



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Two Israeli soldiers were killed early Sunday by a Hezbollah roadside bomb in southern Lebanon, bringing to four the number of Israelis who died over the weekend. Two others died Friday night in a clash with guerrillas affiliated with the Islamic fundamentalist group. [Page 3]

■ A spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the prime minister would block a controversial plan to build Jewish housing in eastern Jerusalem. He spoke after an appeal filed by two members of the Jerusalem City Council against the project in Ras al-Amud was rejected. [Page 3]

■ Britain, the United States and France proposed setting up a new fund to aid Holocaust survivors. The money would come from gold held by the Tripartite Commission, which was established by the three countries after World War II to distribute looted Nazi gold to European central banks.

■ Lithuania's Parliament delayed a vote on amendments to the country's criminal code that would facilitate the investigation of alleged World War II criminals. During a discussion of the measures, some Parliament members said passing the amendments would be tantamount to caving into pressure from Jewish groups. [Page 2]

■ An Israeli army spokeswoman announced that Israel would lift the internal closures in the West Bank. The closures were implemented after a Sept. 4 triple suicide bombing in a Jerusalem pedestrian mall. [Page 3]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will transfer half of the tax revenues Israel has withheld from the Palestinian Authority, according to news reports. Israel began withholding the revenues after the July 30 double suicide bombing in Jerusalem. [Page 3]

■ Israel's Cabinet is expected to consider outlawing Palestinian organizations that operate abroad and are believed to have ties to Hamas. The move comes as Israeli security forces remain on high alert for possible terrorist attacks.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israel's new U.N. ambassador poised to challenge world body

By Cynthia Mann

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) — Dore Gold has no illusions about the challenges that lie ahead for him as Israel's new ambassador to the United Nations.

With the U.N. General Assembly scheduled to open its 52nd session Tuesday, the American-born diplomat is preparing for diplomatic responsibilities that he believes could be unprecedented if his country enters into final-status talks with the Palestinians.

That process is slated to determine such weighty matters as Israel's borders and the future of Jerusalem.

In an interview the day before the latest terrorist bombs ripped through downtown Jerusalem, Gold took the international community to task for giving carte blanche to Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

"The reason why Yasser Arafat can embrace a leader of Hamas in public and give Hamas a green light to attack Israelis" is that "very few people know how to say no to Yasser Arafat," Gold said.

Days after the attack, Gold reiterated the "accountability of Arafat for the loss of Israeli lives."

Despite the high stakes and the tall hurdles, the 43-year-old Connecticut native seems undaunted by the prospect of representing an increasingly isolated country. Gold is assuming his post in the wake of a series of tough, albeit non-binding, resolutions by the General Assembly condemning Israel for construction at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem.

The stinging harsh anti-Israel rhetoric in the assembly halls prior to these votes was reminiscent of the era prior to the 1993 signing of the Oslo accords between Israel and the Palestinians.

But Gold aims to put things in perspective, faithful to the administration of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in which he served for the last year as foreign policy adviser. He argues that it is important not to exaggerate the warming in the U.N.'s climate that preceded the Likud-led government.

While there was some "mild improvement," said Gold, who wears a knitted kippah certain to distinguish him in the diplomatic ranks, "Israel's difficulties at the U.N. never stopped."

Most notably, he said, Israel has continued to be denied membership in a regional grouping, to which every member state is entitled. Such a denial precludes Israel's participation in a number of key U.N. bodies.

Importance of security is 'constant'

Meanwhile, Gold made it clear he would be proactive when it comes to advancing Israel's position in the peace process. While he termed it a "very impaired" process, he insisted that Israel wants to see it implemented.

One of the tools he is using to get across his message is the two-page "Note for the Record," which was attached to the Hebron agreement signed in January and drawn up by Dennis Ross, the U.S. special envoy for the Middle East.

In the document, which Gold helped negotiate, Israelis and Palestinians affirmed their commitments to implement of the 1995 Interim Agreement. Israel emphasized the importance of a security that "is constant and not contingent" and of the principle of reciprocity, he said, pointing to Arafat's failures on both counts.

In contrast, he said, when Egypt or Jordan disagrees with Israel, neither encourages violence against the Jewish state.

Gold is circulating copies of the "Note for the Record" in his meetings with other diplomats. The handout features commentary in purple ink highlighting Israel's compliance, item by item, followed by commentary in red recording the Palestinians' non-compliance.

The red type indicts Arafat for failing to strengthen security cooperation, prevent incitement, combat terrorist organizations and infrastructures, punish terrorists and confiscate illegal weapons, among other items.

Without compliance, Gold said, "we have a fundamental problem of how to move this process forward."

On the issue of Har Homa, Gold said that despite the international

outcry, Israel broke no rules by beginning construction on the new Jewish neighborhood.

The Palestinians had failed in their bid to place in the Oslo accords restrictions on Israel's right to build, he said, noting that Arafat signed the agreement anyway.

"To come now and say you should not build in Jerusalem or that Israel should freeze settlement activity is to demand from the Netanyahu government what Arafat failed to obtain from Rabin and Peres."

He also said the Palestinians had canceled a meeting between Arafat and an adviser to Netanyahu who had been dispatched to apprise him of the decision to proceed at Har Homa.

"They cut the lines of communication, not Netanyahu," he said.

At the same time, Gold said such a crisis is natural and must be weathered. "Negotiations are not easy, there are crises and impasses and you have to have the strength to go through them."

Gold said part of the responsibility he shares with the Israeli ambassador in Washington, Eliahu Ben-Elissar, and the new consul general in New York, Shmuel Sisso, will be to "help adjust the expectations of the international community and the Jewish community" around the peace process.

Those expectations, he said, had "been elevated" under the previous Labor government. □

Israeli ambassador's speech provokes storm in Lithuania

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A speech by Israel's ambassador to Lithuania has that country's politicians up in arms.

Within days after the speech by Oded Ben Hur, Lithuania's Parliament delayed action on amendments to the country's criminal code that would facilitate the investigation of alleged World War II criminals.

During a discussion of the amendments, parliamentarian Rimantas Smetona urged his colleagues not to cave into the pressure of international Jewish organizations.

Smetona, a candidate in Lithuania's December presidential elections, had especially harsh words for Ben Hur, who told the Parliament's opening session last week that Lithuania had failed to prosecute alleged war criminals.

Parliament was expected to take the amendments up again next week.

Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas and Prime Minister Gediminas Vagnorius were among those attending the parliamentary session, which was devoted to speeches praising the legacy of the Vilna Gaon, the renowned commentator on the Talmud and Torah whose 200th yearzeit is being commemorated in Lithuania.

Some Jewish groups, including the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Israel-based Association of Lithuanian Jews, boycotted the commemoration, saying that participation would be seen as support for a government that has not yet atoned for the destruction of Lithuanian Jewry.

Nearly 94 percent of the country's prewar Jewish community perished in the Holocaust, a tragedy that local Jews say is not widely known in Lithuania.

Other parliamentarians took issue with Ben Hur's comments, which one legislator said displayed "impudence and tactlessness." Another legislator, Kazys Bobelis, said that Ben Hur had "insulted the Lithuanian nation."

Bobelis added that Parliament had wanted to express its sincere respect for the Vilna Gaon, but that Ben Hur's speech was "absolutely improper and spoiled the festive tranquillity of the event."

Ben Hur made the "rift between the Lithuanian and Jewish nations even wider," he added.

Ben Hur remained unapologetic, but said he hoped that his comments would not arouse a wave of anti-Semitism in Lithuania. "I understand that the manner of my speech will not contribute to the improvement" of Israeli-Lithuanian relations, he told reporters.

Ben Hur said his speech had been passionate because of the extent of the Holocaust in Lithuania, adding that he said "what had to be said" and that the speech came with the full blessing of Israel's Foreign Ministry. His speech made front-page headlines in every major Lithuanian newspaper.

After declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Lithuania issued certificates of exoneration to more than 50,000 Lithuanians who were convicted as war criminals by Soviet courts. Among those pardoned were people who allegedly helped the Nazis kill Jews.

Holocaust survivors, American Jewish leaders and the Lithuanian Jewish community have protested this practice of rehabilitation and called upon the Lithuanian government to reverse the pardons. □

Czech Jews call on Germany to bring Nazi criminal to trial

By Randi Druzin

PRAGUE (JTA) — The recent revelation that a wanted Nazi war criminal is living comfortably in a Munich nursing home has evoked protests from Czech Jewish leaders, one of whom has accused German authorities of having little interest in bringing such criminals to justice.

Czech politicians have joined Jewish leaders in calling on the Germany to prosecute Anton Malloth, 85, who served as a prison guard at the Theresienstadt ghetto in Czechoslovakia during the war.

More than 33,000 Jews died in the ghetto, and thousands more were sent to their deaths in concentration camps to the east.

After Malloth fled Czechoslovakia at the war's end, he was sentenced to death in absentia by a Czechoslovak court in 1948 for his role in the murder of Jews in the ghetto.

He lived in Italy until authorities there expelled him to Germany in 1988, according to news reports. Authorities in the German state of Bavaria then granted him citizenship — a move that under German law prevents him from being extradited to Czechoslovakia.

The case came to the fore earlier this month, when a member of Germany's Green Party disclosed Malloth's whereabouts.

According to Tomas Kraus, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, Malloth was found by a German citizen whose father had been tortured by Malloth at Theresienstadt, which is called Terezin in Czech.

This person had been searching for Malloth for years, Kraus said.

The director of the Terezin Memorial, Jan Munk, questioned the intentions of German leadership on this issue. If Germany "wanted to find him, they would have found him a long time ago," he said.

"There wasn't too much will to find him," he added.

Germany will now "have to approach this case and do something. It is important for him to be sentenced."

According to a spokesman at the Czech Ministry of Justice, Vladimir Voracek, authorities here have been pressing Germany to try the case for years, but have received no response from the state prosecutor. □

Internal closure lifted by Israel in wake of Albright's harsh words

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had some sharp words for Israel and the Palestinians during her visit to the Middle East.

In unusually blunt language for a diplomat, she warned the two sides that she would all but wash her hands of the peace process if they were not willing to take some difficult steps on their own.

And within days after she departed the region, there were some signs that Israel and the Palestinians might be stepping back from the brink.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman, David Bar-Illan said Sunday there were some "positive" signs that the Palestinians were beginning to fight the terrorist infrastructure.

Within hours after he spoke, an army spokeswoman said Israel would lift an internal closure on Palestinian towns in the West Bank. Israel imposed the closure after a Sept. 4 triple suicide bombing in a Jerusalem pedestrian mall.

There were also reports Sunday that Israel would hand over to the Palestinian Authority half of the tax revenues it was withholding after a July 30 double suicide bombing in Jerusalem.

Also Sunday, an Interior Ministry committee cleared the way to start a controversial Jewish housing project in eastern Jerusalem.

But Bar-Illan said the prime minister might still block the project in Ras al-Amud.

He spoke after the Jerusalem district planning and building appeals board rejected an appeal filed by two members of the Jerusalem City Council against the project, which is planned by Miami-based developer Irving Moskowitz.

In July, Netanyahu criticized the Jerusalem Municipality for granting Moskowitz permits to build 70 housing units for Jews in Ras al-Amud.

Two members of the Jerusalem City Council from the Meretz Party later appealed the municipality's decision.

But on Sunday, the planning board's Appeal Committee unanimously rejected the appeals.

One of the petitioners, Ornan Yekutieli, said he intended to appeal to the district court.

The Appeal Committee's decision came three days after Albright called on Israel to take a "timeout" from launching construction projects on disputed land.

Albright calls for 'hard decisions'

During her visit to the region, Albright met separately with Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

But with little to show for her efforts, she said last Friday that she would not be at the beck and call of the two sides if they were not ready to make the "hard decisions" needed to get the peace process back on track.

"I'm not going to come back here to tread water," she said before leaving Jerusalem.

During her visit, Albright came out strongly behind Israel's demand that the Palestinian Authority crack down on terrorism.

On her first visit to the region as America's top diplomat, she also expressed sympathy for what she said were the hardships suffered by the Palestinians under Israeli sanctions, and she urged Israel to implement already-signed agreements and refrain from taking unilateral actions.

From Jerusalem, Albright traveled to Syria, Egypt and Jordan for meetings with those countries' leaders.

Briefing the Cabinet on Albright's visit, Netanyahu

said Sunday that the two sides had agreed to continue separate talks with the United States on fighting terror.

Meanwhile, thousands of Israelis protested against Netanyahu's policies at a demonstration in Tel Aviv on Saturday, which marked four years since the signing of the Oslo accords on the White House lawn.

Demonstrators called on Netanyahu to resign, saying his policies were leading the country to war.

Former Labor leader Shimon Peres, one of the architects of the Oslo process, said that the government must treat Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat as an equal partner in peace and not as an agent hired by Israel to fight terrorism.

In another development, the military arm of Hamas claimed over the weekend that Israeli security forces had kidnapped Hamas leader Ibrahim Makadmeh.

The Palestinian Authority arrested Makadmeh last year after a wave of suicide bombings on suspicion of heading the fundamentalist group's military arm.

The self-rule government released Makadmeh from jail in March, a move that prompted Israel to demand his immediate re-arrest. After giving a sharp anti-Israel speech in the Gaza Strip, Makadmeh went underground.

Over the weekend, Hamas said in a statement that it would launch attacks against Israel to teach it a lesson for abducting Makadmeh. Israel denied that it had anything to do with Makadmeh's disappearance. □

Four Israelis killed in Lebanon as cycle of violence continues

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Two Israeli soldiers were killed early Sunday morning by a roadside explosion in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it came in response to the death of 18-year-old Hadi Nasrallah, the son of Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, during an earlier clash over the weekend.

Two other Israeli soldiers, and at least three Hezbollah fighters, died in clashes last Friday.

Meanwhile, six Lebanese army soldiers were also killed last Friday by Israeli air strikes that were launched after troops reported that Lebanese soldiers were fighting alongside Hezbollah units.

There was speculation in Israel that there may be a swap of Hadi Nasrallah's body for the remains of Itamar Ilya, a naval commando who died in a failed commando raid north of the security zone on Sept. 5. Eleven other commandos died in that raid, but Ilya's was the only body not returned to Israel.

The deaths of the two Israeli soldiers early Sunday — Staff Sgt. Ofir Basoul, 21, of Kfar Saba, and Staff Sgt. Roslan Yosipov, 21, of Neshar — brought to 15 the number of Israeli troops killed in southern Lebanon during the past two weeks.

The recent rise in the number of fatalities has renewed debate in Israel over the army's presence in the security zone. Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani said Sunday that he favored a pullout of Israeli troops, who would be replaced by a multinational force.

Kahalani warned that the continued Israel Defense Force presence in the security zone would only lead to more losses and further demoralization of the Israeli public.

The IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak, said Sunday that there was no clear answer to the situation in Lebanon. "There are definite signs of fatigue in Israeli society. There are some who want a quick and clear solution. I don't believe we have definitive, sharp and agreed solutions that can be implemented quickly without taking risks." □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jericho's residents maintain little hope for peace process

By Gil Sedan

JERICHO, West Bank (JTA) — There is little hope here for the peace process.

Four years after the first Israeli-Palestinian accords were signed on the White House lawn, the people of Jericho, the first West Bank town that Israel transferred to Palestinian self-rule, are disheartened.

When a visitor arrived here recently, residents were reacting to the hardships of a closure that Israel imposed in the wake of the Sept. 4 triple suicide bombing in Jerusalem.

Indeed, the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip had been sealed off from Israel.

Along with that, Israel, which controls the main roads in the area, had also imposed an internal closure that prevented Palestinians from traveling between one West Bank town and another.

Israel was planning to lift the internal closure Monday.

Israeli officials defend the closures as one of the sole means at their disposal to prevent terror attacks launched by Islamic militants.

But their Palestinian counterparts attack the policy, which they describe as collective punishment.

That criticism could also be heard on the streets of Jericho, the sleepy town in the heart of the Jordan Valley that was once the focus of so many Palestinian hopes.

"If your brother kills, do they take you to jail?" asked Riad, a grocer at Jericho's main square.

"Why do I have to pay for the sins of the terrorists who placed the bombs in Jerusalem?"

For some here, the closure, far from preventing acts of terrorism, will only drive people into the waiting arms of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.

Their reasoning is simple: The closure creates unemployment, which in turn creates desperation.

One person advocating this theory was Abu-Raed, the owner of the Temptation Restaurant.

Not a grain of sympathy

Located at the northern entrance to the city near the ruins of ancient Jericho, the restaurant used to have some 40 to 50 busloads of tourists stopping there daily for a meal.

It was a thriving business: 2,000 guests stopping in for a meal that typically cost \$10 per person.

But this week the restaurant was empty.

Abu-Raed said that if the closure continues he will have to lay off his 60 employees.

That, he said, would mean another 60 families without a source of livelihood.

"And what do you think those young people would do if they lose their jobs?" he asked.

For him, there was a direct connection between the worsening economic situation in the territories and the growing popularity of Hamas.

Not one Jericho resident this visitor encountered had a grain of sympathy for the closures Israel imposes after each terror assault.

Abu Hashem, who st among other unemployed cab drivers in the center of town, blames the bleak state of the peace process on the "destructive policies" of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"If he had a more positive approach to the Palestinians, we would not have reached this unfortunate situation," he said.

One resident of Jericho has the awesome responsi-

bility of attempting to restore some measure of trust to the peace process.

For Saeb Erekat, the head of the Palestinian negotiating team, the lack of trust between Israel and the Palestinians is "indeed our worst enemy."

Erekat, relaxing in the garden of his Jericho residence, made his observations as he prepared for a visit to the region by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Prior to her arrival, Erekat said he viewed her visit as the last, best hope for the moribund peace process.

"The visit of Albright must lead to something," he said.

"We can simply not allow the extremists to lead us down the drain."

Albright later described the attempt to breathe life into the peace process as far from successful.

Despite the lack of trust, Erekat maintained, Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat was trying to heal the wounds by vowing to do his utmost to fight violence.

But many Israelis say they have heard the pledge before, and they are far from convinced.

And on the streets of Jericho there is a similar lack of faith, driven by the feeling that the promises of peace were empty words.

On May 13, 1994, Palestinian forces took control of Jericho, the first of the eight Palestinian population centers in the West Bank to come under self-rule.

When Arafat first visited Jericho after the turnover, he was greeted as a political messiah.

Tens of thousands of people gathered at the center of town to hear flowery speeches full of promises.

Reporters from all over the world compared the situation to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

There was a widespread belief at the time that Arafat would make Jericho the seat of his government — Gaza City later became the choice — and that the town would, therefore, thrive.

At the time, Abu-Raed began building a hotel above his restaurant.

He envisioned an era in which Jericho would once again become the flower of winter tourism for the entire Middle East, as it had been prior to the 1967 Six-Day War.

But the two floors above the restaurant remain unfinished.

Jericho has had no influx of winter or summer tourists. The hotel remains a dream.

Lone voice of optimism

Three years ago, Rajai Abdu, who is an Islamic cleric, returned from 24 years of voluntary exile in Greenville, S.C., to his native Jericho, where he used to serve as imam, or religious leader, in the city's Islamic Center.

Abdu, too, had dreams of building a hotel after the peace process was launched.

He converted his family residence into the Hisham Hotel, but this week it was empty and quiet like the rest of Jericho.

Unlike others here, Abdu remains optimistic about the future of the peace process.

"I do have hope," he said, dressed in a white robe, voicing prayers every few minutes in an undertone.

"I have hope because I believe that once religion is removed from political aspirations, it can play a major role in bringing Arabs and Jews together in this part of the world."

Asked if he was perhaps a lone voice in the wilderness, he replied, "Indeed I am. But that does not make me any less right." □