



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ An Israeli government committee was formed to investigate the circumstances surrounding the attempt to assassinate a Hamas leader in Jordan. While not explicitly referring to the incident, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended at a news conference Israel's right to fight terrorism everywhere. [Page 1]

■ Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin received a tumultuous welcome upon his return to the Gaza Strip. Yassin, who was freed from an Israeli prison last week, was allowed to return to Gaza after Jordan released two Israeli agents held on suspicion of attempting to assassinate a Hamas leader. [Page 3]

■ The Canadian foreign affairs minister said Israel expressed its "very deep regret" for implicating Canada in the attack on a Hamas leader in Jordan. Canada recalled its ambassador to Israel after determining that the two assailants arrested in Jordan were carrying forged Canadian passports. [Page 2]

■ Jury selection began in the trial of Maurice Papon, a Vichy France official accused of deporting more than 1,500 Jews during World War II. [Page 4]

■ The U.S. Supreme Court rejected a constitutional challenge to Indiana University's custom of having a clergy member offer prayers as part of its graduation ceremony. The justices turned down arguments that the state school's custom violates the constitutionally required separation between church and state.

■ The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism joined supporters of campaign finance reform at a news conference intended to give a boost to legislation sponsored by Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Russell Feingold (D-Wisc.). A RAC official urged lawmakers to "work toward the creation of a more ethical campaign financing system."

■ A synagogue in the Croatian city of Dubrovnik reopened. The synagogue had undergone renovation to repair damage caused by artillery attacks during the war earlier this decade that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Israel recoils after Mossad bungles operation in Jordan

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It was supposed to be a quiet week of introspection during the Days of Awe.

But Israelis found themselves dealing with a disturbing situation during the period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Not only had Israel's famed Mossad secret service reportedly botched an assassination attempt in neighboring Jordan.

But also, perhaps worse, the failure triggered a slew of internal recriminations — instead of the instinctive, patriotic rallying-around-the-Israeli-government that usually occurs in the wake of such embarrassing episodes.

The political opposition did not even wait for Jordan to release two alleged Mossad operatives before demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

And the various defense and intelligence agencies lost no time in flinging mud at each other while washing their hands clean of the matter.

The affair, which strained the Jewish state's relations with two of its allies, Jordan and Canada, overshadowed the resumption of the long-suspended Israeli-Palestinian peace talks as well as the visit to Washington this week of Israeli President Ezer Weizman.

But the affair was bound to affect the peace process and the Palestinian political scene, as Israel freed from prison a key Hamas figure in order to secure the release of the two assailants captured in Amman after the failed assassination attempt.

Netanyahu, breaking his own silence on the affair at an internationally televised news conference Monday, said Israeli policy is to fight terrorism everywhere.

While he did not explicitly refer to the Amman attack, Netanyahu announced the creation of a government committee "to clarify the events that happened in Jordan."

Netanyahu spoke a day after his Cabinet issued a statement referring to Khaled Mashaal, a senior Hamas official in Amman who was the target of the bungled Sept. 25 attack, as the "number one figure in Hamas," adding that Israel has an obligation "to defend the rights of its citizens and to fight terror without compromise."

While the domestic political fallout will await the findings of the investigative committee, most commentators here believe the prime minister will survive this episode, as he has survived other difficulties during his 16 months in office.

An opinion poll published Monday by the Israeli daily Ma'ariv had a majority of the public faulting Netanyahu's performance, but a similar number opposed his resigning over the affair.

### Obvious political and strategic risks

The chief danger to Netanyahu's standing at home is thought to stem from Danny Yatom, the head of Mossad.

Over the Rosh Hashanah weekend, reports were published abroad to the effect that Yatom had advised against the move, but that he had been ordered by Netanyahu to go ahead with the assassination plan.

The order was given despite the obvious political and strategic risks involved, given Jordan's pivotal position as Israel's closest, some would say only, friend in the Arab world, and the decades-long discreet defense relationship between the Hashemite kingdom and the Jewish state.

But Yatom helped Netanyahu out of a dangerous position, letting it be known Sunday that the original idea to target Mashaal, developed in the wake of the July 30 double suicide bombing at Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market, had come from Mossad to the prime minister and not the other way around.

Reports apparently emanating from Yatom or those close to him went further, insisting that other security agencies and other ministers had been apprised of the plan before the final OK was given.

These reports elicited immediate denials and angry denunciations

from various departments and agencies, all anxious to distance themselves from the searing failure of the Amman attack and its possible political consequences.

The fallout from the affair took a dramatic turn Oct. 1, when Hamas co-founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin was released from an Israeli prison and flown by helicopter to Jordan.

Israel's decision to free Yassin was part of a deal for the release of the two Israeli agents who apparently carried out the attack against Mashaal. The two arrived at an undisclosed Israeli airstrip Monday minutes before a helicopter carrying Yassin touched down in the Gaza Strip.

Yassin, one of the Palestinians' most revered figures, received a boisterous welcome from his followers.

As part of its deal with Jordan, Israel also set free 20 Palestinian and Jordanian prisoners, and Israel Radio reported that another 50 prisoners could be released soon.

Netanyahu's point man during delicate behind-the-scenes diplomacy with Jordan after the failed attack on Mashaal was National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon, who apparently came out the winner, in terms of domestic Israeli politics, from the unfortunate affair.

Netanyahu apparently turned to Sharon when the full dimensions of the disaster became clear.

The prime minister reportedly took Sharon, along with Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and other officials, with him on an urgent initial visit to Amman after the Mashaal attack was botched.

Jordan's King Hussein, enraged at Israel's invasion of his sovereignty, reportedly threatened to sever diplomatic ties with the Jewish state.

His fury was allayed by the prospect of his emerging from the affair as the liberator of Yassin, who has been languishing in an Israeli jail since 1989 despite many appeals to win his release.

Sharon took over the handling of the difficult negotiations with Hussein, who expressed in a weekend newspaper interview his outrage over the affair.

There is a profound irony here, since Sharon, more than any other Israeli military or political figure, was long seen in Jordan as the country's most ominous threat.

It was he, after all, who for many years during the 1970s and 1980s propagated the "Jordan is Palestine" thesis, which was predicated on the eventual overthrow of Hussein by a Palestinian uprising.

The Jordanian leadership, in fact, interpreted the 1982 Lebanon War, which was inspired and largely led by then-Defense Minister Sharon, as an Israeli effort to force the Palestine Liberation Organization, then ensconced in Lebanon, to move back to Jordan and oust the Hashemites.

### **Hamas, Yassin emerge as winners**

But time has changed perspectives on all sides.

"I'm not a fan of Netanyahu," Sharon was quoted as saying Monday. "But the situation is very grave and I have to help him."

The incident also soured relations between Israel and Canada, after it was reported that Mashaal's two assailants had carried Canadian passports. Canada temporarily recalled its ambassador to Israel for consultations.

Lloyd Axworthy, Canada's minister for foreign affairs, said Monday that Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy had expressed Israel's "very deep regret" over the incident to him.

In the Arab world, the big winners emerging from the affair are Hamas in general and Yassin in particular.

Indeed, it is ironic, too, that just as both Hussein and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat were responding to American pressure by cracking down on Hamas activists on their respective sides of the Jordan

River, the assassination attempt raised the stock of the fundamentalist movement in Jordan, in the Palestinian territories and throughout the Arab world.

Arafat, who was entirely left out of the negotiations for Yassin's release, visited the sheik in Jordan over the weekend.

But the Palestinian leader, always wary of the fundamentalist challenge to his prestige, was conspicuously absent during Yassin's triumphant return to Gaza.

It remains to be seen whether Yassin's freedom will have the effect of moderating his movement's actions.

Yassin gave conflicting indications of where he stands during interviews this week.

But others in Hamas have sworn violent revenge for the attempt on Mashaal's life. □

### **Israel moves to repair relations with Canada after Amman attack**

*By Bill Gladstone*

TORONTO (JTA) — The Canadian government is not likely to take stern measures against Israel in the wake of a botched operation that implicated Canada.

Intelligence operatives for the Jewish state used forged Canadian passports as part of an attempt to assassinate a Hamas official in Jordan.

The Canadian minister for foreign affairs, Lloyd Axworthy, said Monday that Israel had expressed its "very deep regret" for the use of the passports in the botched Sept. 25 attack on Khaled Mashaal.

But Axworthy, who spoke Sunday with his Israeli counterpart, David Levy, said that his office was still seeking reassurances from Israel "that it won't happen again."

Prime Minister Jean Chretien flatly denied suggestions that Canadian officials had given permission for the Israeli operatives to use the passports.

"It is completely unacceptable to this government that anybody authorized by another government would use the Canadian passport to perpetrate any illegal action," he said.

Canada recalled its ambassador to Israel, David Berger, soon after Canadian consular officials in the Jordanian capital of Amman determined that the signatures and photographs on the passports had been falsified.

Opposition voices in the Canadian Parliament have urged trade sanctions and visa restrictions against Israelis.

But the government has not indicated that it is considering any further measures.

"In the short term, I think they'll try to develop the arrangements necessary to restore a normal situation," said Robert Ritter, national executive director of the Canada-Israel Committee, which represents the Jewish community on issues between the two countries.

"It'll take a while for the dust to settle," Ritter said. "In the long run, I don't think this will injure the strength of Canada-Israel bilateral relations."

"I think the Israelis will get out of this particular difficulty and the friendship will remain as solid as it's always been," he added.

The passport affair has commanded front-page headlines in Canada since the story broke.

In an editorial Monday, Canada's most respected newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, angrily asserted that recalling the ambassador may not be enough.

"Canada appreciates that Israel is under siege and understands that it cannot let attacks on its citizens go unpunished," the editorial said.

"But friends do not exploit each other. Friends do not hide behind each other. If the allegations about last week are true, Israel has put our friendship at risk." □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES**

**Ailing Hamas leader remains potent force for Palestinians**

*By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Muslim cleric who was released on the eve of Rosh Hashanah has been a thorn in Israel's side for more than a decade.

Sheik Ahmed Yassin, 61, is frail and seriously ill. A quadriplegic who is nearly blind, he recently suffered from kidney disease as well as a hearing loss.

But as the co-founder of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement, he is a potent symbol to his followers far beyond his physical state.

Yassin returned to a tumultuous welcome in the Gaza Strip Monday, days after Israel freed him in a deal struck with Jordan to secure the release of two Mossad agents who were captured after the failed attempt to assassinate a senior Hamas official in Amman.

Yassin was born in the village of Jawarah, near Ashkelon. His family fled to the Gaza Strip during Israel's 1948 War of Independence and resided in the Shati refugee camp, north of Gaza City.

Despite his physical disability — he became paralyzed at the age of 3 — Yassin became actively involved as a young man in the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist group militantly opposed to Israel's existence.

He received his religious training at the Ein Shams University in Cairo and formed a local group opposed to the traditional leadership of the brotherhood, which has followers in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Arab world. In the early 1970s, Yassin was a co-founder of the Al-Mujama al-Islami, or the Islamic Union, a socioreligious movement that operated from the local mosques in Gaza with the primary goal of improving the living standards of Palestinians.

The union won supporters by establishing a network of schools, health services and other social services that had previously been virtually non-existent.

When this correspondent met Yassin in the early 1980s at his residence in one of Gaza's poorer neighborhoods, he was already well-known to the Israeli security service, but was relatively unknown to the Israeli public.

**Self-confident and menacing**

At the time he was in his 40s, but sitting crippled on a mattress in a modest living room he already looked like an old man.

Despite his infirmity, he was both self-confident and menacing when he spoke in his high-pitched voice. He rejected any possible compromise with what he described as the Israeli enemy, although he refrained at the time for calling for a holy war against the Jewish state.

By 1984, Yassin transformed his religious and political convictions into a violent credo, and he began preparing his followers for underground military activities against Israel.

Israel outlawed his organization at the time, and he was arrested and sentenced to 13 years in jail. A year later, he was released as part of a prisoner exchange.

Yassin co-founded Hamas as an armed underground movement on Dec. 14, 1987, five days after the Palestinian uprising known as the intifada began.

In May 1989, Israel arrested Yassin and sentenced him to life imprisonment for ordering the deaths of Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel.

Almost immediately, Arab officials and militant leaders began a campaign to pressure for Yassin's release.

Israeli officials, who regarded him as a valuable bargaining chip, occasionally flirted with the idea of

freeing him. But keeping him imprisoned was always a dangerous proposition for Israel.

Had he died while in an Israeli jail, according to many observers, he would have been regarded as a martyr by his followers, who could well have launched a new intifada. That possibility was defused last week, when Yassin was released from prison before daybreak on Oct. 1 and flown by helicopter to Jordan.

Israeli officials refuse to confirm or deny reports that Yassin was freed in exchange for the release of two Mossad agents who on Sept. 25 allegedly attempted to kill another Hamas leader, Khaled Mashaal, in the Jordanian capital of Amman.

But the two agents were returned to Israel Monday as Yassin himself received a tumultuous welcome upon his arrival in Gaza.

During his imprisonment, Yassin moderated his positions, calling on his followers for an end to terrorist attacks in Israel. According to some observers, his change of position was at least partly intended to help win release.

Yassin continued in that moderate vein this week, saying during an interview with Israel Television's Arabic-language service that he was prepared "to live with the Jews, the best life, in brotherhood and cooperation and coexistence, on condition that they do not gobble up our rights."

These rights, he said, included the right of return for some 4 million Palestinians "who want to return to their homes (in Israel) from which they were expelled."

In another interview Sunday, Yassin said Hamas and the Palestinian Authority — which are often at odds over strategies — share the same goals.

"We are one people, we are in one path even if our views differ, our relationship is one of brotherhood," Yassin said. "We are in one national path to build our homeland, our state, our entity, our future, our civilization, and our presence, to restore our rights. We will remain one people and, will die, God willing, one people." □

**Fewer immigrants slow down Israel's population growth rate**

*By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's population is growing, but not as quickly as earlier in the decade.

The Central Bureau of Statistics said this week that the Jewish state has a population of about 5,863,000, of which 4,702,000, or about 80.2 percent, are Jews.

Israel's Muslim population stands at 872,000, or 14.9 percent of the population; Christians, 190,000, or 3.2 percent; and Druse and other religions, 100,000, or 1.7 percent, the bureau said.

The statistics, released each year on the eve of the Jewish New Year, indicated a rate of population growth since the previous Rosh Hashanah of 2.45 percent.

The growth rate was lower than that posted at the beginning of the 1990s, when a massive influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union contributed to annual growth rates in the 4.5 percent range.

In its Statistical Yearbook published Sunday, the bureau said that in the year 5757, the Jewish population increased by 1.9 percent while the Muslim population increased by 3.5 percent. The bureau also reported that a record 2.5 million Israelis traveled abroad during the past year and that economic growth dropped drastically from 6 percent in 5756 to 2.5 percent.

According to the bureau, Israelis have life expectancy rates that rank among the world's highest.

Israeli women can hope to live 79.1 years, placing them 17th in the world. Men must suffice with 75.5 years, which puts them third in world life expectancy rates. □

**Trial of former French official will review nation's aid to Nazis**

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — After 16 years of delays, former government minister Maurice Papon will go before a jury this week to answer accusations that he sent Jews to death camps during World War II.

Papon, 87, is accused of crimes against humanity for ordering the arrest and deportation of 1,560 Jews — 223 of them children — to Auschwitz, when he was secretary-general of the Bordeaux prefect's office, the second highest-ranking position in the region.

But his trial, which opens Wednesday in the southwest city of Bordeaux, will be more than an examination of one man's deeds. It will be a post-mortem on the conduct of an entire nation during the Nazi occupation.

Delving into the behavior of the French administration — police, judges, bureaucrats — during the occupation was a longstanding taboo in the postwar years, when General Charles de Gaulle, intent on strengthening a weakened nation, perpetuated the myth that France had been heroically united against the German occupiers.

Papon himself went on to hold senior positions in de Gaulle's administration, including Paris police chief from 1958 to 1967.

After de Gaulle died, Papon continued his successful career, serving as budget minister from 1978 to 1981.

Efforts to bring Papon to trial were launched in 1981 after a newspaper article detailed his wartime activities.

But they were repeatedly obstructed by senior French officials — in particular by late President Francois Mitterrand — who were determined to prevent a trial that would make France re-examine its collaboration with the Nazis and, ultimately, its participation in the Final Solution.

The trial of Papon — who will in all likelihood be the last Frenchman to face trial for crimes against humanity — is seen as the nation's last chance to come to terms with a past it has long tried to forget.

According to a recent survey, most French people welcome that chance.

An opinion poll conducted for a French weekly newsmagazine showed that 67 percent of those questioned thought the trial would be useful in understanding more about France's collaboration with the Nazis.

Among the survey's participants, 83 percent found it "shocking" that Papon was able to become Paris police chief after the war, while 68 percent believed Papon should have disobeyed the Vichy regime.

**Papon always sought 'maximum efficiency'**

The charges against Papon include being an accomplice to kidnapping and murder, carrying out arbitrary arrests and perpetrating inhuman acts.

The trial will be held as a result of a January ruling by France's Supreme Court. In its ruling, the high court said Papon knew that "the arrest and deportation of Jews to the east would inevitably lead them to death," adding that his office always "sought to ensure maximum efficiency in carrying out anti-Jewish measures."

The court also said Papon often displayed unwarranted zeal by providing Nazi authorities with details about French Jews before he was asked for the information.

Papon has denied the charges against him, saying that he stayed in his job at the prefect's office to help the French Resistance and that he used his position to save Jews. Papon reportedly joined the Resistance near the end of 1943.

Papon's lawyers plan to ask the court on the first

day of the trial to allow their client, who is half deaf and has a heart condition, to remain free during the proceedings because of his age and state of health. Under French law, a defendant must stay in prison throughout his or her trial.

His lawyers also say they plan to argue that their client was no guiltier than wartime Jewish officials, who they say cooperated with the Nazis in the hope of saving as many Jews as possible.

Lawyer Jean-Marc Varaut maintains that Papon was "a low-level civil servant who saved those who could be saved," and his trial "will be a sacrificial trial against a man being made into the scapegoat of France's bad conscience."

Henri Hajdenberg, president of CRIF, the umbrella group of secular French Jewish organizations, said the defense was "trying to sow doubt, attack everyone, darken everyone, so that everyone appears guilty and Papon comes out seeming no guiltier than anyone else."

The trial, during which a long list of witnesses will appear, is expected to last two-and-a-half months.

Among several eminent figures the defense intends to call to the stand are Valery Giscard d'Estaing and Raymond Barre, who were president and prime minister, respectively, when Papon served in the Cabinet as budget minister.

"Being Paris police chief and Cabinet member, he knew a lot of people," Arno Klarsfeld, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, who include Holocaust survivors and relatives of Papon's alleged victims, said of Papon.

"They can all testify that he was a good man when he was minister of budget. Maybe he was good for the budget, but he wasn't good for the Jews of Bordeaux, and one is more important than the other."

Joseph Sitruk, the chief rabbi of France, was also asked to testify for the defense, but he refused.

He will instead testify for the civil plaintiffs, along with Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel and several World War II historians. □

**Deportation cases to proceed against 3 alleged war criminals**

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — Canada's Supreme Court has ruled that deportation proceedings against three alleged Nazi war criminals can proceed despite defense claims that the government had improperly interfered in their cases.

Proceedings against Erichs Tobiass, Helmut Oberlander and Johann Dueck stopped last year after a judge ruled that there had been improper discussions between the chief justice of the Federal Court and a lawyer from Canada's Justice Department.

The high court ruled recently that the secret meetings, held to discuss ways to speed up the proceedings, had not prevented the three from receiving a fair trial.

The high court ruled that the trial could proceed after a new judge was appointed to handle the case.

Lawyers for the Justice Department maintain that all three were involved in Nazi-ordered killings of civilians during World War II.

Canadian Jewish leaders, who have been increasingly impatient with what they charge is Canada's poor record of dealing with suspected war criminals, welcomed the ruling.

"The suggestion that deportation proceedings be dropped was way out of proportion to the severity of any impropriety that took place," said Irving Abella, chair of the war crimes committee of Canadian Jewish Congress.

"We applaud the Supreme Court justices for recognizing the fact we are dealing with allegations of heinous crimes." □