



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu offers help

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu offered to have his country's intelligence agencies help track down those responsible for the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Initial signs indicated the bombings were due to "terrorism centered on Islamic fundamentalism," he said.

More crosses at Auschwitz

More crosses appeared at the site of the Auschwitz death camp. Some 90 crosses now stand at the site after a Catholic workers group ignored calls from Israel to remove the crosses. The group is vowing to erect 152 crosses at the site to commemorate Poles executed at the camp by the Nazis.

Netanyahu declines invitation

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu turned down an invitation from the Norwegian government to attend a fifth anniversary commemoration of the Oslo accords.

An aide to the premier said Netanyahu "thought it would not look good if he attended, when the Oslo work is not completed here." Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat plan to attend the Aug. 23-24 events in the Norwegian capital.

Little progress expected

A spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he expected little progress in Middle East peace moves during the next two weeks.

David Bar-Illan said a trip by Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to South Africa this week and a vacation planned by Netanyahu for next week were responsible for the delay.

Candidate calls for delay

Germany's opposition candidate for chancellor called for delaying any decision on a proposed national Holocaust memorial in Berlin until after the Sept. 27 national elections. Gerhard Schroeder told a television interviewer he would handle the project differently than Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who is trailing in the polls.

Schroeder also said he believed that Germany's former concentration camps were better suited for memorials than designs proposed by artists.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Rescue operation in Kenya gives Israel respite from peace process

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Cynical though it may sound, the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania have provided a boost for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

And indeed, tragic as the bombings were, the effect extends beyond the premier, who has been buffeted between coalition moderates and hard-liners and has been a constant target of American and international pressure.

The carnage in Nairobi has provided a welcome, though likely temporary, respite from the pressures the State of Israel as a whole — the government, the opposition and ordinary people alike — have felt regarding the peace process, which has been stalemated for almost a year and a half.

Suddenly, thanks to the speed and efficiency of the Israel Defense Force's emergency rescue unit, Israelis this week were reliving the country's good times, periods when the Jewish state routinely basked in the warm glow of international admiration.

After some two years of incessant demands and criticism from the international arena over the Netanyahu government's go-slow policy in the peace process, Israel now finds itself praised in the world's headlines.

Israel's teams of medical personnel, rescue experts and rubble clearers were credited with bringing order to the chaos after they arrived on the scene in the Kenyan capital, where a powerful blast last Friday left nearly 200 dead and approximately 5,000 wounded.

By Saturday, the Israelis were saving lives.

On Sunday, the Jewish state's soldiers were pulling survivors whom all had given up for dead from the bombed-out ruins — and the rescue work continued throughout the week.

Shortly after the near-simultaneous explosions were detonated last Friday, 150 members of the IDF's Rescue Unit were dispatched to the Kenyan capital.

Word soon spread throughout the city that the Israelis had arrived.

Hundreds of Kenyans soon appeared at the blast site to watch the Israeli army teams at work.

The IDF unit brought special equipment, including heavy-duty balloons, jackhammers and cutters capable of lifting and slicing through tons of debris.

Israeli military and civilian doctors who also flew in toiled in the overflowing Nairobi hospital wards and operating theaters.

Back home, the Israeli media displayed the rescuers' prowess on page after page, newscast after newscast.

There was, it seemed, a whiff of Entebbe in the sweltering midsummer air as Israel suffered through its worst heat wave in five years.

"Under these difficult circumstances, IDF soldiers have once again become the PR people of the State of Israel," the Israeli daily Ma'ariv wrote in an editorial. "Their contribution to the image of Israel in the world is worth incomparably more than another series of speeches condemning terrorism."

The IDF, for a change, was not being lambasted abroad or debated at home for its activities in the West Bank. It was not losing young lives in the seemingly endless imbroglio in southern Lebanon. Instead, the IDF was demonstrating a flash of its old

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak vows assault

Israel's opposition leader returned from his trip to the United States with a promise to mount a full-scale assault on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The premier is "tearing the nation apart and has to be replaced urgently," Ehud Barak told a meeting of senior Labor Party figures.

Cabinet debates budget

The Israeli Cabinet began discussing the country's 1999 budget.

Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman is proposing a budget of about \$62 billion that shifts its central priorities from battling inflation to boosting economic growth and employment.

Ne'eman set an inflation target for 1999 at 4 percent, down from this year's estimate of 7 to 10 percent.

Ship to stop dumping

A Danish ship complied with a government directive to stop dumping waste in the Mediterranean for an Israeli fertilizer firm.

The move came after the environmental watchdog group Greenpeace said the ship was regularly dumping toxic sludge in international waters for Haifa Chemicals.

Greenpeace has accused the Jewish state of being one of only a few countries in the world still allowing such dumping despite an international agreement to ban it.

Israeli jets strike in Lebanon

Israeli warplanes struck suspected Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon.

The strike came after Hezbollah gunmen launched several attacks this week against Israeli forces operating in the southern Lebanon security zone.

brilliance and style that had won Israeli soldiers international admiration — as on July 3, 1976, when the IDF traveled to Entebbe, Uganda, to rescue hostages hijacked by international terrorists.

That exhilarating episode left Israel with an open debt to Kenya — which it has now been able to repay.

It was Kenya that discreetly put its ground facilities at the disposal of the Israeli airborne operation to stop and refuel on the way back from Entebbe, the Ugandan capital.

The speed and willingness with which Israel sprang to Kenya's aid last weekend reflects a commitment to the two-decades-old memory.

Beyond the humanitarian aspect of the Israeli rescue effort and the demonstration of its logistical prowess for all the world to see, the double bombings have also given Israel an opportunity to put its own rich intelligence assets at the disposal of the international community in the hunt for the perpetrators.

This, too, has earned the Jewish state kudos.

It is still too early to blame definitively any Islamic terror groups for the attacks.

But the initial, instinctive finger of suspicion is certainly being pointed in their direction.

Anti-American threats by extremist groups in the Muslim world, published shortly before the bombings, have fed these suspicions even though terrorism experts say such warnings are everyday occurrences.

Israel, moreover, is never omitted from the litany of these groups' loathing. Vicariously, therefore, Israel has also been victimized by the bombings — and benefits from pro-victim sympathy.

For Netanyahu, still wavering over a U.S. proposal for a further redeployment in the West Bank, the blasts serve two convenient purposes:

- they take the diplomatic heat off, at least temporarily; and
- they focus attention on Islamic terrorism.

The heat — in the form of relentless American pressure to get on with the difficult decision-making — had pushed the right-wing Israeli premier into an awkward corner at home.

To go ahead with a redeployment would mean risking a showdown with Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon, the National Religious Party and other coalition hard-liners who oppose the 13 percent pullback figure proposed by the United States and accepted by the Palestinian Authority.

But to keep deferring the moment of decision was increasingly courting a crisis with The Third Way Party, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and other moderates in the government.

Now, with Washington's attention riveted on Africa, Israeli officials heaved a metaphorical sigh of relief.

Having reached the end of July — and the end of the Knesset session — without making a decision on the redeployment, Netanyahu can now look toward the rest of the summer with a fair amount of confidence that he will be able to continue avoiding the moment of truth.

And indeed, peace negotiations once again appear to be on hold.

Israeli-Palestinian talks were suspended last week in the wake of the murder of two Jewish settlers in the West Bank and the failure of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to condemn the attack.

Israeli officials said there was little separating the two sides when the talks were halted — a claim roundly denied by the Palestinians.

In recent days, the Palestinian leader has sent two letters to the U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright urging the United States to increase its pressure on the Jewish state.

American officials, in turn, have indicated that U.S. Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross would return to the region within the next two weeks, but only if there were some signs of progress in the negotiations.

But with Arafat flying off for a state visit to South Africa this week, and Netanyahu on vacation next week, there appeared to be little basis for believing that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators would be making any headway soon. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Florida threatens sanctions

Florida threatened to cancel its business with Switzerland's leading banks if they do not reach a settlement of Holocaust-era claims.

The World Jewish Congress said it had been informed by Florida's state treasurer that the sanctions would go into effect Sept. 1.

Insurance policies probed

An investigator probing Holocaust-era insurance policies said documents found in a Moscow archive show that German insurance firms conspired with the Nazis to deny Jews insurance claims worth billions in today's dollars.

Terrell Hunt, president of the Houston-based research firm Risk International, told Texas insurance regulators the companies were not forced to go along with the Nazis, but in fact helped create policies that robbed Jews of their benefits.

Jews threaten to pull support

Several prominent Australian Jews threatened to withdraw their financial support from the governing Liberal Party because they claimed the government had not spoken out forcefully enough against the far-right One Nation Party. One Nation officials claim that the country is overrun by Asians and that Aborigines receive preferential treatment. Polls show the party is supported by about 14 percent of the population.

Britain denies allegations

Britain's foreign secretary denied allegations that British intelligence operatives plotted to kill Libyan strongman Muammar Gadhafi in 1996.

Robin Cook said an investigation proved there was no basis to the charge made by a former member of Britain's intelligence services.

Bus driver accused of assault

Argentina's anti-racism unit is taking a Buenos Aires bus driver to court for assaulting a 14-year-old Jewish boy. Witnesses who came to the boy's aid said the driver tried to push him and threw his skullcap off the bus after shouting, "No Jews get on my bus." The bus company is also investigating the incident.

Historic film to be screened

A film believed to be the last Yiddish feature film made in Poland will be screened at an upcoming Yiddish arts festival in Los Angeles.

"Unzere Kinder," or "Our Children," one of the first films to attempt to come to grips with the Holocaust, had among its cast actual survivors, including orphans from a children's home near Lodz, Poland. The festival is scheduled to take place from Oct. 17 to 25.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israeli rescue unit in Nairobi was born after 1982 bombing

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli military unit that came to the rescue at the site of the bombed U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, traces its origins to a 1982 tragedy in Lebanon.

On the morning of Nov. 11, 1982, a giant blast rocked the southern Lebanese town of Tyre.

The blast decimated a seven-story building that had served as the Israel Defense Force command there, turning it into a 25-foot pile of ruins that buried some 127 Israeli security personnel and 33 Arab detainees.

After intensive rescue efforts, the final death toll reached 89, 76 of them Israelis.

"We came there as individuals, civil defense soldiers who happened to be in the vicinity," reserve Col. Gavriel Rappaport recalled this week.

Although no efforts were spared to find survivors, rescue work at the time lacked planning and organization.

As a result, Rappaport was ordered by then-Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan, to set up a new body, the IDF's Rescue Unit.

"I interviewed 1,500 soldiers and eventually selected 300 who became the skeleton of the new unit," Rappaport told JTA.

They included regular soldiers as well as reserve soldiers with engineering and technical backgrounds.

"The first criterion was motivation," then professional capabilities, said Rappaport.

A year after the Tyre tragedy, the rescue unit's new-found skills were called into use. A booby-trapped car had exploded in the yard of the same Israeli military headquarters, killing 29, wounding 31.

This time, however, Israel had a rescue machine to cope with the disaster.

The rescue unit soon became one of the army's more popular reserve units. Senior engineers and technicians try to pull strings to do their annual reserve service in the rescue unit.

The unit accumulated most of its professional experience during the 1991 Gulf War, when Iraqi Scud missiles hit Israeli population centers.

Only one person died in those attacks, but the rescue unit was there, with its yellow helmets and sniffing dogs — ready to save people from the ruins.

Word of this special Israeli expertise has spread and the unit has been called into action around the world.

The Israelis were involved in the rescue of wounded in earthquakes in Mexico in September 1985 and in Armenia in December 1988.

They also assisted in the rescue operation after the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992.

"I was there in Buenos Aires," recalled reserve Maj. Shaul Nevo, who served in the unit during the Gulf War. "We knew that there was little chance to find survivors; our main job was to detect bodies."

As the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv said in an editorial Monday, "In operations like this in remote countries, the legend of the IDF is still in effect."

Rescue work in Nairobi continued throughout the week. The Israelis, working side by side with the French, were busy clearing the rubble that remained from the bombed office building that used to stand opposite the U.S. Embassy building there. The blast left nearly 200 dead and about 5,000 injured.

"We are not better than others," Rappaport, the founding father of the rescue unit, said. "It's just that when we are there, we do not waste any time, we simply go straight to work."

Rappaport did not travel to Nairobi — at the age of 70, he is now retired.

Like other Israelis, the member of Kibbutz Beit Alfa has been watching the rescuers on television.

"In a way, I was there. I was so proud of them," he said.

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Stronger hate crimes law awaits return of Congress

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish activists involved in the fight against racism, bigotry and prejudice are hopeful that U.S. lawmakers will pass a tougher hate crimes statute after their August recess.

A measure pending in Congress would give federal prosecutors new authority to prosecute hate crimes against women, the disabled, and gay and lesbian Americans.

Current federal law applies only to crimes motivated by race, color, religion or national origin.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act also seeks to make it easier for the federal government to investigate and prosecute hate crimes by extending the Justice Department's jurisdiction.

Under current law, the Justice Department's authority is limited to crimes that occur in conjunction with a federally protected activity, such as voting or going to school.

The proposed bill would eliminate that limitation, thereby making it easier for the federal government to prosecute cases like the murder of Yankel Rosenbaum, a Jewish student from Australia, during the 1991 Crown Heights riots in New York.

"These are two very important changes that will bring federal hate crime law to where it should be in 1998," said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League, which has spearheaded Jewish support for the tougher law.

The legislative effort gained some momentum after last year's White House conference on hate crimes.

Now, in the aftermath of the grisly death of James Byrd, a black man dragged to his death in Texas in a hate crime earlier this summer, sponsors of the bill are hoping that incident can help push the legislation through before Congress adjourns the first week of October.

The bill is sponsored in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and John Conyers (D-Mich.), and in the U.S. Senate by Sens. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Ron Wyden (D-Ore.).

Some lawmakers, however, have maintained that the legislation is unnecessary because dozens of states have laws protecting the groups identified in the bill. Forty states and the District of Columbia have adopted laws against hate crimes, many of them based on a model law drafted by the Anti-Defamation League. But about 30 states lack protections for crimes motivated by sexual orientation, gender or disability, according to the ADL.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) has pledged to move some kind of hate crimes bill this year.

"Time and a limited House and Senate calendar" are the biggest obstacles to the passage of such a bill, Lieberman said.

President Clinton endorsed the legislation last year, and the measure has support from 22 state attorneys general, law enforcement organizations and a broad range of national civil rights groups.

A record 8,734 hate crimes were reported to the FBI in 1996 — the most recent year for which data is available. That marks an increase from about 8,000 reported incidents in 1995, but because reporting is voluntary, it remains uncertain whether the numbers reflect an increase in hate activity or simply better reporting. □

Israel opposes Vatican plan to name Palestinian archbishop

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Israel and the Vatican are locking horns regarding Israel's attempts to block the nomination of a Palestinian refugee as the new archbishop of Galilee.

The conflict represents what could be the most serious friction between the Vatican and Israel since the two states established full diplomatic relations in 1994.

The clash comes less than two years before the millennium year 2000, when Pope John Paul II has said he would like to visit Israel as part of a pilgrimage to biblical sites in the Holy Land.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quoted last week as admitting that he had tried to block the appointment of Bishop Boutros Mouallem, a Palestinian refugee living in Brazil, as bishop of Galilee.

"I discussed the nomination with the Vatican's representative in Israel, and expressed my concern regarding the politicization of nominations of the church," Netanyahu said.

He accused the Vatican of having acceded to political pressure from the Palestine Liberation Organization in appointing Mouallem as Galilee bishop of the Greek Catholic Church, an Eastern-rite branch of Catholicism that is loyal to Rome.

"We think there shouldn't be any politicization of the choices of emissaries on the part of the Church," he told reporters.

The Vatican responded last Friday with a brief statement denying any pressure and reiterating that, under an agreement between Israel and the Holy See, "The appointment of bishops in the Catholic Church is the reserve of the Pope in the exercise of his supreme power, and in the nomination of His Excellency Mouallem, the Synod of the Greek Catholic Church carried out its duties free from any external pressures."

It said, "The fundamental accord existing between the Holy See and the State of Israel" provides for the "autonomy of the Church and state, each in its own sphere."

In an interview with the Rome newspaper *La Repubblica*, Cardinal Luidi Poggi called Netanyahu's reaction "incomprehensible."

Meanwhile, in a move that could be related to the Vatican's conflict with Israel regarding Mouallem's appointment, the Holy See's observer mission to the United Nations in New York released a document last week stating that plans to expand Jerusalem's municipal jurisdiction are "causing great disquiet."

Expressing support for the U.N. Security Council's decision to criticize such plans, the statement said such a move "certainly does not favor a dialogue aimed at a solution of the problem of the Holy City." □

Heat wave hits Israel

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli meteorologists promised that Israel's worst heat wave in 34 years would begin to weaken in the coming days.

Temperatures on Sunday peaked at about 117 degrees Fahrenheit in the Jordan Valley.

One man reportedly died in a Jericho prison and one near Jerusalem as a result of heat stroke.