



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 159

Friday, August 28, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bomb explodes in Tel Aviv

A bomb filled with nails injured at least 21 people in Tel Aviv, including two young children. The bombing — which occurred amid reports that progress had been achieved in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations — came one day after Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin called for attacks on Israel to retaliate for last week's U.S. missile strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan. [Page 3]

President criticizes crosses

Poland's president criticized the ongoing campaign to erect crosses near the site of the Auschwitz death camp. Meanwhile, a Vatican spokesman said it was unlikely the pope would speak out on the issue, and Polish bishops have proposed that all but one of the crosses be removed on Sept. 14. [Page 1]

U.N. inspector accused

A seven-year veteran of the U.N. inspection team monitoring weapons in Iraq is under investigation by the FBI for allegedly showing to Israel classified information on Saddam Hussein's weapons program. Scott Ritter denied any wrongdoing in an interview with The New York Times. Ritter resigned from the U.N. team Wednesday after accusing the Clinton administration, the U.N. Security Council and the U.N. secretary-general of caving in to Iraq. [Page 2]

Judge rules on march

A U.S. judge ruled that New York City could not deny a permit to the organizers of the Million Youth March. In making the ruling, the judge said the city's denial violates the Constitution's free speech provisions.

The demonstration is being led by the anti-Semitic former spokesman of the Nation of Islam, Khalid Muhammad. It is scheduled to take place Sept. 5 in Harlem.

Ras al-Amud project approved

The Jerusalem municipality gave final approval to a controversial Jewish housing project in eastern Jerusalem.

The project at Ras al-Amud, financed by American philanthropist Irving Moskowitz, has been on hold pending the approval. Palestinian officials described the move as a "provocation."

Pope stays silent as militants erect more crosses at Auschwitz

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Ignoring pleas from Israel's chief rabbis, the Vatican has decided to stay on the sidelines of the escalating crisis over the placement of more than 150 crosses outside the site of the Auschwitz death camp by Polish Roman Catholic militant groups.

A Vatican spokesperson told JTA it was unlikely that Polish-born Pope John Paul II would make a pronouncement on the issue or that the Vatican would soon express a public position. "The matter is not under the jurisdiction of the Vatican," the spokesperson said in an interview. "We refer everyone to the Polish bishops."

But neither Polish bishops nor the Polish government has so far been able to defuse a crisis that has chilled Polish-Jewish relations, embarrassed Poland internationally and increasingly assumed powerful nationalist and anti-Semitic overtones.

On Wednesday, Roman Catholic militants defied the Polish Bishops Council — the highest body of the Polish Roman Catholic Church — and erected two more wooden crosses outside the Auschwitz walls.

Kazimierz Switon, the leader of the militants, complained in an interview with CNN aired Wednesday that "Jews cannot tell Poles what to do" on their own soil.

The CNN report also showed skinheads erecting crosses at the site.

On Tuesday, the Polish Bishops Council called for the removal of the 150 crosses that have been set up there in the past month and urged that no more be erected.

They said, however, that a 26-foot-high cross that has stood there since 1988, and which was used by the pope during a mass at Birkenau in 1979, should stay in place.

The bishops warned in a statement that the crisis is hurting both the Polish Church and Poland itself.

"Escalating the conflict brings harm to the church and turns against our homeland," the statement said. It added that the campaign of erecting crosses at Auschwitz "painfully harms the different sensitivity of our brothers, the Jews."

Poland's chief rabbi, Pinchas Menachem Joskowicz, rejected the bishops' stand on Wednesday, reiterating that all crosses, including the papal cross, must go. The presence of any cross prevents Jews from praying at Auschwitz, he said.

"We Jews suffered there the most, so I think it would be bad if in this sacred place we could not pray for our nation, our relatives, our friends and for all who suffered there," said Joskowicz, a Holocaust survivor.

At least 1.5 million people, some 90 percent of them Jews, were killed by the Nazis at Auschwitz.

Throughout the world, Auschwitz is regarded as the symbol of the Holocaust and the biggest Jewish graveyard. Jews say no religious symbols should be allowed to be placed there. But tens of thousands of Polish Catholics also were killed at Auschwitz, and Poles regard the camp as the symbol of Polish suffering under the Nazis.

Ostensibly, the militants began placing the crosses last month to protest the possible removal of the so-called papal cross to another location. They also say the crosses commemorate 152 Catholic Poles who were killed there by the Nazis.

Polish officials and church leaders have come under pressure from Israel and from Jewish organizations in the United States to resolve the crisis. The American Jewish pressure is coming from a coalition of groups led by Miles Lerman, chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

The coalition has been attempting to work out a deal with the Polish government

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel fires on Lebanese troops

Israeli helicopters fired on a Lebanese army position, wounding one soldier. An army spokesman said Israel had "no desire to involve the Lebanese army," adding that the helicopters had been responding to anti-aircraft fire. The incident occurred one day after a series of Katyusha rockets were fired on northern Israel.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is reportedly furious over the instructions given to the residents of Kiryat Shmona during the rocket attacks there Tuesday.

The residents of the northern Israeli town were not told to enter bomb shelters until half an hour after the beginning of the Katyusha attack. Israel's Defense Ministry said the army did not open the shelters earlier because it wanted to keep life as normal as possible.

Police question extremist

Israeli police questioned an extremist activist who had called President Ezer Weizman a "spy."

Baruch Marzel made his comment earlier this week, when Weizman came to Hebron to pay condolences to the widow of a rabbi murdered there last week.

U.S. asks Egypt about Abu Nidal

The U.S. State Department asked Egypt whether it is holding terrorist Abu Nidal. The inquiry came as Egypt's foreign minister, Amre Moussa, denied widely published reports that Egypt had arrested Abu Nidal, who has been linked to terrorist attacks over the past two decades.

U.S., Israeli officials confer

American and Israeli defense and intelligence officials met in Washington to assess the threat posed by Iran's missile program.

Last month Iran test-fired a medium-range missile capable of reaching Israel.

on how to protect and preserve Auschwitz-Birkenau, but has made removal of the crosses a prerequisite to further discussions.

Poland's leaders, including President Aleksander Kwasniewski and Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek, have called for an end to the cross-planting campaign, which Kwasniewski denounced as politically motivated.

"This is a political activity which is unacceptable, both for us and our Jewish partners," he told a news conference Thursday in Krakow.

Earlier in August, the government canceled the lease on the site, held by a right-wing association of war victims.

The head of the Polish Catholic Church, Cardinal Josef Glemp, has also denounced the placement of the crosses, saying that the campaign is likely to incite Jewish anger. Speaking to a crowd of more than 100,000 worshipers Wednesday at Jasna Gora, Poland's holiest shrine, the primate called the crosses "wrong," but also was quoted as saying he was sorry that Jews "cannot find words today of understanding and compromise."

Israel's chief rabbis have appealed to the pope to step in.

The pope's intercession was needed to resolve an earlier crisis at Auschwitz several years ago, over the establishment of a Carmelite convent in a building just outside the camp walls.

The nuns eventually were moved to a new convent after the conflict was resolved in 1993. □

(JTA correspondent Daniel Kurtzman in Washington contributed to this report.)

Arms inspector denies charges he shared intelligence with Israel

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A seven-year veteran of the U.N. inspection team monitoring weapons in Iraq is denying that he shared classified information on Saddam Hussein's weapons program with various countries, including Israel.

Scott Ritter, who is under investigation by the FBI for allegedly leaking classified U.S. documents, has meanwhile quit the U.N. weapons inspection commission for Iraq, known as UNSCOM. In a scathing resignation letter, he accused the Security Council and the United States of making a "mockery" of the program.

Israeli officials had no direct comment on the charges. One Israeli official said the Clinton administration notified the Israeli Embassy in Washington earlier this week about the investigation.

When asked whether he is an Israeli agent, Ritter, who did not respond to a request for an interview, told CNN that there is "no truth to that whatsoever."

Ritter's colleagues reportedly said the FBI probe contributed to his decision to leave the U.N. post. These colleagues also defended Ritter, telling The Washington Post that he stands on solid ground in his fight against the FBI.

Sources said Ritter's information-sharing was explicitly authorized by the head of the weapons inspection program, Richard Butler, and his predecessor. In addition, because Ritter did not maintain his American security clearances, any U.S. information provided to him was declassified, the Post reported.

Butler did not comment directly on the FBI investigation. He did, however, call Ritter a "man of integrity."

Ritter is likely to face questions next week at a speaking engagement at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Ritter worked at UNSCOM's New York headquarters from 1991 to 1998. During the past two years, he frequently drew the ire of Iraqi officials as he tried to uncover Iraqi attempts to conceal its remaining capabilities to develop missiles and weapons of mass destruction. After Ritter resigned, Iraq claimed to have exposed his links to the Mossad and the Central Intelligence Agency.

"The resignation of the American-Zionist intelligence officer Scott Ritter from the Special Commission is because his connection with the Zionist Mossad was uncovered," the Iraqi Ministry of Culture and Information said in a statement. □



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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

JEWISH WORLD

Banks oppose lawsuit

French and British banks are opposing a class-action lawsuit that could be heard next year in New York regarding Holocaust-era claims against them. The stakes from such a lawsuit "could be very significant," said an official with one of the banks.

Warrant issued in Sheinbein case

Prosecutors in Maryland issued an arrest warrant for the father of a U.S. teen-ager who fled to Israel last September after allegedly committing murder. They charge that Sol Sheinbein obstructed justice by facilitating his son Samuel's flight to Israel. Both Sheinbeins are currently in Israel, where Samuel is in jail.

Diary excerpts published

A Dutch newspaper printed new pages of Anne Frank's diary. In the pages — which were recently released by a friend of Anne's father, Otto — Anne wrote that she thought her father no longer loved her mother.

E.U. issues Golan call

The European Union called on Israel to stop expanding settlements on the Golan Heights. The E.U. made its call after reports that Israel had approved plans to build close to 5,000 new housing units there.

Menem authorizes extradition

Argentine President Carlos Menem authorized the extradition to Croatia of the wife of a former concentration camp commander.

But it was unclear when Esperanza Sakic would be sent to the Balkan nation. Sakic, whose husband, Dinko, was extradited to Croatia in May, is also charged with committing atrocities during World War II.

Schroeder has plan for memorial

Germany's opposition candidate for chancellor said Parliament should decide the fate of a proposed national Holocaust memorial.

Gerhard Schroeder's comments came after the country's current leader, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, agreed to put the plan on hold until after Germany's Sept. 27 general elections.

Jewish center gets funding

New York Gov. George Pataki recently signed legislation that would provide \$200,000 annually for the Center for Jewish History. The five-building complex in lower Manhattan, which will house the archives of several Jewish institutions, is scheduled to open in the fall of 1999.

Tel Aviv blast injures 21, setting back peace talks

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli officials stepped up security in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem after a bomb filled with nails exploded on a busy Tel Aviv street during Thursday's morning rush hour.

At least 21 people were injured in the attack, including two young children.

The bombing occurred amid reports earlier in the week that progress had been achieved in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

In the wake of the attack, police reinforcements were dispatched to beaches, shopping and entertainment centers, and pedestrian malls in the country's two largest cities. Security checks at Ben-Gurion Airport were intensified.

Israeli leaders of all political stripes were soon demanding that the Palestinian Authority condemn the attack.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat did so — but only in a private conversation with Knesset Member Saleh Tareef of the Labor Party.

He said he condemns those who attack Israeli citizens. In the past, Palestinian officials, including Arafat, have made a distinction between Israelis and settlers.

The Palestinian leader also said the explosion may have been the work of common criminals, not terrorists.

Arafat told Tareef that he did not share the optimistic reports published earlier in the week that Israel and the Palestinians were nearing agreement for a further Israeli redeployment in the West Bank. He said there is still a long way to go "because of Netanyahu's positions."

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Thursday that unless the Palestinian Authority acts against terrorism "in both deeds and words," there will be no agreement.

Netanyahu made the comment to reporters while visiting the hospital bedside of one of the attack's victims, Michal Matityahu.

The prime minister pointed out that although Arafat has denounced attacks on Israeli citizens, the Palestinian leader has not yet condemned the murders earlier this month of two Israelis in the West Bank because the victims were settlers.

The bomb that exploded Thursday had been placed in a garbage can at one of Tel Aviv's busiest intersections, the corner of Allenby Street and Rothschild Boulevard.

It was the first attack in Tel Aviv since March 21, 1997, when a Hamas suicide bomber detonated an explosion at the Cafe Apropos, killing three Israelis and wounding 47 others.

"Suddenly a very strong explosion occurred," recalled David Cohen, who was sitting inside a coffee house when the bomb exploded about five feet away. Cohen was only slightly injured.

Only one of the victims, Matityahu, required hospitalization at Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv. All the others suffered light injuries.

The explosion, which shattered windows in some 80 apartments and 10 stores, caused damage estimated at \$400,000.

As of Thursday evening, no one had claimed responsibility for the attack.

Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin said the explosion was probably the work of Jewish extremists seeking to derail the peace process.

One day before the explosion, Yassin called for attacks on Israel to retaliate for last week's U.S. missile strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan.

A few hours after the explosion in Tel Aviv, thousands of Israelis gathered in the West Bank city of Hebron to mark the end of the shiva period for Rabbi Shlomo Ra'anani, who was killed in his home last week by a suspected Palestinian intruder.

Angry mourners attacked Palestinian reporters who were on the scene to cover the ceremony. Clashes involving Jewish settlers and Palestinians in Hebron have increased after Ra'anani's murder. Tensions there escalated after the Israeli army responded to the killing by imposing a round-the-clock curfew on the estimated 30,000 Palestinians living in the Israeli-controlled part of the heavily Arab city. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Holocaust restitution deals fail to engross Israeli public

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — When Switzerland's two leading private banks reached a \$1.25 billion settlement with representatives of Holocaust survivors earlier this month, the news sent shock waves throughout the Jewish world.

But not in Israel.

The situation was similar when Italy's largest insurer, Assicurazioni Generali, agreed last week to pay \$100 million as part of a settlement of a class-action lawsuit filed by survivors.

The main details of the stories were reported in the Israeli news media. But there have been no editorials or op-ed pieces published, and little, if any, discussion of the developments on talk shows, which are considered a staple of Israeli public discourse.

Indeed, during the past year or so, as Jewish groups wrangled with Switzerland to come to terms with its wartime past, the restitution issue appears to have eluded the attention of Israelis, who usually miss no opportunity to transform every minute political development into endless debate and commentary.

Israeli observers of Jewish groups' ongoing attempts to reach settlements with European banks and insurers were not surprised by the general lack of interest among the public here.

While no studies or polls have been conducted to confirm or explain their impressions, those involved in the restitution issue offer a range of theories, some stemming from the very different roles that memories of the Holocaust play in Israel and the Diaspora.

Likud Knesset member Avraham Herschson, who heads the parliamentary subcommittee on restitution, says the explanation lies with the Israeli media.

"The public is extremely interested in knowing about these issues," says Herschson.

"But even though it is getting tremendous coverage throughout the world, it seems to be passing by the Israeli media as if it has no relevance to us."

But some observers say that it is the average Israeli who is indifferent to the issue and that the Israeli media are merely reflecting that indifference.

Moshe Sanbar, chairman of the Center of Organizations of Holocaust Survivors in Israel — an umbrella organization for 29 groups and 300,000 survivors — links the lack of interest to the survivors themselves.

"Israeli survivors did not want to have anything to do with these issues," he says. "They wanted to close the book on the Holocaust."

Sanbar traces this attitude to survivors' experiences just after their liberation from the death camps and arrival in the nascent Jewish state.

"They called us the sabonim," he says — using Hebrew slang for "cowards."

But it also sounds like the Hebrew word "sabon," or soap, which survivors perceived as a reference to the soap the Nazis made from Jewish corpses.

With some justice, survivors arriving in Israel felt stigmatized. Israelis were creating a "new Jew," symbolized by the suntanned

kibbutznik working the fields or the fearless underground fighter.

They looked down on the passivity of European Jews, who they felt went like sheep to the slaughter.

Eager to fit into Israeli society, Sanbar says, many survivors tried to shake off their Holocaust experiences.

And 50 years later, they do not want to reopen the history books to fight for financial restitution.

Nevertheless, the Holocaust does play an important role in Israeli education and public life.

In addition, the media often discuss Holocaust-related issues. For example, a recent expose by the Israeli daily Ma'ariv of a local restitution issue — in which Israeli survivors committed to psychiatric hospitals had their funds frozen by the state — generated much interest.

Walter Zvi Bachrach, a professor emeritus at Bar-Ilan University and an expert on Holocaust history, says the role the Holocaust plays in Israeli public life may explain why there is less interest in restitution in Israel than in the Diaspora.

"You don't feel Holocaust Remembrance Day when you are not in Israel," he says.

"Dealing with and identifying with the Holocaust is an integral part of independent Jewish life. But in the U.S., for example, that national and public identity with the Holocaust simply doesn't exist."

This may lead Diaspora Jews to seek issues such as restitution in order to bolster their Jewish identity, he adds.

While Bachrach stresses that his observations are not the result of any empirical data, he nonetheless believes there is a clear link between contemporary Israeli attitudes toward restitution and the stormy debate during the 1950s over German reparations.

"In the 1950s, many were not emotionally capable of accepting reparations because they didn't want to take compensation from the murderers," he says. "There is no fundamental difference here."

Yair Auron, a researcher of contemporary Judaism at the Kibbutz College of Education and the Yezreel College, has conducted extensive research on Israelis' attitudes toward the Holocaust.

His studies indicate that secular Jews in Israel, who do not relate to a traditional or religious framework, are increasingly seeking their Jewish identity through the Holocaust.

"But in Israel, the Holocaust is discussed less in the Jewish sense and less in terms of its universal lessons," he says. "The emphasis is on the Zionist lessons of the Holocaust, such as the need to have a strong state."

He adds that this may lead Israeli Jews to feel uneasy about issues of financial restitution.

"In an indirect, and perhaps subconscious way, they feel that these issues belong to Diaspora Jews or [stereotypes of] money-hungry Jews, even though Israelis would certainly agree that the cause is just." □

Patients invite ill monarch

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Some 100 young cancer patients have invited Jordan's King Hussein to be their guest in a Jerusalem hotel where they are spending the final days of their summer vacation.

The children sent a letter to the king, who has been undergoing treatment for lymphatic cancer, saying that they, like him, are fighting an illness that crosses all boundaries. □