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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Protests move into second day

More than a dozen Palestinians were wounded in a second day of clashes with Israeli troops in the West Bank.

Israeli security police were on high alert for possible revenge attacks in the wake of the shooting deaths of three Palestinian workers by Israeli troops at a roadblock. [Page 3]

Militants: Retaliate for verdict

Islamic Jihad militants called on their followers to launch attacks on Israeli soldiers and settlers to retaliate for a U.S. court decision about a 1995 terror attack carried out by the group.

The verdict, in which Iran was ordered to pay nearly \$250 million to the family of an American killed in the attack, was an "indicator of the arrogance of American policy in the world," according to a fax the group sent to a wire service.

Annan denies Lebanon plan

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he does not have a plan to facilitate an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

His remarks followed an Israeli media report that he was planning to bring a five-point plan for an Israeli withdrawal in exchange for security guarantees from the Lebanese government.

Anti-Semitic incidents drop

The number of anti-Semitic incidents reported in the United States declined for a third consecutive year, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

In 1997, 1,571 incidents were reported by 43 states and the District of Columbia — 151 fewer than in 1996, or nearly a 9 percent decline, the ADL reported in its annual audit.

Vanunu may be moved

Former nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu may soon be moved out of solitary confinement, according to Israeli media reports.

A lawyer for Vanunu, who has served 12 years of an 18-year sentence for disclosing Israel's nuclear weapons capabilities to *The Times* of London, told Israel Radio that the Justice Ministry had decided to move him to a regular jail cell because of international pressure.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Swastika-kipah comment highlights Israeli tensions

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Those who believe that religious-secular tensions in Israel have never been worse received a stunning corroboration in recent days.

In a March 5 speech, Shlomo Gazit, a reserve general in the Israel Defense Force and the longtime head of army intelligence, compared the knitted skullcap — which usually signifies a national-religious outlook — to the Nazi swastika.

Although Gazit ultimately apologized, his remarks sparked a national controversy. The incident underscored the intense polarization between the religious and secular camps in Israeli society today.

It even came as some Orthodox Knesset members sought to overturn the decision to award author Amos Oz this year's Israel Prize for Literature.

No one on either side of the religious divide pretended that Gazit's words were a complete aberration.

Rather, there is widespread acknowledgment that they represent a profound sense of apprehension among many of the old-school Israeli "elite" that key sections of the state and society are in danger of being overrun by forces with values that run counter to the secular and socialist principles of the founding generation of the Jewish state's leaders.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself often has said that his coalition of rightist, Orthodox, Sephardi and new immigrant groups constitutes an "anti-elitist" swing against the group aligned with the Labor Party that ran the country for many decades.

In the army, especially, members of the "old guard" such as Gazit watch with mounting concern as more and more of the rising young officers corps are modern Orthodox.

The incident, furthermore, has reopened the debate around the haunting question of whether Orthodox officers can be trusted, in all circumstances, to obey orders.

Gazit, a former president of Ben-Gurion University, was speaking at an international symposium on national identity at Tel Aviv University when he said the knitted yarmulka is a political/ideological badge and as such should not be worn by soldiers.

His reference to the swastika was intended to underline the point that it, too, was a political badge that German soldiers were encouraged to wear on their uniforms during World War II.

He recalled that in the past he had suggested to the military chaplaincy that it issue standard khaki or blue kipot — in order to eliminate the political statement that he feels is implicit in the knitted kipot.

The general, taken aback by the reaction to his remarks, offered a series of profuse apologies — including one to the Ashkenazi chief rabbi, Yisrael Meir Lau, himself a Holocaust survivor.

Gazit called his comments foolish and out of place. He spoke warmly of the contribution of kipah-wearing soldiers to the IDF.

But he did not back away from his argument that a knitted kipah represented an ideological badge that had no place in the military.

In response to Gazit's comments, Transportation Minister Shaul Yahalom, a member of the National Religious Party, demanded that the army strip Gazit of his rank and the police open a criminal file against him on grounds of incitement to hatred and

MIDEAST FOCUS

E.U. may have peace plan

The European Union is planning to introduce a plan to break the deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, according to Israeli media reports. Israeli officials are said to be studying the plan and are expected to discuss it during British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's scheduled visit to the region next week.

Hanegbi target of probe

A criminal investigation was launched against Israel's justice minister.

The probe will investigate whether Tzachi Hanegbi is guilty of fraud and breach of public trust when he served in a highway-safety lobby he established during the previous Knesset session, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

TV documentary draws fire

A documentary by Israel Television on the country's 50-year history came under fire from conservative politicians who want the 22-part series pulled off the air for being too sympathetic to the Palestinians.

Communications Minister Limor Livnat said in a letter to Israel Television's board of directors that the show's producers should be rallying around the flag, not presenting "the other side in a favorable light."

Bar association head sentenced

An Israeli court sentenced the head of Israel's Bar Association, Dror Hoter-Yishai, to a six-month suspended sentence and fined him some \$14,000 for helping his father evade taxes. Hoter-Yishai was previously acquitted of evading his own incoming taxes.

Hacker alters premier's Web site

A computer hacker broke into the Web sites of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, and set up links to pornographic sites on the Internet. The sites were closed after surprised Web surfers contacted the Prime Minister's Office.



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violence. Others in the rightist and religious camps were more forgiving, preferring to make do with the general's sheepish apologies.

The increasing number of Orthodox officers that Gazit and others express concern over is especially true in fighting units.

This marks a stark contrast to the past, when the secular kibbutzim tended to supply a disproportionate number of front-line fighting officers and men. That role is now fulfilled by the religious education network, particularly the pre-army yeshivas and the hesder yeshivas, which educate their students to combine religious study and observance with military prowess and ambition.

The most prominent kippah-wearing officer of high rank is Brig. Gen. Ya'acov Amidror, military aide to Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

There are two other brigadier generals who wear kipot, and many colonels and lieutenant colonels.

Indeed, some sources in the military believe that Gazit made his remarks in order to head off the possible appointment of Amidror — who is known to be a hard-liner — to the sensitive post of head of military intelligence.

Regarding the debate over whether Orthodox officers can be trusted, attention has focused anew on the now-notorious rabbinical ruling issued by three national-religious rabbis in 1995 forbidding soldiers to carry out any orders to uproot settlements or evict settlers.

While not all Orthodox Israelis identify with the religious right, and while not all knitted kippah-wearers are necessarily ultranationalists, all Orthodox Israelis have been hurt and scarred by Gazit's comments — because they come from someone at the very heart of the establishment and because they express so graphically the depth of suspicion and fear of Orthodox influence.

The backdrop to the episode is the widening polarization of Israeli society. This polarization is found in several areas:

- Politically, all of the Orthodox political parties are aligned with the Likud in the national camp.

The rabbinic leadership of the various parties are steadily crystallizing a theology to support their hawkish political posture.

The flip-side of that theology is that the left — that is, the dovish, liberal camp — is religiously tainted.

The effort to take away the prestigious Israel Prize from Amos Oz underscores this polarization.

Knesset Member Zvi Handel of the National Religious Party is leading a bid to appeal to the High Court against the award on the grounds that Oz, in a speech nine years ago, had sharply criticized Jewish settlers.

Oz maintains that he was attacking extremists such as the late militant Rabbi Meir Kahane. But in the superheated atmosphere generated by the Gazit affair, Oz's critics were not interested in drawing such distinctions.

- There is growing resentment among secular Israelis over what is seen as draft-dodging by fervently Orthodox, or haredi, Jews and over rising poverty in that community.

A series currently running in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz that details the cost to Israeli society of the haredi community has aroused much bitterness among the haredim.

- Disagreements about opening shopping malls on Shabbat at various sites around the country fill the media each week.

While Shabbat-related secular-religious violence has broadly declined, the Labor Ministry, led by Minister Eliyahu Yishai of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, is determined to enforce closure laws and regulations on these businesses, even where they do not abut Orthodox areas.

For the modern Orthodox camp, Gazit's words and the reaction they drew in wide secular circles — revulsion at the style, not necessarily at the content — have come as a bitter shock.

Fervently Orthodox Israelis, on the other hand, were heard this week citing Gazit to vindicate their separatism. In one synagogue in Tel Aviv, a young haredi man bitterly remarked to a knitted kippah-wearer: "We always told you so — all of them hate all of us."

□

JEWISH WORLD

Poland returns synagogue

Poland returned a synagogue near the Auschwitz death camp to the Jewish community — the first move by that government to return Jewish communal property.

A local Jewish leader said the synagogue would be turned into a Jewish museum.

City officials, KKK make deal

City officials in a Chicago suburb agreed on a plan for the distribution of Ku Klux Klan literature to local residents in exchange for a promise from the KKK to cancel a planned rally.

Officials in Cicero, Ill., said they had expected as many as 8,000 people to protest the rally and that security for the event would cost \$140,000. They said an anonymous donor had agreed to raise \$10,000 to pay for the production of the Klan literature.

Neo-Nazi incident investigated

Neo-Nazis sprayed "Don't Buy From Jews" and other slogans at a military base in Germany. Recent revelations about neo-Nazi activities at German bases prompted a parliamentary probe. German officials said they are investigating the latest incident.

Swiss Jews decry expulsions

The Swiss Jewish community called on its government to stop expelling ethnic Albanians to the troubled Yugoslav province of Kosovo.

The community cited Switzerland's wartime refugee policy — when some 30,000 Jews were turned back at the border, most later going to their deaths at the hands of the Nazis — and said Switzerland should recall the lessons of the past "so that people are never again sent back to places where life and limb are in jeopardy."

Orthodox Jews protest film

Some 30 fervently Orthodox Jews demonstrated outside the offices of a film distributor to protest an upcoming movie they say defames the Orthodox and Chasidic communities.

New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind, who led the protest, said the film "presents the worst stereotype" of Jews and has asked Miramax Films to alter some of the movie. "A Price Above Rubies," which is about a Chasidic woman frustrated by her life, is expected to be released later this month.

Shabbat Across America planned

More than 600 American synagogues of every denomination are expected to participate in the second Shabbat Across America, scheduled for March 20.

The annual introduction to the day of rest is organized by the National Jewish Outreach Program.

Israeli shooting sparks rioting as tension prevails

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The stalled peace process has created a tense atmosphere in which any incident has the potential to set off a regional explosion.

A car accident in the Gaza Strip was the spark that ignited the intifada, the 1987-1993 Palestinian uprising.

And this week, when Israeli soldiers killed three Palestinians in a van at a West Bank roadblock near Hebron, there were warnings from Palestinian officials that a new intifada was in the making.

Indeed, Tuesday's incident at the roadblock — where it appeared that Israeli troops wrongly assessed the motives of the van's driver — prompted rioting in the West Bank.

But in a sharp contrast to 1987 there were mechanisms in place — despite the lag in negotiations — for cooperation to try to prevent tensions from escalating even further.

With that in mind, the Israeli commander in the West Bank, Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, met with senior Palestinian security officials to discuss ways to calm the situation.

But it remained unclear whether their efforts would succeed.

On Thursday, more than a dozen Palestinians were wounded in a second day of clashes with Israeli troops in the West Bank.

Israeli security police were on high alert for possible revenge attacks in the wake of the roadblock shooting deaths.

On Wednesday, at least 20 Palestinians were wounded in clashes with Israeli soldiers, who fired rubber bullets at stone-throwing youths.

That day's clashes took place while thousands of Palestinians in the town of Dura, located near Hebron, attended the funerals of the three workers killed as they were returning home from their jobs in Israel.

In Hebron, rioters threw gasoline bombs and rocks at Israeli troops. There were also riots in Dura and in the Ramallah area.

Palestinian police were deployed around Dura to help restore order, and large numbers of Israeli troops were stationed in and around Hebron to quell the disturbances there.

Near Ramallah, a Palestinian was wounded in the leg when a Jewish settler whose car was pelted with stones opened fire. The settler was later questioned by police.

There were conflicting accounts regarding what took place at the Turkemiya roadblock on Tuesday.

Israeli soldiers manning the roadblock opened fire on the van after it veered toward the roadblock, causing light injuries to one soldier.

The troops later said they believed the van's driver was deliberately trying to run them over.

This was denied by Palestinian officials and by a passenger in the van, who said the driver had sped up in an attempt to bypass a line of waiting cars at the roadblock.

Senior Israeli army officials later admitted this was probably the case. They said that an initial inquiry also indicated that the van's driver did not intentionally drive at the troops.

"The soldiers felt that their lives were threatened, and this feeling was a bona fide one. On the other hand, I don't think the Palestinians were involved in a terror event," Dayan told reporters.

On Thursday, Israeli officials released from detention the soldiers who killed the workers, saying they had opened fire believing that they were under attack when the van veered into them at the roadblock.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat denounced the shooting as a "big crime against our workers who were returning from their work."

Just the same, he told reporters in the Gaza Strip that he was still committed to the peace process. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu telephoned Arafat on Tuesday night to express condolences over the shootings. Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai made a similar call to Arafat on Thursday. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Italy's Jews split over twist in Priebke war crimes case*By Ruth E. Gruber*

ROME (JTA) — The case involving former Nazi SS Capt. Erich Priebke has taken more than a few dramatic twists and turns since he was first discovered in South America more than a decade ago.

The latest act in the lengthy legal drama was played out over the weekend, when an appeals court in Rome, in a stunning revision of earlier verdicts, gave Priebke and another former Nazi officer life sentences for their involvement in Italy's worst World War II massacre.

The verdict, though, left the Jewish community in Italy divided.

And media treatment of the affair raised concern in some quarters that the case was being regarded as a specifically "Jewish" issue.

Priebke and former SS Maj. Karl Hass received the sentences for taking part in the March 1944 massacre of 335 men and boys at the Ardeatine Caves near Rome.

Prosecutors said Priebke would continue to be held under house arrest, while Hass would remain free pending an expected appeal by the two to Italy's highest court.

Priebke was quoted by Italian Television as saying he would also appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France.

The massacre was decreed by the Nazis as a reprisal for an Italian partisan attack that killed 33 German soldiers.

While about 75 of the victims were Jews, the massacre was also clearly directed by the Nazi occupiers against the larger Roman community.

In the wake of Saturday's verdict, and indeed throughout its coverage of the saga, the Italian media has focused largely on Jewish reaction to the case, fostering the impression that Jews were the only ones concerned with the trial's outcome.

This impression has sparked anti-Semitic backlashes on a number of occasions.

In the latest instance, a Jewish woman who lost seven relatives in the massacre received anonymous threats over the telephone after she told a television interviewer that she was happy with the verdicts.

The sentence also opened a deep divide among Italian Jews themselves.

Tullia Zevi, president of the Union of Jewish Communities in Italy, applauded the sentences.

But Zevi also indicated that she favored an act of clemency that would allow the 84-year-old Priebke to be freed from house arrest.

"For us, what counts is that an ethical and irrevocable principle has been affirmed: that there are no statutes of limitations for crimes against humanity."

But, she added, "I don't think that anyone would want an old man in his 80s to pass the rest of his days behind bars."

"At this point I could understand an act of clemency that would allow him to return to his family," she said. "Priebke as a person doesn't count anymore. What counts is this verdict, which

has rendered justice and to which we must pay homage."

Her view angered some Rome Jews, particularly a faction within the community that has taken on the role as a vocal defender of Jewish interests and whose members were prominent in earlier protests against Priebke.

"It is not Zevi's role to express mercy, in the name of the Jews, for a Nazi criminal," said Riccardo Pacifici, vice president of the Rome Jewish community.

Priebke had already been tried twice for his involvement in the massacre since he was discovered living in Argentina in 1984 and extradited to Rome 18 months later.

Military judges at the first trial in 1996 found Priebke guilty but set him free, citing a statute of limitations and other extenuating circumstances.

Friends and relatives of the victims, who heard the verdict read out while they were crowded into a corridor outside the courtroom, exploded into tears, curses and shouts of "Assassins!" and "Shame! Shame!"

Scores of protesters, many of them militant young Jews wearing kipot, prevented Priebke and the judges from leaving the courthouse for eight hours.

The public outcry led to Priebke's rearrest.

The verdict was quashed, and Priebke was tried a second time last year, this time along with Hass, who is also in his 80s.

At the second trial, Priebke received a 15-year sentence. But this sentence was reduced to five years because of extenuating circumstances — and because of time already served, Priebke faced less than a year in jail.

At last year's trial, Hass, who was a prosecution witness in Priebke's first trial, was sentenced to 10 years and eight months for his role in the massacre, but was set free immediately due to extenuating circumstances.

Both men had appealed these verdicts in order to clear their names, but prosecutors also had appealed to get harsher sentences imposed.

Priebke reacted bitterly to Saturday's verdict.

"The law is not equal for everyone," Priebke told Italian Television.

During the proceedings against him, Priebke had admitted to killing two of the Ardeatine Caves victims and marking off the names of victims from a list.

His defense was that, as an SS officer, he had just been carrying out orders.

The airmen who killed hundreds of thousands by dropping a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima and bombing Dresden also had "just been following orders," he told Italian Television.

"For all of this, no one served even a day in prison," Priebke added.

Before the verdict was announced, Priebke read a 50-minute statement claiming he was being prosecuted as a symbol "of all the evils" of World War II.

"It doesn't really matter who Erich Priebke is and what he has done," he said in a statement to the court. "It only matters what he represents."

"Even Argentina, to which I gave 50 years of my life, has issued an expulsion order and doesn't want me any more."

"Even Germany, where I was born, took away my passport and now wants to put me on trial for the things that it ordered me do 50 years ago," he said. □