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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

One wounded in Gaza bombing

At least one Israeli was wounded when two roadside bombs exploded in the Gaza Strip, according to Israel Radio.

The bombs were detonated as a convoy of cars carrying settlers was passing.

The convoy, accompanied by Israeli military vehicles, was heading for the settlement of Netzarim.

The Palestinians have demanded that all Israeli settlements be removed from Gaza.

Netanyahu won't be indicted

Israel's attorney general announced he would not bring corruption charges against former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

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The decision clears the way for a possible political comeback by Netanyahu. [Page 4]

Accused war criminal dies

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The postponements prompted Jewish officials to question the Baltic nation's willingness to prosecute suspected Nazi war criminals. [Page 4]

Munich massacre marked

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Another memorial to the slain athletes was unveiled last year in Sydney's Olympic Park. [Page 3]

5760: A Year of Promise and Peril

Around the globe, new crises challenge Jewish communities

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — The year 5760 was another active one for international Jewry, with its share of crises new and old.

Neo-Stalinist show trial in Iran. Perceived government meddling in Jewish affairs in Russia. Right-wing resurgence in Austria. And the Falash Mura still in limbo in war-torn, famine-wracked Ethiopia.

There were, however, also victories.

A landmark court verdict against British Holocaust-denier and revisionist historian David Irving. Acceptance of Israel into the Western European grouping of the United Nations, finally ending Israel's second-class status in the global body. And more revelations about — and restitution for — Europe's looting of Jewish property and assets during the Holocaust.

Yet from the Jewish perspective, the international news that grabs headlines is the persistent, age-old story of "Jews in distress" — and the general plight of minorities worldwide. That it continues unabated has most American Jewish leaders scratching their heads.

A decade ago, most had bought into President Bush's prediction that the collapse of communism would usher in a "New World Order." Today, though, they wonder what progress, if any, has been made.

"Instead of the promise of New World Order, what we're getting is old world disorder," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"If you look at the number of irredentist or religious- or ethnic-based conflicts around the world today, it's remarkable. And the fact is, much of the world is insensitive to this. Sixty years after the Holocaust, we can't say the world is a much more caring place."

As the 1990s unfolded, American Jewry no longer sensed an existential threat to Israel. Attention then turned to nurturing — the communal buzzword was "continuity" — U.S. Jewry itself as well as the Diaspora Jewish communities that reside in the 100-plus nations around the globe.

In Central and Eastern Europe, for example, where Jewish life was virtually dormant for anywhere from 40 to 70 years under the yoke of atheistic, anti-clerical communism, American Jewish groups and philanthropists continue to make enormous contributions at resuscitating those communities.

But in recent years, there is a dawning realization that some Diaspora Jews are as vulnerable as ever. Unlike the past, however, the main threat is not physical. Rather, aside from the tumult of warfare — which, for example, has significantly depleted the small Jewish population in the Balkans — it is the process of globalization that may unravel numerous Jewish communities.

Scores of developing nations around the world are either experiencing the growing pains induced by globalization, or paying the economic and social price for trying to ignore globalization. Many of these countries also have little or no tradition of democracy or respect for human rights. So when instability strikes, and charismatic rabble-rousers look to assign blame, it's typically immigrant workers or Jews or other minorities who serve as convenient scapegoats.

And Jews, unlike most of their compatriots, often have somewhere else to go,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Lawmakers warn Arafat on state

The U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a bill that would impose stiff measures on the Palestinian Authority should Yasser Arafat unilaterally declare a Palestinian state.

The proposal is significantly tougher than resolutions passed by the House and the Senate last year urging President Clinton to denounce Arafat if he made the declaration.

Clinton: No agreement soon

President Clinton downplayed the likelihood that Israel and the Palestinians would reach a final peace accord in the next few months.

He said Wednesday that it would take "a remarkable convergence of both sides willing to make difficult decisions" for there to be such an accord before he leaves office.

His comments came a day after U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross held separate talks with Israeli and Palestinian officials at a hotel in the suburbs of Washington.

The talks are expected to last several days.

Police urged to block Sharon visit

The Palestinian Authority will do nothing to prevent unrest if Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon goes ahead with plans to visit the Temple Mount on Thursday, a Palestinian security official warned.

Jibril Rajoub urged Israel's police officials to prevent Sharon's visit.

Palestinian gas plan inaugurated

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat participated in a ceremony signaling the start of the self-rule government's first offshore gas well.

The rig is operated by British oil producer BG International, which last year signed a deal with Palestinian officials for gas exploration off the coast of the Gaza Strip.



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whether it be Israel or to join relatives in the West. So they emigrate.

Jews continue to stream out of places like Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria, South Africa, Venezuela, even Mexico.

"With the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a feeling that there would be much more respect for minorities and human rights, and that we would be rebuilding Jewish communities rather than protecting Jewish communities," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"This year was a wake-up call: A lot of things have changed, but they have not changed that much. We thought we would no longer have to mobilize and go to the streets. But Iran reminded us there's still a need to stand in solidarity in defense of Jews."

In early 1999, 13 Jews in Iran were jailed and later accused of spying for Israel. Behind the arrests, analysts say, was a calculated move by Iranian hard-liners, who face domestic pressure to liberalize society and warm economic relations with the West. The hard-liners, goes the reasoning, correctly assumed the arrests would provoke international outrage and stunt rapprochement.

American Jewish leaders were not optimistic. Since its Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has executed 17 Jews on espionage charges. Still, their blend of quiet diplomacy and occasional street prayer vigils likely spared the prisoners from the gallows.

On July 1, 10 of the Jews were convicted of various crimes and sentenced to terms ranging from four to 13 years. As the appeals process grinds forward, Jewish activists report another surge in emigration among Iran's roughly 25,000 Jews. In September, an appeals panel lowered the sentences to two to nine years, but U.S. Jewish advocates said the reduced sentences were not enough.

American Jewish leaders were also quick to denounce two other disturbing developments in Europe. In February, the far-right Freedom Party of Jorg Haider, notorious for his harangues against immigrants and praise for SS veterans and certain Nazi policies, was included in a coalition government. Most Jewish groups joined in the international chorus to isolate Austria.

Then in June, Jewish observers were alarmed and critical of actions taken by Russian President Vladimir Putin. First, police arrested the president of the Jewish community, media magnate Vladimir Goussinsky, ostensibly on a business-related matter. Then, in an intercommunal dispute about who should be chief rabbi of Russia, Putin appeared to interfere by throwing his support behind the challenger, a Lubavitch rabbi.

Meanwhile, some 26,000 Falash Mura continue to languish in Ethiopia. Immigration to Israel of the Falash Mura, whose ancestors converted from Judaism to Christianity, has dragged on as Israeli officials debated the tricky questions of their Jewishness — and whether the emigration of some would bring many more thousands out of the woodwork.

During the spring there was talk of welcoming in a few thousand Falash Mura, but the ensuing government crisis seemed to put that plan on hold.

Looking to the year 5761, it's unclear where in the world will be the next flashpoint that imperils Jewish communities. American Jewry will continue to closely monitor the most likely suspects: Iran, Russia and Germany, where a recent spate of anti-Semitic incidents has Jewish leaders worried that not enough is being done to halt this scourge.

But a wary eye is also on South Africa, where spiraling crime spurs emigration among whites in general, and Jews in particular; Yugoslavia, where this week's disputed elections raise the possibility of civil war; and South America, where countries with large Jewish communities, like Argentina and Brazil, face grueling economic recoveries.

Regardless, 5761 surely won't be a "quiet year," and American Jewry will be prepared to speak out, said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

"There's no such thing as a quiet Jewish year," said Steinberg.

"The volume may be a little louder or a little lower. The mistake is assuming the noise either goes away, or that it isn't there. The fact is it will always be noisy. That's what it means to be Jewish. The question is how Jewish institutions will deal with the noise." □

JEWISH WORLD

Lieberman: I'll meet Farrakhan

Democratic vice-presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman said in a radio interview that he would be willing to meet with Louis Farrakhan, the controversial leader of the Nation of Islam.

Lieberman said Tuesday that he admired Farrakhan for his efforts to register voters.

Farrakhan, who has been criticized for repeated anti-Semitic remarks, has questioned whether Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, would be more loyal to Israel than the United States.

Scotland to consider agunah bill

The Scottish Parliament plans to consider a bill that would grant judges the power to withhold civil divorce from husbands who will not grant their wives a religious divorce.

The Scottish Family Law Act is likely to be debated next year. A similar bill failed in the British Parliament earlier this year.

Extradition related to AMIA blast

Switzerland approved the extradition of a Brazilian national to Argentina in connection with the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires.

Wilson Dos Santos, arrested by Swiss police several weeks ago at Argentina's request, had given advance warning to Argentine and Israeli diplomatic representatives about the attack, which killed 86 people and left some 300 wounded.

Parley focuses on meaning, food

Approximately 60 academics, lay leaders and communal professionals gathered in New York for a symposium on "Critical Issues in American Jewish Life."

Repeated themes at the Sept. 25-26 gathering, sponsored by the Jewish Community Centers Association and United Jewish Communities, were American Jews' sometimes untraditional quests for meaning in Judaism, declining feelings of ethnic connection and the lingering interest in Jewish cooking traditions.

Warsaw Jews plan joint effort

Beit Warszawa, a new liberal Jewish group in Warsaw, will cooperate with the established Jewish community there to sponsor several events during the High Holidays.

These include discussion groups regarding interfaith relationships and the role of women in Jewish life. In addition, Warsaw's Jewish community leader, Orthodox Rabbi Michael Schudrich, and Conservative Rabbi Cynthia Culpeper, an American who is being flown to Warsaw by Beit Warszawa for the holidays, will teach a crash course in reading Hebrew.

Slain Israeli athletes remembered with permanent memorial in Sydney

By Stefan Bialoguski
Australian Jewish News

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Twenty-eight years to the day after Arab terrorists murdered 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, a memorial was unveiled at a Jewish school here.

Israeli Sports Minister Matan Vilnai was among some 800 guests who gathered Tuesday around a plot in the heart of Moriah College, where an 11-sided white marble base bears the names of the victims.

Around the base are 11 cypress trees, and topping it a block of Israeli basalt volcanic rock in the shape of an extinguished Olympic flame.

Another memorial to the slain athletes was unveiled last year in Sydney's Olympic Park.

Among the guests at the ceremony were members of the 1972 Australian Olympic team; Walter Troeger, who was mayor of the Olympic Village during the Munich Games; representatives of numerous countries, including Germany, the United States, Argentina and France; and Israeli Olympians participating in the Sydney Games.

Monument designer Ze'ev Bashan wrote in the ceremony's program that the rock in the form of an extinguished flame symbolizes "the fact that the Olympic Torch will never burn again for the 11 athletes."

But the memory of how and why they died will endure in the form of the segment of rock unveiled by Israeli Olympic Committee President Zvi Varshaviak and International Olympic Committee Secretary-General Yoram Oberkovich.

As a light drizzle fell, Vilnai called on the IOC to institute a minute's silence in memory of the Munich 11 at the opening ceremony of every Olympic Games.

"We all know that life goes on, for there is in human society a vitality that even the most evil act can't suppress. Still, we have an obligation to remember the victims of criminals, murderers and terrorism that continue to threaten people all around the world, especially Jewish people and the people of Israel," he said.

His call was echoed by families of the victims, a letter from whom was read by an Australian Jewish National Fund president, Peter Smaller: "We hope that a memorial for the 11 slain athletes will become a permanent and official part of future Olympic Games so that the world will never forget. The world must learn from the past while reaching for the future."

After the ceremony, the Sydney Games' Finance Committee chairman, Brian Sherman — a prime mover behind an official memorial for the Munich 11 erected at Olympic Park last year — told the Australian Jewish News that he doubted whether the IOC would heed their call.

"I think the reality is that there are a lot of calls on the IOC, a lot of people wanting things for different causes, and I don't think we'll get a dedicated one minute's silence for the 11 on a permanent basis," he said.

But the poignancy of the day's events overshadowed any controversy over future memorials.

Candles for the 11 — Andre Spitzer, Mark Slavin, Yaacov Shpringer, Kehat Shor, Amizur Shapira, Yosef Romano, Eliezer Halfin, Yoseph Gutfreund, Ze'ev Freedman, David Berger and Moshe Weinberg — were lit around the memorial by current Israeli Olympians, together with young representatives of Sydney's Jewry.

A face in the crowd was that of Shlomit Nir, for whom the proceedings were particularly poignant. A former swimmer, she was one of two female members of the Israeli Olympic team in Munich.

"When our athletes were killed, I thought the Games would stop. I thought it was impossible to continue after such a tragedy. But the world went on. Years later, I understood that the Games had to go on so as not to allow the terrorists to use the most unifying event in the world as a political stage.

"Today I feel so good, so proud, that the Sydney community did this. This is something I will never forget." □

Accused war criminal dies at 93: 'Let God be his judge,' leader says

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — A man accused of handing over at least 75 Jews to Nazi death squads in Lithuania during World War II has died before the trial against him could be completed.

The war crimes trial of Aleksandras Lileikis in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius was postponed several times, with the judge citing the defendant's poor health. The postponements prompted Jewish officials to question the Baltic nation's willingness to prosecute suspected Nazi war criminals.

For many Jewish leaders, Lileikis's death of a heart attack Tuesday at the age of 93 means that justice delayed has become justice denied.

The leader of Lithuania's Jewish community, Simonas Alperavicius, voiced hope for the ultimate form of justice.

Lileikis "didn't repent before he died," Alperavicius told The Associated Press. "Let God be his judge."

The director of the Jerusalem office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Efraim Zuroff, blasted Lithuanian authorities for what he called a lack of political will to see the war crimes trial through to its conclusion.

Had the case been handled properly, he said, Lileikis "would have died in jail, which is precisely where murderers should die."

Lithuania has repeatedly been criticized for its poor record of prosecuting suspected Nazis. Zuroff has often branded Lithuania a safe haven for war criminals.

The allegations against Lileikis stem from his activities during World War II, when he was the Vilnius head of the Saugumas, the Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian security police.

Lileikis, who immigrated to the United States in 1955, was stripped of his U.S. citizenship in May 1996. He returned to Lithuania a month later, proclaiming his innocence.

Since that time, he had claimed the case against him was fabricated using documents forged by the Soviet KGB after World War II in an attempt to discredit Lithuanian emigres.

His trial, which began in 1998, was the first to deal with Holocaust crimes in any of the three Baltic states since they gained their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Shortly before the proceedings against him began, Lileikis charged in a television interview that he was being brought to trial because the Baltic nation had caved into pressure from Jewish groups.

During the interview — which was later lambasted by the local Jewish community as biased — he said he was being "sacrificed" for Lithuania's political interests.

Evidence gathered by the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations and by the Lithuanian Prosecutor General's Office shows that from 1941 to 1944 Lileikis gave written orders to kill dozens of Jews jailed in a Vilnius labor prison.

During the Nazi occupation of Lithuania from 1941-1944, approximately 94 percent of Lithuania's prewar Jewish community of 250,000 was killed in the Holocaust.

Historians say the scale of the tragedy could have been smaller had ordinary Lithuanians not helped with the killings.

Since Lithuania regained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, it has not prosecuted any of the alleged Nazi collaborators living there.

Sentiment among Lithuanians about the Lileikis trial was mixed. Many felt a verdict would have helped the nation come to terms with its past. But others were angered at seeing a frail, elderly man subjected to a trial. □

Netanyahu won't face charges, clearing the way for a comeback

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In a move that could shake up Israel's political landscape, the attorney general has announced he will not bring corruption charges against former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In a 22-page written opinion issued Wednesday, Elyakim Rubinstein cited a "lack of sufficient evidence" to seek a trial on charges that Netanyahu took bribes during his tenure and failed to return state property after leaving office.

The decision clears the way for a possible political comeback by Netanyahu, who along with his wife, Sara, has denied any wrongdoing. Rubinstein also indicated in his decision that she, too, would not be indicted.

Netanyahu, currently on a lecture tour in the United States, had no immediate plans to return to Israel, according to his office.

The former premier resigned from politics after his decisive defeat by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in the May 1999 elections.

Recent opinion polls indicate that Netanyahu would make a more formidable opponent to Barak than the current opposition leader, Ariel Sharon, who has indicated that he intends to fight to retain control over the Likud Party.

Rubinstein's decision came as Barak is fighting to rebuild his coalition, which suffered the defections of four parties on the eve of July's Camp David summit.

Barak, who now controls a minority of the Knesset's 120 seats, faces the possibility of a vote for new elections when legislators return from their recess at the end of October.

Rubinstein's decision not to press charges will not necessarily mark the end of the legal process.

Netanyahu's political rivals are expected to ask the High Court of Justice to demand an explanation from state prosecutors as to why charges were not pressed. □

Classes resume after vandalism

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Vandals struck an Orthodox day school in the Los Angeles area this week, leaving behind smashed computers, broken windows and classrooms doused with foam from fire extinguishers.

During their rampage, the vandals also scrawled graffiti — including swastikas and anti-Semitic expletives — on the walls.

Damage from Sunday's attack on the West Valley Hebrew Academy in Woodland Hills, a 200-student elementary and middle school, was estimated at between \$50,000 and \$100,000.

Police blamed two teen-age boys, residents of a home for youths with alcohol and drug problems, who were arrested on the school campus.

"They went bananas," Rabbi Zvi Block, the school's principal, told the Los Angeles Times. "This was totally disastrous." □