for a 63-year-old Bnei Brak man missing since Wednesday. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright raised the matter in her meeting with Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat.

■ Sales of West Bank apartments to Jews have risen by more than 50 percent during the first seven months of this year, according to news reports. The largest rise has been among sales to immigrants.

■ British banks could be holding up to \$1.1 billion in dormant accounts opened by victims of the Holocaust, according to reports. Research by the Holocaust Educational Trust says British banks refused to return assets to survivors after the war unless they could provide exhaustive proof of their suffering.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

U.S. Jewish groups, Congress rally against Palestinian leader

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Are American Jewish organizations shifting positions on the peace process?

Jewish groups, as well as members of the U.S. Congress across the political spectrum have, rallied against Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in the wake of last week's triple suicide bombing in a Jerusalem pedestrian mall.

Many mainstream Jewish groups are using rhetoric usually employed only by the sharpest critics of the peace process.

At the same time, frustration has mounted on Capitol Hill that the United States has yet to put its own anti-terrorism house in order.

The anti-Arafat backlash comes as U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is on her first Middle East mission, trying to revive moribund negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

One Jewish organization that has been supportive of the peace process, B'nai B'rith, has called on the United States to stop all contact with the Palestinian Authority, including CIA participation in Israeli-Palestinian security talks.

"The Palestinian Authority has become like a rogue state in a position which can be likened with those states that the United States has ceased all contact with," said Tommy Baer, president of B'nai B'rith.

"Perhaps Arafat is not the right person" to lead the Palestinians to peace, he added.

Baer made these comments in an interview just hours after last week's attack on Ben Yehuda Street, which claimed the lives of five Israelis and wounded more than 190.

That kind of language is music to the ears of Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, who has spearheaded American Jewish opposition to the Israeli-Palestinian agreements, known as the Oslo accords, signed four years ago on the White House lawn.

"There's been a significant shift of people openly stating that Arafat is the villain here, and he continues to be the terrorist we hoped he was not," Klein said.

But other Jewish officials were not ready to declare that such a shift has taken place.

"We're not necessarily seeing a turn to the right," said Martin Raffel, associate executive vice chairman of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, formerly the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

"This is a rallying around the Israeli people at a difficult time for them."

Bombings eroding support for Palestinians

The Jewish community is laying the groundwork for a public relations campaign to boost support for Israel in its quest for security.

But even before the Ben Yehuda Street attack, it appeared that the American public was behind the Jewish state.

A recent Harris poll showed Arafat's image slipping while Netanyahu's was gaining strength in U.S. opinion.

The poll also showed that 37 percent of those surveyed believe that the Palestinians should bear most of the blame for the problems in the peace talks.

Of those surveyed, 20 percent said Israel was mostly to blame.

The poll of 1,007 Americans was taken in August and released this week. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

A similar poll in the spring found that 31 percent blamed the Palestinians, while 28 percent blamed Israel.

Respondents in the August survey split 41 percent to 40 percent on whether Netanyahu was breaking agreements with the Palestinians.

As for Arafat, 30 percent said he was complying with the accords; 55 percent said he was not.

While the American public lays some of the blame on Netanyahu's

doorstep, the bipartisan leadership of Congress has conditioned the future of U.S.-Palestinian relations on Arafat's actions. In a letter to the secretary of state, the congressional leadership urged her "in the strongest possible terms to focus on one clear message to the Palestinians: fight terrorism and violence unceasingly and commit to the systemic and complete eradication of the terrorist infrastructure."

The letter from Senate majority leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and minority leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), and House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and minority leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) wrote Arafat that "American patience and understanding are at an end."

"Arafat and the leaders of the Palestinian Authority must live up to this solemn obligation" to fight terror "or risk an end to the relationship with, and support of, the United States of America."

U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority remains frozen.

The law that allows direct aid to the self-rule authority expired last month after the State Department would not certify Palestinian compliance with the Oslo accords.

Meanwhile, Congress is preparing to act on another anti-terrorism front.

Fed up with the State Department's failure to create a list of terrorist groups, as required under last year's anti-terrorism law, Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) has introduced an amendment to the law to cut the department's budget by \$1 million a month until it completes such a list.

The list is a precursor to banning these group's U.S. fund-raising.

A senior State Department official said the list will not be completed at least until October.

According to this official, lawyers are working feverishly on the documentation required by the anti-terrorism law.

Schumer focused attention on the list in the wake of Hamas' claim of responsibility for last week's bombing.

"I find it an affront, as an American, that groups like Hamas are still allowed to fund raise here, are allowed to bring members here," Schumer said last week after the Jerusalem attack.

"Surely if the State Department was as serious as it might be in fighting terrorism, it would have designated these groups as terrorists a while ago." □

Albright predicts 'a long way' until a revival in negotiations

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright believes there is a "long way to go" before Israel and the Palestinians will be able to revive peace negotiations.

"So far we have managed to get agreement on the fact that terrorists are terrible, but we have not, I think, yet been able to see what the best methods are to get the peace process back on track," Albright said Thursday.

She made these comments after more than two hours of talks with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

In a second meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the secretary asked Israel to freeze all settlement activity.

Albright made a similar call later in the day during a visit in front of 600 people at a school for gifted Jewish and Arab children.

"Israel should refrain from unilateral acts, including what the Palestinians perceive as provocative expansion

of settlements, land confiscations, home demolitions and confiscations of IDs," she said.

A Netanyahu spokesman rejected the request, saying, "We cannot freeze settlements any more than we can freeze life."

Earlier in the day, Albright said the United States understood the "suffering" the Palestinians had endured as a result of the Israeli sanctions imposed by the Netanyahu government.

But she reiterated that Arafat had to crack down on the "dastardly" acts of suicide bombers.

Albright said that while she was heartened by the Palestinian leader's pledge to take action, U.S. officials would wait to see if the self-rule authority did, in fact, implement a sustained battle against terrorism.

"To be effective, the Palestinian Authority's fight must be comprehensive, relentless and sustained. It cannot be pursued only when it is convenient to do so."

"As Chairman Arafat knows, fighting terror is a 24-hour-a-day job."

In his remarks, Arafat denounced terrorism.

"We do not believe in violence or terrorism," he said. "We reject it."

But he did not indicate whether his self-rule authority was planning to launch the kind of wide-scale crackdown and arrests of Islamic militants demanded by Israel.

Albright also directed criticism at Israel for policies she said have caused the Palestinians much suffering.

"These have not been easy years. The Palestinians have suffered a great deal, including the human costs of closures, of restrictions on movements and of housing demolitions and land confiscations."

She also censured Israel for withholding tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority in the wake of the July 30 double suicide bombing in Jerusalem.

"It makes it more difficult to have the kind of political environment that is necessary for this partnership to go forward," Albright said.

Weizman, Leah Rabin criticize Netanyahu

Meanwhile, Israel's president and the widow of slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin criticized the policies of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in discussions with Albright.

Ezer Weizman asked Albright to ensure that Netanyahu implement all three pullbacks from the West Bank as stipulated in the Oslo accords.

Leah Rabin, making comparisons between the Palestinians of today and the Jews before the founding of the State of Israel, said Netanyahu was making unreasonable demands on Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Israel Radio also reported that in her meeting with Arafat, Albright appealed to the Palestinian Authority leader for assistance in searching for a missing Israeli man who was feared to have been kidnapped by terrorists.

Police officials said they were not ruling out any possible explanation for the man's disappearance.

Ya'acov Schwartz, a 63-year-old resident of Bnei Brak, disappeared this week after visiting his father's grave in Ashkelon.

Police found his abandoned car. A skullcap and shirt from an Israeli army uniform were found in it.

These clues prompted Schwartz's daughter, Ilana, to believe that her father had been kidnapped by an Islamic militant who was dressed as an Israeli soldier.

While Schwartz's wallet was found, his identity card was also missing.

Israel informed the Palestinian Authority, which conducted searches in the Gaza Strip. □

Churches, ADL demand accounting of missing funds for arson attacks

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The ceremony at New York's Marriott Marquis hotel last November marked a high point in black-Jewish relations.

After a spate of arson attacks, the Anti-Defamation League and the National Urban League had teamed up to raise more than a quarter of a million dollars to help rebuild burned-out black churches in the South.

At a news conference that gained national coverage, the civil rights groups presented an oversized check for \$225,000 to the Rev. Henry Lyons, president of the National Baptist Convention. They later sent additional donations, bringing the "Rebuild the Churches Fund" total to \$244,500. Weeks later, Lyons wrote to the ADL that six Alabama churches each received \$35,000 and a seventh was due to receive \$15,000.

But now, the churches are claiming foul play.

They say they only received a fraction of the money that Lyons had promised or none at all, according to a Tampa Tribune article published this week.

Three ministers who traveled to New York with Lyons for the ceremony got checks for \$10,000 each, the paper reported. A fourth church received \$1,000 and two other churches got no money.

Another church received \$25,000 seven months after the ADL and the Urban League gave Lyons the money. Now the ADL wants the rest of the money delivered. "Our concern is that the money in fact be delivered to the institutions. We are shocked and troubled by the news accounts," Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, said in a phone interview.

Foxman, who learned of the discrepancies from the Tribune article, immediately sent a letter to Lyons asking "for a complete accounting."

Lyons did not respond to numerous requests for comment. Lyons' attorney, Grady Irvin, told the Tribune, "You have indicated there is a discrepancy. There is no discrepancy."

"We will not spend our time responding to what now appears to be a second attempt by the media to put Dr. Lyons in a bad light," he said.

Lyons survived numerous attempts to oust him as president of the Baptist group last week as he battled charges of infidelity and mishandling church money.

Another much larger fund for burned churches has distributed all of its money, according to Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious relations at the American Jewish Committee.

The AJCommittee, the National Council of Churches and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops teamed up to administer an \$8 million fund that included foundation contributions, individual donations and in-kind contributions from companies such as Home Depot.

"I hope that the report is not true," Rudin said. "These churches really need every dollar." □

Israel: Russia helping Iran gain nuclear missile capability

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Iran is less than three years away from having nuclear missiles capable of reaching Israel, according to Israeli intelligence reports.

According to a Washington Times article based on these reports, Russia is helping Iran build missiles that could reach Israel as well as parts of Europe.

According to The Washington Times, the Israelis have given the CIA a copy of a \$7 million contract

between Iran and the Russian rocket-motor manufacturer NPO Trud. The report says the head of the Russian Space Agency, Yuri Koptev, is directly involved in Iran's program.

The cooperation appears to violate the Missile Technology Control Regime and could trigger sanctions against the company and perhaps the Russian government.

On Thursday, Russia denied it was providing missile technology to Iran. A Foreign Ministry spokesman said Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran involves construction of a nuclear power plant and provided "no grounds" for concern. President Clinton raised concerns about Russian cooperation with Iran in meetings with Russian President Boris Yeltsin earlier this year.

Vice President Al Gore is expected to raise the issue with the Russian prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, in meetings scheduled for later this month.

U.S. officials say Iran does not yet have nuclear material for missiles, but could substitute chemical or biological warheads.

Alarmed by Iran's activity, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, is supporting a congressional resolution that calls on Clinton to impose sanctions on Russian entities supporting Iran's missile program if the Russian government fails to take "concrete actions to stop governmental and non-governmental entities" from providing missile technology and technical advice to Iran.

Iran's missile program "has an even greater sense of urgency now because it is a near-term, real-world problem and therefore requires top-priority U.S. attention," said Howard Kohr, president of AIPAC.

The issue was also raised during meetings this week between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. □

In wake of Knesset criticism, Croatian leader won't visit Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Croatian President Franjo Tudjman will not visit Israel in the near future, according to Israel Radio.

Despite reports last month that Tudjman would come to Israel soon after the two countries established formal diplomatic ties, Israeli officials did not think the timing was appropriate, Israel Radio reported.

Israel and Croatia forged these ties earlier this month, a move that drew criticism from some Jewish organizations and political figures.

The establishment of ties came after Tudjman said he planned to visit Israel and apologize for his nation's persecution of Jews during World War II.

Tudjman's nationalist policies are viewed by many as an attempt to rehabilitate the fascist Ustashe regime that ruled Croatia as a Nazi puppet state during World War II.

He drew particular fire in 1996 by declaring that he wanted to rebury the bones of Croatian fascists at a Yugoslav-built memorial to the thousands of Jews and Serbs slaughtered at the Ustashe's Jasenovac concentration camp. Croatia had 25,000 Jews before World War II, most of them prosperous and largely assimilated. Some 20,000 were killed by the Nazis or the Ustashe regime.

The Israeli government's decision to establish ties with Croatia came under sharp criticism earlier this month from Labor Knesset member Yossi Beilin, who said Tudjman had yet to fully repudiate writings which cast doubt on the number of people killed during the Holocaust.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel has also joined the chorus of critics urging Israel to reconsider its ties with Croatia. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Among the fallen youth of Israel: Grandchild of a late peace activist

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It was the first week of the new school year, and a group of Jerusalem teen-agers had made their way to Ben Yehuda Street in search of new supplies.

Minutes later, two of them — Smadar Elhanan and Sivan Zarka, both 14 — lay dead.

Their friend Daniella Birman was critically wounded.

Within a heartbreaking 24-hour period, more than a dozen young Israelis had lost their lives in two separate tragedies.

Three teen-agers were among the four Israelis killed in a triple suicide bombing Sept. 4 at the popular Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall.

More than 190 others were wounded by the near-simultaneous explosions.

One of the wounded, Eliahu Markowitz, 40, died Monday from his injuries.

Less than 12 hours after the suicide attack, a failed raid into Lebanon early Friday morning by an elite unit of Navy commandos left 11 members of the unit dead.

A 12th member of the unit who was missing was later officially listed among the dead.

Behind the headlines, each victim had his or her own story.

Here are some of them:

- Elhanan, like her late grandfather Gen. Motti Peled — a former Knesset member and one of the first Israeli officials ever to meet with members of the Palestine Liberation Organization in hopes of reaching a negotiated settlement — was a peace activist.

'The hand of terror does not differentiate'

Indeed, a representative of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat attended Elhanan's burial this week.

In a graveside eulogy, Anis Kak, the self-rule authority's deputy minister of planning and international cooperation, addressed the mourners gathered at Elhanan's grave.

"The hand of terror does not differentiate between peace lover and extremist, Israeli or Palestinian," the Palestinian official said.

Elhanan was buried in a grave next to her grandfather.

She is survived by her parents and by three brothers.

- Zarka, Elhanan's classmate at Jerusalem's Gymnasia Rehavia, was the Israeli-born child of French immigrants.

Zarka's homeroom teacher described her as "a special girl who loved everyone and took everything in the nicest and most relaxed way."

"She was an excellent student who got along with everyone."

Zarka is survived by her parents and a brother.

- Yael Botwin, also 14, moved to Israel from Los Angeles with her parents eight years ago.

She held dual Israeli and American citizenship. Her father, who suffered from a heart condition, died three-and-a-half years ago.

A student at the Religious School of the Arts, Botwin had hoped to go into the dramatic arts.

Described as "a friend that everyone loved," Botwin spent a month of her summer vacation volunteering at a residential hospital for chronically ill children and

young adults. She leaves behind her mother and two sisters.

- Rami Kozashvili, 20, immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union five years ago after his family's home was destroyed by an earthquake.

Kozashvili left the army six months early to help support his parents and two siblings. His father is unemployed and his mother works as a cleaner.

At the time of his death, Kozashvili worked in one of the stores on Ben Yehuda Street. He had planned to study computer science.

Among the fallen navy commandos, all but two were in their 20s.

- Lt. Col. Yosef Korakin, 32, the commander of the naval commando force, had one dream: to become head of the entire navy.

After finishing his mandatory stint in the Israel Defense Force, Korakin traveled around the world for two years with his childhood sweetheart, Ayelet, whom he later married.

Interviewed after her husband's death, Ayelet Korakin said that she never wanted Yosef to join an elite combat unit.

"But I told him, if you want to go, really go, I'll support you 100 percent."

Korakin leaves a 3-month-old son.

- The only Druse officer to die in the ambush was Capt. Dagesh Maher.

A 26-year-old physician, Maher reportedly risked his life treating several of his comrades before he himself was killed.

A graduate of the Hebrew University School of Medicine, Maher was honored as an "Outstanding Soldier" during last year's Independence Day ceremony in Jerusalem.

When the medical staff at Nahariya Hospital, in the north of the country, heard about the ambush, they did not know that one of their favorite colleagues was among the fallen.

"It was a tremendous shock," said a hospital administrator, fighting back tears.

"He was a true friend."

Maher leaves behind his parents and six siblings.

News was not a surprise

- For the mother of another fallen commando, news of his death was not a complete surprise.

Early last Friday morning, the mother of Sgt. Maj. Itamar Ilya, 22, had a premonition that something terrible had happened to her son.

"I woke up suddenly and knew something was wrong with Ilya.

"Then I looked out the window and saw soldiers approaching the house," said Edna Ilya.

They had come to tell the family that her son was missing in action and presumed dead.

Sitting with some of Itamar's friends in her home in the Negev town of Arad, Edna Ilya said, "Every time I sit on the balcony staring at the desert view that Itamar loved so much I'll think of him.

"That will always be my image of Itamar," she added.

The other naval commandos killed last Friday were:

Maj. Yitzhak Ben Tov, 28, Kfar Saba; Capt. Ram Lavinas, 22, Shavei Zion; Capt. Zvi Grossman, 21, Tel Aviv; Sgt. Maj. Raz Tabbi, 22, Rishon le-Zion; Sgt. Maj. Arye Abramson, 22, Yavne'el; Sgt. Maj. Yochanan Hilberg, 22, Netzer Hazani; Staff Sgt. Guy Golan, 21, Kibbutz Hatzor; Staff Sgt. Gal Rodovsky, 20, Herzliya; and Staff Sgt. Yaniv Shamiel, 20, Kiryat Haim. □