

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ Two staff members of the Israeli Embassy in Jordan were shot and lightly wounded. Jordanian authorities launched a search for the assailants and offered a cash award for information leading to their arrest. [Page 3]

■ Israel demanded that the Palestinian Authority hand over four suspected terrorists, including three alleged members of a Hamas terrorist cell. Meanwhile, Israel sealed several West Bank villages as it continued to look for Islamic militants involved in two recent suicide bombings in Jerusalem. [Page 4]

■ A former Palestinian tenant of a building in the eastern Jerusalem neighborhood of Ras al-Amud filed a police complaint which said that documents claiming that he had sold it to American developer Dr. Irving Moskowitz were forged. [Page 3]

■ Israeli President Ezer Weizman will visit Washington in early October. Weizman, who has recently been critical of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, will meet with high-ranking American officials, including President Clinton, Vice President Al Gore and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

■ Czech President Vaclav Havel arrived in Israel on an official visit aimed at deepening trade ties between the two countries. At a welcoming ceremony, Havel noted the changes the region had undergone since his last visit in 1990, when, he said, he would not have been able to enter Israel from Jordan via the Allenby crossing.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to the Mauthausen concentration camp in the first official trip to Austria by an Israeli leader.

■ Israel's Defense Ministry denied reports that Poland had put on hold a deal with Israel to upgrade combat helicopters in Poland's air force. They said it now appeared the project would be split between the United States and Israel. Israeli and Polish officials met last week in Warsaw to discuss the estimated \$600 million deal.

**NEWS ANALYSIS****Divisions over religion bill reflect gaps between Americans, Russians**

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Most Russian Jewish leaders are either supporting an amended version of a controversial bill on religious freedom or remaining silent.

Their stances, however, stand in marked contrast to human rights watchers here and in Washington who see the measure as a threat to religious freedom.

Russian Jewish leaders here do not believe that the bill will hurt any Jewish religious groups operating here.

Given the relatively improved conditions Jews have enjoyed since the fall of the Soviet Union, they appear not to be concerned with the broader issue of how much religious freedom should be granted in a new democracy.

An official of the Russian Jewish Congress, for example, recently stated that he did not understand "all the fuss about the bill."

Zinovi Kogan, leader of the Hineini Reform congregation in Moscow, gave his cautious support for the bill, saying that if it "contains any provisions that contradict the [Russian] Constitution, it would be sent to the Constitutional Court."

Human rights activists, in contrast, are worried that it remains unclear how the bill would be implemented once it becomes law.

Even if the bill would not affect Jews, the activists are interested in the relationship between religious freedom and democracy.

Alexander Lieberman, director of the Russian-American Bureau on Human Rights of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, said he was surprised by the silence of Jewish leaders.

"Apparently, they believe the law will not hurt Judaism," he said.

He spoke days after the Duma, as the lower house of the Russian Parliament is known, passed the amended religion bill by an overwhelming vote of 358-6.

According to most observers, the upper house of Parliament, known as the Federation Council, will approve the bill within two weeks and President Boris Yeltsin will sign it.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Association was originally approved by Parliament during the summer.

But Yeltsin vetoed the measure in July after swift criticism came from Washington, where the bill was viewed as a threat to religious freedom. The U.S. Senate had threatened to cut Russia's \$200 million aid package if it became law.

Yeltsin then established a commission comprised of representatives of Russia's leading religions to draft an amended version.

In both its original and amended forms, the legislation allotted to four established faiths — the Russian Orthodox Church, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism — the status of "traditional" Russian religions.

All other religions would be required to prove that they officially existed in Russia for at least 15 years to receive full rights, even though under the Communist regime, many religions had to operate clandestinely.

**A 'comeback to Stalinist times'**

In the bill's amended form, groups that could not meet the 15-year probationary period would receive limited rights if they submit to a re-registration procedure every year.

The original bill could have imposed serious limitations on religious denominations such as the Lubavitch movement and Reform Judaism that could not meet the 15-year requirement.

But Russian Chief Rabbi Adolph Shayeveich, who represented Russian Jewry on the commission, said recently that since Judaism is recognized in the reworked version as a "traditional" Russian faith, the amended bill would not discriminate against any segments of the Jewish community.

Valery Borshchov, one of the few Duma deputies who voted against the bill, termed it a "comeback to Stalinist times."

Alarmed by the Duma's passage of the bill, the Washington-based Union of Councils for Soviet Jews issued a statement urging the Clinton

administration to convince Yeltsin to veto the "Soviet-style bill" again.

Another U.S.-based group, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, called on Vice President Al Gore to discuss American opposition to the bill when he meets this week with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

Indeed, Gore spoke to Chernomyrdin on Monday and conveyed Washington's misgivings about the bill.

The conference's executive director, Mark Levin, who is concerned about the bill's potential impact on some Russian Jewish groups, said the legislation was dangerous because the "principle of religious freedom is fundamental to a democratic state."

Levin added that his group was consulting with members of Congress as part of its effort to "mount the type of public campaign to get Yeltsin to reconsider."

Diederik Lohman, director of the Moscow office of Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, also said he believed that the only way to prevent the bill from becoming law was to urge the international community to press Yeltsin not to sign it. □

*(JTA foreign editor Mitchell Danow contributed to this report.)*

### Premier optimistic on peace, economy on Rosh Hashanah eve

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Despite gloomy headlines about Israeli-Palestinian relations, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is optimistic about Israel's future.

In his annual pre-Rosh Hashanah meeting with correspondents from the American Jewish media, the premier downplayed the badly frayed peace process, focusing instead on Israel's economic strengths, particularly in the technological arena.

Noting that Israel is poised to become "one of the wealthiest societies in the world," Netanyahu exuded confidence during the Sept. 18 meeting, saying that despite the current difficulties, peace with both the Palestinians and the Syrians would be achieved. Referring to Israel as a second Silicon Valley, the prime minister said the country's high-tech industries have benefited from the influx of experts from the former Soviet Union and from research projects carried out by the Israel Defense Force.

With more than 3,000 high-tech firms operating in Israel, Netanyahu suggested that Diaspora Jews send their children here to study advanced computer technologies.

He capped his optimistic evaluation of Israel's economic prospects by predicting that within 10 years, "We will see Jews immigrating to Israel from countries like Argentina, Britain and America to improve their standard of living."

He also suggested that the Israeli stock market is undervalued because of the region's tense political climate.

"If I can send a message to Jewish leaders abroad, I would tell them: 'Don't wait. Now is the time to invest money in Israel. You will make a lot of money.'"

Netanyahu brushed aside the tensions existing within Israeli society, particularly those dealing with the religious pluralism issue, which has created strains between the country's Orthodox and non-Orthodox streams.

While conceding that rifts within Israeli society were "too high," he stressed that "the difference between us and our neighbors is much higher than our internal discussions."

Turning to the peace process, Netanyahu downplayed the recent freeze in Israeli-Palestinian relations, saying that the two sides had arrived at the "end game" of the Oslo process, which he said was naturally more difficult than the beginning.

Netanyahu described the Arab-Israeli conflict as part of a much broader confrontation between the Middle East and Western civilization.

"We will achieve peace with the Palestinians, the Syrians and Lebanon," said Netanyahu, adding that it would "not be a Western-style peace, because we are not dealing with Western-oriented neighbors."

"If we understood this," he added, "we would be less tense." The real danger, he said, comes from Iran, which "poses the biggest threat to peace."

Netanyahu's comments reflected the view among Israeli intelligence experts that Iran will have the ability to launch long-range missiles by next year and that it will possess nuclear armaments within three to five years.

Netanyahu shares the belief of some Western experts that the recently elected president of Iran, Mohammed Khatami, has yet to prove that he would bring a change in Iran. "Iran is the only country on the face of the earth that still calls for the destruction of the State of Israel," Netanyahu said.

His response to one reporter's question was particularly sharp. Asked about his pre-election promise that he would serve as prime minister of all the people, including those who did not vote for him, Netanyahu said, "I certainly view myself as premier of all the people."

"If part of the people do not accept me, it's their problem." □

### French president visits Buchenwald

FRANKFURT (JTA) — French President Jacques Chirac has laid a wreath for Holocaust victims at the site of the Buchenwald concentration camp.

Chirac made the trip last week while in Germany for a French-German summit.

The visit to Buchenwald was not the French president's first gesture toward the Jewish community.

Shortly after taking office in 1995, he became the first French president to acknowledge his country's complicity in the persecution of Jews during World War II.

A renewed debate in France about collaboration with the Nazis is expected to take place next month with the onset of the trial of former Vichy government official Maurice Papon. Papon, now 87, is accused of having deported more than 1,500 Jews, many of them children, from the Bordeaux area when he was secretary-general of the region during the war. □

### Germans plan to pay Baltic Jews

MOSCOW (JTA) — A German province is planning to compensate — and lobby for — Lithuania's Holocaust survivors.

The Brandenburg Parliament has already earmarked several thousand dollars to compensate Jews living in the Baltic nation, and it intends to ask the German government to further compensate these survivors, according to Herbert Knoblich, the chairman of the province's Parliament.

Knoblich made the comments in a meeting with the leadership of Lithuania's Jewish community in Vilnius, the country's capital.

Some public organizations, companies and individuals from Brandenburg, which is located in eastern Germany, have already offered to aid some members of the Lithuanian Jewish community. Over 90 percent of Lithuania's prewar Jewish community of 250,000 was exterminated during the Nazi occupation.

Lithuanian survivors, like Holocaust survivors in other parts of the former Soviet Union, were unable to file for individual compensation from Germany during the Cold War. □

**Two Israeli guards wounded in shooting attack in Jordan***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A previously unknown organization calling itself the Islamic Resistance has claimed responsibility for an attack on two Israeli Embassy security guards in Jordan.

The guards, identified as Moshe Levin and Amikam Hadar, were lightly wounded in Monday's shooting attack in the Jordanian capital of Amman.

Jordanian authorities launched a search for the assailants and offered a cash reward for information leading to their arrest.

In a statement faxed to news agencies in Beirut and Amman, the Islamic Resistance said the attack was in reaction to "Zionist enemy actions in Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon."

It warned that attacks would resume in a month against Israeli targets.

The group also demanded the release from prison of Ahmed Dakamshah, a Jordanian soldier recently sentenced to life in prison for the March shooting deaths of seven Israeli schoolchildren who were on a field trip to Naharayim on the Israeli-Jordanian border.

Jordan's King Hussein phoned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was on an official visit to Austria, to express his shock at the attack.

The monarch promised that every effort would be made to apprehend those responsible for the attack.

Netanyahu expressed his appreciation for Amman's thorough handling of the situation.

He appealed to the Palestinian Authority to follow Jordan's example in clamping down on terrorist organizations.

The attack occurred Monday at about 7:30 a.m., near the home of one of the guards in a neighborhood of Amman.

Israeli officials said at least one gunman opened fire from a passing car.

The two security guards were taken to a hospital in Jordan, where one underwent an operation to remove a bullet from his leg.

The other was treated for a thigh fracture. □

**Compromise on Ras al-Amud fails to assuage Palestinians***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A compromise reached last week between the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jewish families living in eastern Jerusalem has failed to assuage Palestinian complaints about a Jewish presence in the mostly Arab neighborhood.

Under the compromise that Israel reached Sept. 18 with three Jewish families living in Ras al-Amud, the families left the building voluntarily, but 10 yeshiva students stayed to maintain a Jewish presence.

The compromise saved Netanyahu from having to forcibly remove the families, a politically volatile step given threats from right-wing members of Netanyahu's coalition that such an action would bring down the government.

But Palestinian officials condemned the compromise. Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat called it a "trick," and during a weekend meeting in Cairo with the 22 members of the Arab League, he urged the Arab world not to improve relations with Israel as long as the peace process remains mired in crisis.

Over the weekend, Israeli police scuffled with Palestinians protesting against a Jewish presence in Ras

al-Amud, which is located near the Old City. Protests also spread Saturday to Hebron, but Palestinian police herded away some 20 youths throwing stones at a Jewish settler enclave there.

In eastern Jerusalem, a former resident of the house that the Jewish families moved into denied that he had sold the structure to Dr. Irving Moskowitz, the U.S. developer who leased the structure to the families.

The Palestinian, Fuad Hadiyeh, said he had been abroad on business and returned to find that the families had moved in and thrown out his belongings. He also said he did not own the building, having rented it since the 1980s, and that he was unauthorized to make any transaction involving the building. Moskowitz maintains that he legally purchased the two-story structure.

Hadiyeh filed a police complaint Monday which said that documents claiming that he had sold the building to Moskowitz were forged.

The Palestinians broke off negotiations with Israel in March after Israel broke ground for a new Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem.

The Palestinians, who want the eastern half of the city as a capital of an independent state, accuse Israel of altering the status quo in Jerusalem prior to final-status talks on the future of the city.

In contrast to his reaction to the start of construction at Har Homa, Netanyahu came out strongly against the action in Ras al-Amud, saying last week that any decisions regarding building in Jerusalem should be coordinated by the government, not individuals.

Israeli and Palestinian officials were scheduled to hold separate talks with American officials this week in Washington in an effort to restart the negotiations.

The talks were arranged during a recent visit to the region by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, who flew to New York this week to address the 52nd meeting of the U.N. General Assembly, was scheduled to meet in New York with Albright and Palestinian Authority official Abu-Mazen, who is Arafat's second-in-command. □

**Mubarak vows Israeli Druse held for spying will not be pardoned***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has announced that he has no plans to pardon an Israeli citizen sentenced by a Cairo court on charges of espionage.

Mubarak told reporters Sunday that he blamed Israel for its "mishandling" of the situation and "arrogance" in the case of Azam Azam.

Mubarak said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had insulted the Egyptian judicial system when he called the verdict in the case "twisted."

Azam, a mechanic at an Israeli-Egyptian textile plant in Cairo, was convicted Aug. 31 of spying for Israel and sentenced to 15 years in prison with hard labor.

Netanyahu said earlier this month that he expected Mubarak to pardon the 35-year-old Druse man.

Azam, who was arrested last November in Cairo, was charged with giving women's underwear soaked with invisible ink to an Egyptian national, Emad Abdel-Hamid Ismail, who then used the ink to write messages to Israel about the state of Egyptian factories.

The Cairo court sentenced Ismail to life imprisonment for being an accomplice.

Israeli officials have insisted that Azam was not a government agent.

His arrest and his trial, which began in April, have exacerbated tensions between Israel and Egypt. □

**Israeli forces find terror cell in crackdown on Arab militants***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli security forces have arrested dozens of West Bank Palestinians suspected of involvement in terrorist activities.

As part of the sweep, Israeli soldiers sealed several West Bank villages Monday.

Israeli officials also closed down a mosque in the West Bank village of Dura after they found materials linked to Hamas that they said incited violence against Israel. The mosque was shut down for four months. Another mosque in the village of Samoa was also closed down.

On Saturday night, the Israel Defense Force carried out a sweep of West Bank towns in an operation that was overseen by Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, the head of IDF operations in the West Bank.

In recent weeks, Israeli security forces have rounded up scores of suspected members of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad fundamentalist organizations after the July 30 and Sept. 4 suicide bombings in Jerusalem that killed 20 Israelis.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said Sunday that the arrests were linked to Israel's investigation into the attacks. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mordechai claim that the terrorists who carried out the attacks came from the autonomous areas.

Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat insists that the bombers came from abroad, a position he reiterated at a weekend meeting in Cairo of the 22-member Arab League and on Monday to reporters in the Gaza Strip.

Also Monday, Israel demanded that the Palestinian Authority hand over four Palestinians suspected of involvement in terrorist attacks that killed 11 Israelis during the past year.

Three of the Palestinians are believed to belong to a Hamas cell from the village of Tsurif near Hebron.

Israeli officials believe they were involved in the March 21 suicide bombing of the Cafe Apropos in central Tel Aviv that killed 3 Israelis and wounded 47 others.

The fourth Palestinian is wanted in connection with the May 13, 1996, killing of David Boim, 17, who was shot dead when terrorists opened fire on a hitchhiking stand near Beit El.

Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi, who signed the extradition orders, said the Palestinian Authority has ignored 36 such requests in the past.

**Alleged plan to kidnap Jerusalem mayor**

In a related development, Israeli security forces disclosed last week that they had uncovered a terrorist cell whose members included two residents of eastern Jerusalem who allegedly had planned to carry out a bomb attack in Jerusalem's indoor shopping mall.

The two men, who were brought before the Lod Military Court last week, were charged with attempting to plant a bomb in the Malha shopping mall.

The indictment sheet said Mahamad Hamda and Iman Mahamad Suleiman went to the mall with bags stuffed with clothing and nails to see if they would be caught by security.

They allegedly left the bags near the ticket counters at the mall's movie theater. No one notified the guards.

The two were also charged with an attack last year at the old Tel Aviv central bus station in which they put two bombs inside garbage cans. Fourteen people were wounded in the explosions.

According to reports, the cell to which they belonged also planned to kidnap Jerusalem Mayor Ehud

Olmert and another senior Israeli figure with the intention of swapping them for the release of Hamas prisoners held by Israel.

Security was stepped up around Olmert after the cell's discovery. □

**Slovak premier seeks to assure Jewish leaders on anti-Semitism***By Randi Druzin*

PRAGUE (JTA) — Despite assurances from Slovak Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar that anti-Semitism is not a threat in Slovakia, local Jewish leaders remain worried.

At a meeting earlier this month with Meciar, B'nai B'rith President Tommy Baer expressed concern about the government's refusal to withdraw from state schools a teacher's manual romanticizing the life of Slovak Jews during World War II.

Meciar insisted that anti-Semitism in Slovakia was a marginal phenomena and that he would prevent it from gaining popularity.

The premier maintained that Slovakia had been more diligent than some other former Soviet Bloc countries in returning property that had been confiscated from Jews by the Nazis or the Communists.

He also apologized for incidents such as the desecration of a Jewish cemetery.

Frantisek Alexander, chairman of the Slovak Jewish Community, said that anti-Semitism was a cause for concern. "Racism is developing here," he said. "Now animosity is targeted at Romanys (Gypsies) and later at the Jews. If Slovaks need a scapegoat, they will find one." □

**Alleged war criminal's pardon voided**

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Lithuanian Supreme Court has annulled a 1991 pardon granted to an alleged war criminal.

Petras Kriksciunas was accused by the Soviet authorities of killing Jews in Vilnius, Lithuania, during World War II.

Some 50,000 Lithuanians who were convicted as war criminals by Soviet courts were exonerated by the Baltic nation after it gained independence in 1991. Among those pardoned were people who allegedly helped the Nazis kill Jews. Holocaust survivors, American Jewish leaders and the Lithuanian Jewish community have called upon the Lithuanian government to reverse the pardons.

The decision to annul the pardon granted to Kriksciunas, who died in 1993, came just days before this week's annual commemoration of Holocaust victims.

There are 16 incomplete annulment cases before the Supreme Court. □

**Hate crimes increase in Berlin**

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Hate crimes are up in Berlin.

In the first half of this year, there were 397 such crimes compared to a total of 426 for all of 1996, according to Berlin's senator for the interior, Joerg Schoenbohm.

The incidents include the spraying of neo-Nazi graffiti as well as the use of neo-Nazi emblems, which are banned by law.

Schoenbohm says districts in the eastern part of the city, which was once the capital of communist East Germany, are a center for much of the activity.

In one such district, the members of the far-right NPD political party increased from 50 to 130 during the first half of the year. □