



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The Israeli government is reconsidering a decision to allow the export of semi-automatic guns to the United States. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) has led the congressional protest against the planned commercial sale of the weapons. [Page 3]

■ At least two Israel soldiers were killed and nine wounded in clashes in the southern Lebanon security zone. The deaths bring the total number of Israelis killed in Lebanon since the beginning of the year to at least 41. [Page 2]

■ The war crimes trial of Maurice Papon opened in Paris amid calls from Papon's lawyer to release the former Vichy official from custody while the trial takes place. Papon, 87, is accused of deporting more than 1,500 Jews while he was secretary-general of the Bordeaux region during the war.

■ Israel's two chief rabbis have called for an emergency meeting with Orthodox Knesset members to discuss ways to block the appointment of non-Orthodox Jews to local religious councils. [Page 4]

■ Israeli President Ezer Weizman urged restraint by members of Congress who are threatening to cut as much as one-third of the U.S. aid to Israel unless it extradites 17-year-old Samuel Sheinbein, who is accused of a murder in Maryland. Republican lawmakers claim to have the votes needed to cut between \$200 million and \$1.2 billion of Israel's \$3 billion foreign aid package.

■ The United States designated 30 groups as terrorist organizations in an effort to block their ability to raise funds in the United States. Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Kach and Kahane Chai were among those groups on the list, which was required by last year's counter-terrorism bill. [Page 2]

■ The Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the nomination of Martin Indyk by a voice vote to the post of assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs. The nomination now goes to the full Senate.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Netanyahu meets with Arafat to move beyond Mossad fiasco

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — Beyond anything else, political self-interest was the driving force behind this week's sudden meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Questions about how the long-dormant peace process would unfold took a back seat to a more important issue for the two — demonstrating that each can assume the role of statesman and deliver for his people.

For Netanyahu, there was a particular urgency to have his first face-to-face meeting with Arafat in eight months.

He was plagued by a new scandal — a botched Mossad mission to assassinate a Hamas leader on the streets of Jordan's capital — and a summit with Arafat provided a way to deflect attention from that fiasco.

Compounding the scandal were reports that two days before the Sept. 25 attack, Jordan's King Hussein had contacted Israeli officials with a message from Hamas that it was willing to suspend terror attacks against Israel — but the message was never conveyed to Netanyahu.

It was no surprise when reports surfaced that it was Netanyahu who had asked for the meeting with Arafat.

In one fell blow, the fiasco in Amman had severely strained Israel's relations with Jordan, undermined Arafat, besmirched the reputation of Mossad and revived calls for Netanyahu's resignation.

But, perhaps worst of all, it had strengthened the hand of the very organization targeted in the assassination attempt: Hamas.

If this were not bad enough, to recover from Jordan the two Mossad agents captured after the failed attack on Khaled Mashaal, Israel had to free the spiritual leader of Hamas, Sheik Ahmed Yassin. As part of the deal with Jordan, Israel also released 20 other prisoners and agreed to free up to 50 more. This was the price for assuaging the anger of Jordan's King Hussein, Israel's closest Arab ally, who made no secret of how he felt that Israel had used the streets of his capital as a base for a covert Mossad operation.

After languishing in an Israeli prison since 1989, when he was sentenced to life imprisonment for ordering the deaths of Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel, Yassin was flown last week to Amman.

On Monday, he returned to a hero's welcome in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas, which has several captains in bureaus throughout the Middle East, suddenly had a general.

New player at center stage

At various times this week, Yassin gave conflicting signals of whether, and under what conditions, Hamas would suspend its terror attacks against Israel.

But more important than what he said was the fact that there was now a new player, spotlighted at center stage, in the region's politics.

And Netanyahu, by all accounts, was responsible for casting Yassin in this role. Clearly, the besieged Israeli premier had to do something.

The first effort at damage control came Monday, when Netanyahu broke his silence on the failed Mossad operation, telling an internationally televised news conference that it was part of Israel's ongoing fight against terror. This fight had its successes, he said, but there were also failures. Without speaking explicitly about the attempt to kill Mashaal, Netanyahu announced the creation of a government committee "to clarify the events that happened in Jordan."

The news conference, in which he cast himself as the warrior against terrorism in all its forms, served as a valiant first effort at self-defense.

But more was needed.

Before dawn broke Wednesday morning, Netanyahu traveled to the Erez Crossing separating Israel from Gaza and met with Arafat for more than two hours. The last time they met was Feb. 9, three weeks after Israel pulled its troops out of most of the West Bank town of Hebron.

Then, the two discussed the next steps in the peace process. Within weeks, Israel began construction for a Jewish neighborhood in southeastern

Jerusalem, and the Palestinian Authority responded by suspending negotiations. Relations between the two sides have been on a downward slope ever since.

Hamas filled the void created by the suspended talks by launching two terror attacks in Jerusalem, in July and September, that killed 21 Israelis.

When U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross held separate meetings Tuesday with Netanyahu and Arafat, the Palestinian Authority leader could well have balked at meeting the premier.

Arafat knew that Netanyahu was seeking to bolster his prestige, and he could have let the Israeli leader stew in his own juices.

But Arafat needed the meeting as much as Netanyahu. Arafat, who had been left out of the negotiations between Israel and Jordan over the swap of Yassin for the Mossad agents, had been denied the glory of securing the Hamas leader's release. And when Yassin arrived in Gaza to a tumultuous greeting from thousands of followers, Arafat knew that he had a serious contender for the affections of the Palestinian people.

Ultimately, for Arafat to achieve gains, he needs Hamas to desist from terror and back his efforts to achieve a permanent peace agreement with Israel.

But Arafat could not afford to stand in the Hamas leader's shadow, so he carefully avoided Monday's emphatic welcome for Yassin.

Neither could he risk ignoring Yassin entirely — so he visited the freed Islamic leader the following day.

It was also on Tuesday that Arafat told Ross he would meet Netanyahu at Erez.

After their meeting, neither Netanyahu nor Arafat spoke with reporters. Ross characterized the meeting as a new beginning at which the two leaders recommitted themselves to advancing the peace process.

Ross said that the two had agreed to meet regularly in the future, but it was unclear whether they had accomplished anything else.

They discussed issues that will be taken up at meetings expected for later this month between the two sides in Washington. Arafat also called on Netanyahu to stop construction projects on disputed lands and to implement a redeployment from rural areas of the West Bank, a move that was scheduled to take place last month.

The Netanyahu-Arafat meeting took place a day after Israeli and Palestinian committees reconvened — after a seven-month suspension — to discuss issues still unresolved from the 1995 Interim Agreement.

The committees were slated to discuss the opening of a seaport and airport in Gaza, a safe-passage route for Palestinians traveling between the West Bank and Gaza, and the release of Palestinian prisoners.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said Tuesday that the Palestinians were seeking a "three-month ceiling" for the committees to conclude their work.

The Palestinians, concerned that the Netanyahu government will content itself with an extended process of discussions, want to see tangible results.

For Arafat, with Yassin's presence in Gaza creating a new set of realities, this is of particular concern, since his viability as a leader depends on his ability to achieve concessions from Israel. □

U.S. issues long-awaited list of foreign terror organizations

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In a long-awaited move expected to aid the fight against terrorism, the United States this week designated 30 groups as foreign terrorist organizations.

The action was taken under a 1996 anti-terrorism law that makes it illegal to provide funds for designated terrorist groups, bars U.S. visas for their members or representatives and requires U.S. financial institutions to block funds belonging to the groups.

Jewish organizations, which were instrumental in pushing the legislation through Congress, have been urging the administration to make the designations for nearly a year and half.

Officials welcomed Wednesday's move, which effectively triggers the restrictions outlined in the law.

The Anti-Defamation League called the designations "an essential first step in an ongoing process to prevent illegal fund-raising activities in this country for terrorist groups abroad."

"We urge federal prosecutors to aggressively enforce the law against these foreign terrorist organizations and their domestic conduits," the ADL said in a statement.

The groups include Hamas, Hezbollah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Two Jewish organizations — Kach and Kahane Chai — are also on the list.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in brief remarks, called terrorism one of the nation's most important security problems and said the administration hopes to turn the country into a "no-support-for-terrorism zone."

The law mandating the identification of terrorist groups took effect 17 months ago.

The process of actually naming the organizations was delayed, however, as preparations were being made for possible legal challenges to the designations, observers said.

Last month, the U.S. House of Representatives, impatient over the slow pace of compiling the list, voted 396-6 to cut State Department salaries and expenses by 2 percent until the list was completed.

Following the designations, Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House International Relations Committee, said the State Department's "belated" action sends a signal that the administration "is finally waking up to the serious threat of foreign terrorist organizations."

The anti-terrorism law supplements an executive order President Clinton signed in 1995 blocking assets of 12 Middle Eastern terrorist organizations that threaten to use violence to disrupt the peace process.

"Rather than using an executive order authority, one can now use this full legal authority to restrict the travel of officials of these organizations or anyone who would like to come to this country to fund raise on their behalf," said James Rubin, a spokesman for the State Department. □

2 Israeli soldiers killed in Lebanon

JERUSALEM (JTA) — At least two Israeli soldiers were killed Wednesday by roadside bombs in the southern Lebanon security zone.

Hezbollah claimed responsibility for detonating the bombs, which have claimed a steadily rising toll of Israeli soldiers.

Israel and its ally in the region, the South Lebanon Army, responded to the bombings by targeting Hezbollah positions with artillery fire.

The deaths bring the total number of Israelis killed in Lebanon since the beginning of the year to at least 41.

Last month, 12 Israeli naval commandos were killed in a raid on Lebanon, in what was the Israel Defense Force's heaviest casualty count in a single military operation in more than 12 years. The recent rise in the number of fatalities has renewed debate in Israel over the army's presence in the security zone. □

Israel reconsidering decision to export Uzis to United States

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is reconsidering his decision to allow an Israeli government-owned company to export thousands of semiautomatic guns to the United States.

After Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) read the riot act at a meeting last week to Israel's ambassador to the United States, Netanyahu agreed to review his position, congressional and Israeli sources said.

Israel's ambassador to the United States, Eliahu Ben-Elissar, handed Feinstein a two-page letter from the premier that defended Israel Military Industries' plan to export modified versions of the Uzi and Galil weapons to the United States for commercial sale.

The letter basically said, "It's legal and we're doing it," according to sources familiar with it.

After Feinstein labeled the response "disingenuous and unsatisfactory," Ben-Elissar asked for a few more days to consider her response.

This week, Israeli officials told Feinstein that the government is reviewing its position.

The proposed sale has drawn the fire of two-thirds of the Senate's Democrats, who are urging President Clinton to step in to stop the sale. In addition to Feinstein, five Jewish senators signed a letter to Clinton.

"Mr. President, we do not need more assault weapons on the streets of America. We urge you to use your executive authority as President to prevent this transfer of arms to American streets on behalf of public safety," the 30 senators wrote.

A similar letter from Rep. Walter Capps (D-Calif.) has attracted 22 House members, including six Jewish lawmakers. Clinton has not yet responded to the request.

The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms recently approved modified versions of the Uzi and Galil for import. Israel Military Industries modified the guns to avoid the 1994 assault weapons ban that included other versions of these guns.

Senator hopes Israel 'will lead the way'

President Bush originally banned the import of Uzis and Galils after five children were killed and 30 wounded in a California schoolyard by a similar weapon in 1989.

At least a dozen other countries have received similar permits to export their guns. Feinstein has said that any state-owned companies will face similar congressional pressure.

"It is my hope that the Israeli government will lead the way and set an example that others will follow," Feinstein said.

Last month, Feinstein, along with 29 of her colleagues, sent a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu requesting that he stop the export.

"It is my personal hope," Feinstein said in a recent speech on the Senate floor, "that a nation that understands perhaps better than most the paramount importance of any government's responsibility to ensure the safety and security of its people will understand that there is a moral issue at stake here that far outweighs any commercial value the sale of these weapons holds for their country."

In an effort to ratchet up pressure on the Israeli government, Feinstein sent the letter to 18 Jewish groups that she listed at the bottom of her letter to Netanyahu.

The National Jewish Democratic Council urged members to sign the Capps letter.

"As an American Jewish organization we ask that

you don't confuse your steadfast support of Israel with the sale of Israeli-made assault weapons in the United States," NJDC wrote to members of Congress.

Signing the letter "signifies your commitment to the safety of American streets. It is not a reflection of your support for Israel." Although the American Israel Public Affairs Committee officially took no position on the issue, at least three House aides said AIPAC lobbyists, when asked, had urged them not to sign the letter.

For now, the most vocal Jewish support for Feinstein has come from the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. "Feinstein's initiative reflects our shared concern about the transfer of assault weapons to the U.S. by foreign companies and governments," the group said in a recent statement. □

Australian paper: Athletes fell into a 'deadly cocktail'

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY (JTA) — An analysis of water from the site of this summer's Maccabiah Games bridge collapse in Israel has revealed that Australian team members "fell into a deadly cocktail of chemicals and pollutants," according to tests conducted by an Australian newspaper.

Barry Lyons, a director for WSL Consultants, which conducted the tests for the Sunday Herald-Sun, said the results of a sample from the Yarkon River indicated that the water was "quite contaminated," resembling "diluted sewage."

The report also produced evidence that the water contained a toxic oil that can be used to repel mosquitoes and that the substance caused "oily gunk" on the lungs of the victims which prevented oxygen from being absorbed by the body.

According to Dr. Elihu Richter of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, "the substance in the Australian tests — and what we have found with our own experience — would produce the kind of pneumonia which developed in the athletes hours and days after they fell into the water."

Four Australian athletes died as a result of the July 14 collapse during the opening ceremonies at the Ramat Gan Stadium, and a number of team members became seriously ill.

An Israeli commission that investigated the incident found that a combination of factors, including shoddy materials and faulty construction, led to the accident.

Initial analyses conducted on water samples soon after the accident indicated that the water contained contaminants, but did not cause any of the deaths.

Meanwhile, some family members of those injured in the accident continue to show public displeasure with how the incident has been handled.

Colin Elterman, whose 15-year-old daughter, Sasha, remains in a Sydney hospital with symptoms that include high fevers and a lung infection, has been openly critical of the way that Maccabi Australia has dealt with the issue, particularly for what he sees as its inability to pressure the Maccabi World Union.

In a paid advertisement taken out in the Australian Jewish News last month, Elterman exempted Israel from blame, saying that the international sports organization, along with the engineers and the builders, should be held responsible.

In a Rosh Hashanah message, Tom Goldman, president of Maccabi Australia, was also critical of the international organization, but added that the first installment of a loan from the group was expected to arrive in Australia soon. Goldman added that Maccabi Australia is evaluating its participation in the group. □

Chief rabbis seek law to ban non-Orthodox from councils

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's two chief rabbis want the Knesset to block the appointment of non-Orthodox Jews to local religious councils.

They have called for an emergency meeting with Orthodox legislators to discuss amending the law regulating how religious council members are appointed.

The move by Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau and Sephardi Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron is the latest salvo in the ongoing battle between the country's Orthodox establishment and the Reform and Conservative movements, which are seeking an official role in Israel's religious life.

The meeting is scheduled in advance of a High Court of Justice ruling on the right of Reform and Conservative Jews to sit on religious councils in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa and Kiryat Tivon.

A ruling is expected on Oct. 29.

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

The religious council in Netanya has refused to seat a Reform representative, Joyce Brenner, despite a High Court ruling in August upholding her appointment.

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

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

Secular Israeli denied housing on campus at religious school

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — At a time when five Orthodox students at Yale University are battling to live off campus, a secular Israeli student is fighting for the right to live on the campus of a religious university.

Earlier this month, Bar-Ilan University told Cyril Amar, a 24-year-old immigrant from France with no family in Israel, that he was ineligible for campus housing because he is not religiously observant.

The university, located in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan, offered to pay for nearby off-campus housing, but Amar rejected the offer. According to the university's long-standing guidelines, all students who live in Bar-Ilan's four dormitories must keep the laws of kashrut and the Sabbath. Male students must wear a kippah, while female students are expected to dress modestly.

University spokesman David Weinberg said Amar was given a room in a dormitory last year on the condition that he live a religious lifestyle while on campus.

"This young man knew the rules, but was not able to keep them. Shabbat and kashrut were not things he could do," Weinberg said.

In an interview with the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Amar said, "I have the right to live in the university dormitory. Sixty to 70 percent of the student body at Bar-Ilan is secular. Why is their right to live in the dorms revoked?"

Amar, who served in the Israeli army, said he made aliyah in 1992 "for ideological reasons and was prepared to pay a high personal price and move away from

my family in order to live in a sovereign, democratic Jewish state.

"I think it is horrible that an academic institution for higher education is not able to practice the tolerance it preaches."

Weinberg said Bar-Ilan "is and has always been a religiously traditional university," though "about 60 percent" of the university's students are secular.

He added that accommodations on campus are limited. "Only a small fraction of our 25,000 students are able to live on campus," he said. "There are only 800 dorm beds, so we are unfortunately forced to turn away most religious and secular students who want to live on campus."

Bar-Ilan gives dorm preference to religious students "because we want to maintain the traditional atmosphere on campus," he said.

Amar's case stands in stark contrast to that of five Orthodox students who are contemplating a lawsuit against Yale for allegedly violating the students' religious rights.

The dispute arose after the five requested exemptions from Yale's housing policy, which requires all freshmen and sophomores to live on campus unless they are married or over 21 years old.

They asked for a waiver of the \$7,000 residential fees because they believe that living in dorms where both sexes easily mingle would not conform with their religious convictions.

Yale maintains that residential living on campus is an integral and important part of attending the school. □

Red Cross official apologizes for group's stance in Holocaust

NEW YORK (JTA) — Add the Red Cross to the list of groups that have recently apologized for remaining silent during the Holocaust.

The director of archives for the International Red Cross, George Willemin, acknowledged this week the organization's "moral failure" at a ceremony at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

He also delivered approximately 60,000 pages of Red Cross documents to be given to three Jewish museums.

"The ICRC admits — yes — that it has kept silent with regard to the Holocaust, and I would say that this is the heart of the moral failure," he said.

The Red Cross apology came days after the French Roman Catholic Church issued a statement of repentance for its silence during the persecution of Jews in Nazi-occupied France.

The ICRC, which is based in Switzerland, discounted reports of a 1940 mass murder in Lublin, Poland, according to a statement from Yad Vashem.

This was not its only failure.

As reports of extermination camps began to spread in 1944, the Red Cross visited the Theresienstadt ghetto in Czechoslovakia at the invitation of the Nazis.

Nazi officials cleaned up the ghetto, lessening overcrowded conditions by sending prisoners to Auschwitz and adding a bank, cafe, shops and schools — in effect, creating a "model ghetto."

The ruse worked.

The Red Cross reported that allegations of extermination camps were unfounded.

In the latter stages of the war, the Red Cross did work with Jewish organizations in rescuing Jews, according to Yehuda Bauer, director of research at Yad Vashem.

The documents will be distributed among Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Washington and the Center for Jewish Documentation in Paris. □