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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Hamas founder calls for attacks

The founder of Hamas called for terror attacks against Israel to retaliate for last week's U.S. cruise missile attacks on targets in Sudan and Afghanistan.

"By attacking Israel, we are harming America," Sheik Ahmed Yassin said at a rally in the Gaza Strip. The demonstrators trampled on U.S. and Israeli flags and chanted their support for Osama bin Laden, the Saudi millionaire living in Afghanistan whom the United States blames for the recent terror bombings of the U.S. embassies in East Africa. [Page 1]

Lebanese fear reprisal

Hundreds of Lebanese in the southern part of the country fled their homes expecting Israeli reprisals after Hezbollah gunmen launched Katyusha rocket attacks on northern Israel.

The attacks, in which dozens of rockets injured at least 14 people, came after Israeli helicopters made a raid near the southern Lebanese city of Tyre, killing an official of the Shi'ite Amal militia. Meanwhile, the United States urged restraint on Israel and Lebanon in the wake of the events on both sides of the border. [Page 3]

Jewish officials cautious

Jewish leaders cautioned that it could take years before Holocaust survivors see payments from an agreement signed by four European insurance companies. Some advocates for the survivors criticized the agreement, which calls in part for the creation of an international commission to probe survivors' claims against the firms, as insufficient for the aging survivor population.

The commission will begin its work in two months, according to a U.S. official involved in forging the agreement.

Abu Nidal would not cooperate

Egypt arrested terrorist Abu Nidal two months ago after he refused to cooperate with authorities in providing information about the planned activities of other terrorists, according to an Egyptian intelligence official.

Egypt, which is believed to fear terrorist reprisals, responded to reports of the arrest by repeating its denials that it is holding the man linked to attacks in 20 countries.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Did U.S. anti-terror campaign spur progress in peace talks?

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Last week's U.S. air strikes on Sudan and Afghanistan may have played a role in pushing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations forward.

In the wake of those missile strikes, some Israeli observers were quick to predict possible American pressure on the Jewish state to reach an agreement with the Palestinians.

These observers believed that Washington, certain to be criticized by militant Arab states for the attacks, would be anxious to shore up support among moderates in the Islamic and Arab world.

The thinking regarding Washington's role in the peace process has undergone some rapid changes during the past week: Only days before the missile attacks, some pundits were saying that the sex scandal plaguing President Clinton would render him powerless to advance the long-deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

But by early this week, there were indications that the talks were making meaningful progress.

Indeed, the signs of progress prompted U.S. diplomatic sources to predict that a new agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority could be signed in Washington on the fifth anniversary of the historic ceremony on the White House lawn, where the Oslo accords were signed.

Word of a Sept. 13 signing came amid indications that the two sides have softened their positions and are closer to reaching an agreement on a further Israeli West Bank redeployment, coupled with Palestinian steps to combat terror.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat himself gave credence to the more upbeat speculation when he made a series of positive statements in Oslo, where he, former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Norwegian officials were celebrating the fifth anniversary of the initialing of the Oslo accords.

Arafat called a series of Israeli concessions that he had indirectly received from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a "good beginning."

The Palestinian leader has repeatedly indicated that he would accept a 13 percent further Israeli redeployment in the West Bank. This is the basis of a plan, floated by the Clinton administration months ago, that also calls for specific Palestinian steps to combat terror.

This week, for the first time, Israeli officials publicly confirmed that Netanyahu is ready for the 13 percent pullback, subject to certain conditions.

And, while the Israeli premier himself has remained deliberately silent on the matter, there are persistent reports that these conditions, too, have undergone a certain erosion.

The Israeli leader is reportedly prepared, for example to waive his demand that the full Palestine National Council be convened to revoke the anti-Israel clauses in the Palestinian Covenant.

According to these reports, the premier will accept a smaller — and, for Arafat, more manageable — Palestinian forum to approve the changes.

Netanyahu is also said to have given ground regarding how much control the Palestinian Authority would have over a West Bank nature preserve that would comprise 3 percent of the further redeployment.

Whether the new Israeli flexibility indeed flows from concern that Clinton,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel criticizes Waqf move

The decision by Muslim religious authorities in Jerusalem to close the gates of the Temple Mount to tourists represents a violation of the rules governing the administration of holy sites in Jerusalem, Israeli police said.

The Waqf made the move after Israeli police arrested two Palestinians near the entrance to the Temple Mount because they refused an identity check. The sides have long argued over who has control over security at the site.

Fugitive's family under arrest

The Palestinian Authority placed the family of a Hamas fugitive under house arrest, according to a Palestinian human rights group.

Imad Awadallah, who is accused of killing a Hamas bomb-maker in March, escaped from a Palestinian jail 10 days ago.

Report: Israel plotted murder

Israel tried to brainwash a Palestinian to assassinate Yasser Arafat in 1968, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The newspaper, which cited only one intelligence source for the story, said the plot had been inspired by the movie "The Manchurian Candidate," in which a captured U.S. soldier is brainwashed by Chinese Communists to become an assassin.

Store sells settlement products

A store devoted to selling products made in Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip opened in Jerusalem.

The owner of "Judea and Samaria Are Here," which sells wine, toys, clothing and furniture made in the settlements, said he was inspired to open the shop after he saw a site on the World Wide Web run by an Israeli peace group that urges a boycott on such products.



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embarked on a what may become a long-term war against Islamic terror, needs to be tougher with Israel may be merely speculation.

Officials close to the premier and to Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai have been insisting for some weeks, without reference to developments surrounding the White House, that despite the appearance of deadlock, the negotiations were moving in the direction of an agreement.

Some of these officials are cautioning that an agreement is not yet at hand, indicating that the predictions of a Sept. 13 signing ceremony in Washington are somewhat optimistic.

Whatever impact the U.S. air strikes had on Middle East peacemaking, there is a broad and somber realization in Israel that a long-term and bloody confrontation between American might and Islamic terrorism will almost inevitably spill over onto Israeli targets.

Associates of Osama bin Laden — the Saudi millionaire living in Afghanistan whom American officials hold responsible for the recent embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania — have virtually said as much, promising to wreak retribution not only on American installations but on Israeli targets as well.

Such threats are bound to inflict yet more damage to Israel's already-weakened tourism industry.

But beyond this, the threats are causing Israelis a profound sense of unease. Already, parents are warning their children away from malls and public parks — and of course from buses, the targets of many past terrorist attacks.

Last week's American air strikes are also having their effect on Palestinian public opinion.

Few Palestinians expressed support for the carnage wrought by the U.S. Embassy bombings in East Africa.

But many in the Palestinian community, as in the wider Arab world, have reacted with outrage at the American reprisals.

Israeli experts believe that this reaction has already escalated violent confrontations in many parts of the West Bank between Palestinians and settlers, and between Palestinians and Israeli security forces.

These confrontations grow daily more numerous and more intense — most notably last week, when a rabbi was killed in his home in Hebron by a suspected Palestinian intruder.

Despite the reported progress in the peace process negotiations, Netanyahu had harsh words for the Palestinian side when he visited the often-volatile West Bank town earlier this week to pay an unannounced condolence call to the family of Rabbi Shlomo Ra'anani.

The Israeli premier said any agreement with the Palestinian Authority depends on it taking action against "murderers" of Jews — an indication that Netanyahu would be intent on convincing the Palestinian side to clamp down on terror under its part of the agreement.

He also held firm to his commitment to build permanent homes in Tel Rumeida, the Hebron enclave where Ra'anani was killed and where a handful of settler families live in mobile homes.

Some observers warn that extremists on both sides may well be planning to incite a conflagration in Hebron to destroy any progress currently being made in the diplomatic arena.

They point out that the U.S.-proposed redeployment plan would be implemented in stages during a 12-week period — during which acts of violence in Hebron could bury the agreement before it is fully implemented.

There is precedence for this, of course.

The gunning down of 29 Palestinians by Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein in Hebron, shortly after the implementation of the Oslo accords began, and the bloody attacks against Israeli civilians by Hamas suicide bombers two years later nearly derailed the peace process.

A titanic battle between mighty America and the shadowy Islamic terror organizations could provide an encouraging backdrop for this sort of calculated destructiveness in the weeks ahead. □

JEWISH WORLD

France rejects Papon's demand

France rejected the demand of convicted Nazi collaborator Maurice Papon that the state pay his court bills.

Papon, who was sentenced in April to 10 years in prison for ordering the arrest for deportation of 1,560 Jews during World War II, based his demand on the grounds that he was working for the state when he committed his crimes.

Papon will not have to serve his prison sentence until all his appeals are concluded — a process that could take years.

Some observers believe that Papon, 87, will never serve time in prison.

Lawyer not seeking firm's closing

A lawyer representing Holocaust survivors in a class-action lawsuit against a German metals company said his goal is not to bankrupt the company.

Michael Witt said Degussa could still continue to function if the lawsuit's demand that the survivors take control of the company's assets are met.

Degussa allegedly profited by melting down gold taken from concentration camp inmates during World War II.

French right funds Swedish party

France's extreme-right National Front Party is helping fund a similar party in Sweden so it can participate in that country's general elections, scheduled for Sept. 20.

Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen said he is helping the Sweden Democrats because they are a "new, young and poor party." The far-right Swedish party won 12,651 votes when it ran for the first time in Sweden's last general election in 1994.

Man may return diary pages

A Dutch man said he would give back five missing pages of Anne Frank's diary only if scholars promote his Holocaust research. Cor Suijk, a former employee of the Anne Frank Foundation, said Anne's father, Otto, gave him the pages shortly before Otto died in 1980.

Hockey great denies comments

Legendary hockey great Bobby Hull fiercely denied comments attributed to him in a Moscow daily praising Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.

The former Chicago Blackhawks vowed to use all legal means available against the Moscow Times for publishing what he called "outrageous lies and distortions of the truth." The English-language paper quoted Hull as saying that Hitler "had some good ideas" but "went a bit too far."

Rocket salvo in Galilee tests Israeli resolve in South Lebanon

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's continued commitment to its military presence in southern Lebanon has been tested again following a series of Katyusha rocket attacks on the Galilee.

Scores of rockets fell Tuesday night in Kiryat Shmona and other targets in northern Israel, leaving 14 Israelis wounded and a number of houses damaged.

The Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement, which for years has been waging a battle against the Israeli presence in Lebanon, took responsibility for the attacks.

The rocket barrage came after Israeli helicopters made a raid near the southern Lebanese city of Tyre, killing Hussam al-Amin, a high-level official with the Shi'ite Amal militia, which is generally less militant than Hezbollah.

The Israeli operation appears to have united Amal and Hezbollah, which are often at odds. The two Shi'ite groups reportedly launched the Katyusha barrage jointly.

Israel has long debated the wisdom of its continued military presence in southern Lebanon, which it maintains as a bulwark against terrorist attacks on towns and settlements in northern Israel. The debate grew especially heated last fall amid a growing number of Israeli casualties.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convened several top advisers this week to discuss an initiative he has pushed for months: an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in exchange for guarantees that the Lebanese government would be responsible for security in the area. Netanyahu is reportedly planning to discuss the initiative during a planned visit to New York in September, when the U.N. General Assembly convenes for its annual session.

Rockets landed in Kiryat Shmona shortly before 10 p.m. Tuesday night and continued for about an hour. More rockets were fired simultaneously at other targets in the Galilee. Five hours before the rockets landed, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai warned Amal and Hezbollah not to try to retaliate.

Although Israel anticipated the possibility of a rocket assault after its helicopter raid, residents of Kiryat Shmona were instructed to take cover in shelters only after the first rockets were fired. Two wedding ceremonies were interrupted by the assault, as the celebrants fled for cover.

Israel condemned the rocket attacks, saying they were contrary to the understandings reached in a cease-fire brokered by the United States in April 1996 in an effort to protect civilians on both sides of the Israeli-Lebanese border.

Israeli officials maintain this week's operation against al-Amin did not violate those understandings because it was aimed at a military person and not at civilians.

Hezbollah officials claimed in turn that Lebanese villagers were hurt during exchanges of gunfire Tuesday in southern Lebanon.

The situation in Lebanon was high on the agenda of Israel's Inner Cabinet meeting Wednesday. Most of the ministers said Israel should act with restraint in the wake of the rocket assaults and try to restore quiet to the region.

Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani, however, said Israel should launch reprisal raids against infrastructure targets, such as power plants, in and around Beirut.

"As long as Jewish families lose their sons in Lebanon, there is no reason why there should be business as usual in Beirut and why they should enjoy the regular supply of electricity," said Kahalani, who is a fierce advocate of settlements in the northern Golan region.

The question of whether to hit enemy targets in Lebanon at the possible cost of Katyusha rocket attacks is one the army confronts almost every day.

Whenever the army fires at targets in southern Lebanon, it faces the possibility of hitting civilians — which could in turn lead to reprisals against civilian targets in Israel. Despite this, the security establishment has long sided with carrying out such operations — even at the cost of reprisals — arguing that abstaining from such operations could lead to paralysis. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**With waning of secession threat, Montreal Jews feel sense of hope***By Bram Eisenthal*

MONTREAL (JTA) — The gloom that has hovered over Montreal's Jewish community for the past several years appears to be lifting.

In fact, after more than a decade of Quebec's secessionist movement, which has often had anti-Semitic overtones, the city's Jews are cautiously optimistic.

"There exists a great quality of life here in Montreal that you don't find elsewhere. But I still worry a bit about what opportunities there will be for my children in the future," said Joel Greenberg, a 40-year-old business executive who is married with two young sons.

Greenberg added that he was still worried about job opportunities for his children.

But, he said, "Things appear much more positive for our community than they did two years ago. I'm far less anxious than I was before."

A decision last week by the Canadian Supreme Court once again brought the secessionist issue to the surface. The high court ruled that Quebec could not secede unilaterally, but that Canada's federal government would have to negotiate with Quebec if a majority of the province's residents voted for independence in the next referendum on the issue.

But the court ruling appears to be moot for now, as the latest polls show that support for separation is seriously eroding. Fewer than 40 percent of Quebec residents currently support separation, according to a recent survey.

The movement for Quebec's secession from the rest of Canada, which often relies on anti-English-speaking and anti-immigrant rhetoric, narrowly lost a 1995 referendum on the issue.

As job opportunities dried up for non-French speakers, many of Montreal's younger Jews left the city, home to one of Canada's most storied Jewish communities.

To combat the population drain, the organized Jewish community has worked hard in recent years to convince adults like Greenberg to stay.

The Jewish community federation here created a program called Pro Montreal.

The program, among other things, helps young, educated Jewish adults find jobs, which is seen as a major factor in keeping them in the city.

According to one Jewish resident of Montreal, the program appears to be having a favorable impact.

"This has been a positive year," said McGill University law student Samantha Mintz, 22. "My friends and I went out" recently, and "15 people out of 15 agreed that this is a good place to live," she said.

"Many of the people wanting to leave seem to be unaffiliated with the Jewish community. If you have no roots, there's no reason to stay in one place," she added.

Jews in Montreal enjoy benefits that are the envy of other communities, including a strong Jewish day school system and an intermarriage rate of just 15 percent.

In addition, a higher percentage of Jews here are affiliated

with communal organizations and synagogues and have traveled to the Jewish state than in most American cities.

To help support the strong Jewish participation, the federation announced late last year that it would be initiating an expansion and renovation project, totaling \$25 million, that would create a Jewish community campus here.

"We've been living in a situation" that is "intolerable," said Stanley Plotnick, the federation president. "We're doing this because we love Montreal and are committed to stay."

Plotnick observed that this is the first major building project for the community in more than 25 years.

Some \$16 million has been raised for the project so far, with the Quebec provincial government and the city of Montreal each donating \$1.3 million. The Canadian government is also expected to contribute.

Groundbreaking is scheduled to begin this fall, and the building is expected to be completed by the end of 1999.

Community activist Anthony Housefather, the 28-year old vice president of the pro-English-speaking group Alliance Quebec and a local elected official, believes things are changing for the better. "The threat of separation has decreased dramatically," Housefather said. "And the Jewish community has done a great deal in terms of trying to keep people in Montreal."

"I actually see people coming back to Quebec, as well as people from other provinces moving here. In the community, there's a sense that it's up to us, not the government, to take action. We have a thriving Jewish community, and this is a beautiful place to live." □

Support for school vouchers is up a bit in most recent poll*By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A bare majority of Americans favor taxpayer-funded school vouchers, according to a new poll.

The survey found that 51 percent favor the idea of allowing parents to send their children to any public, private or church-related school if government pays all or part of the tuition, while 45 percent oppose it.

A similar poll conducted last year found 49 percent in favor of vouchers and 48 percent opposed.

School vouchers remain a contentious issue in the Jewish community. Most Jewish organizations oppose vouchers, saying such initiatives violate the separation of church and state and would undermine public education. But many Orthodox and politically conservative Jews favor the idea, arguing that vouchers are needed to provide better access to a quality Jewish education and to fight the Jewish continuity crisis.

The U.S. Supreme Court may decide to rule on the issue in its coming term.

The poll, conducted in June by the Gallup Organization for Phi Delta Kappa, a professional association of educators, found a slight decrease in support for vouchers when respondents were asked specifically about vouchers that would pay for all tuition costs, with 48 percent in favor and 46 percent opposed.

When asked about a system that would pay part of tuition costs, the public supported the idea by a 52 to 41 percent margin.

The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent. □