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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli soldier killed in Gaza

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he does not plan to retaliate after a deadly attack in the Gaza Strip. He spoke to his Cabinet on Sunday after a Palestinian policeman infiltrated the Jewish settlement of Kfar Darom a day earlier, killing an Israeli soldier and seriously wounding two others before being shot dead by Israeli troops at the site.

The soldier killed in the attack, Staff Sgt. Baruch Snir Flum, 21, of Tel Aviv, was among the last Israeli troops to withdraw from Lebanon in May.

He had four months left until his army discharge.

Saturday's attack came one day after Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat ordered Palestinian gunmen to stop firing at Israelis from Palestinian-ruled areas. [Page 2]

Israeli diplomat hurt in Jordan

An Israeli diplomat in Amman, Jordan, was slightly injured when he was shot at while getting into his car in front of his home.

Yoram Havivian was struck by shards of glass from his car window, but it was unclear whether he was hit by gunfire, Jordan's Interior Ministry said. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak called the shooting "very grave" and urged Jordanian authorities to find the perpetrator. [Page 2]

Court hears women's prayer case

Israel's Supreme Court is reconsidering whether to allow the Women of the Wall group to continue to pray at Jerusalem's Western Wall.

An expanded panel of nine justices convened Sunday at the request of the state, which had asked the high court to reconsider the ruling it issued six months ago in favor of the women's prayer group. [Page 4]

Weizman, Mubarak talk cease-fire

Former Israeli President Ezer Weizman discussed ways to end Israeli-Palestinian fighting during a meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheik.

Sunday's meeting, arranged at Mubarak's invitation, coincided with the 23rd anniversary of the historic visit that the late Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat made to Jerusalem before Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty.

A powerful friend of Israel may have to leave House post

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — An advocate for Israel during his stint as chair of the House's International Relations Committee may be forced to step down from that post as part of the Republicans' six-year term limit on committee chairs.

Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), the only Jewish Republican lawmaker, is attempting to gain a waiver, but GOP leaders re-emphasized their commitment to the six-year limit during a caucus last week. That leaves Gilman, and several other veteran lawmakers, with few options for retaining power on the committees they have led.

"Mr. Gilman has had conversations with the leadership about what is going to happen next year," said Lester Munson, spokesman for the committee. He declined further comment.

Israeli policy analysts, who see Gilman's departure from the chair as a key loss, describe him as a consistent, effective and thoughtful voice on behalf of Israel. But despite that, no real shift in policy is expected and analysts believe the committee will still make Israel a priority.

"We think [Gilman] will continue to find ways to be an activist on pro-Israel issues and his influence on the committee will still be very strong," said Kenneth Bricker, spokesman for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the chief pro-Israel lobby.

Gilman became committee chairman in 1995 after Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress. Gilman had previously served as Republican leader of a Middle East subcommittee that was dissolved so Gilman could handle the region's issues himself as committee chairman. There is speculation that the Middle East subcommittee could be formed again as a platform for Gilman.

Munson said he is unaware of any plans to revive the subcommittee, but said the congressman is seeking to maintain his leadership role on Middle East issues.

"It was very clear and very obvious that Benjamin Gilman was a warrior for issues of concern to the pro-Israel community," Bricker said. "In that role, he will be missed."

Gilman gained wide support for his pro-Israel viewpoints and actions.

"We might differ on interpretations of what is in Israel's best interest, but I don't think anyone can fault the basic intent of what he is trying to do," said Lewis Roth, assistant executive director of Americans for Peace Now.

Gilman's hard-line approach toward the Palestinians has sometimes fallen to the right of the Clinton administration and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

Gilman has been more skeptical of the Palestinian leadership and has tried to hold the Palestinian leadership accountable for commitments made in previous peace accords.

Gilman spearheaded legislation this fall, opposed by Clinton, that would have cut off aid to the Palestinian Authority if it unilaterally declared a Palestinian state. That bill, which passed the House, had the support of several Jewish groups.

Gilman was also seen as a staunch supporter of reparations for victims of Middle East violence.

His support for Israel, however, has been seen by some as a possible detriment to the peace process.

In contention for the committee chair are three senior members of the panel: Reps. Jim Leach (R-Iowa), Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) and Doug Bereuter (R-Neb.).

All three have been generally supportive of pro-Israel legislation, especially foreign

MIDEAST FOCUS

Qatar urged to open Israeli office

U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen called on Qatar to reopen the Israeli trade in the Persian Gulf state that Qatar closed because of the Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Cohen, visiting Qatar as part of a regional tour, also said Saturday that the violence could spin out of control and engulf other countries.

Lawmakers offer to live in Gilo

Two right-wing Israeli legislators expressed interest in moving to the southern Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo to show solidarity with residents there who are under frequent fire from a nearby Arab town.

Legislators Uzi Landau and Ze'ev Boim insisted the possible move was not intended as a publicity stunt, the Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported.

Barak media adviser resigns

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak accepted the resignation of his media adviser. Israel Radio reported that Gadi Baltiansky resigned after other officials in the Prime Minister's Office had briefed journalists without informing Baltiansky.

U.N. condemns Hezbollah attack

A United Nations envoy condemned a Hezbollah attack on an Israeli patrol in a disputed territory near Israel's northern border, warning that it could "ignite a new spiral of violence."

Rolf Knutsson said last Friday that the incident a day earlier in the Shebaa Farms area was a serious border violation.

Poll: Netanyahu would beat Barak

If an election were held today, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would defeat Prime Minister Ehud Barak by nearly 20 percentage points, a Gallup poll in the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv showed.



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aid, Bricker said. Hyde and Leach co-sponsored legislation in 1995 to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. Bereuter voted against that legislation, but has backed other bills that recognized Jerusalem as the capital and has supported Israel on sanctions for Iraq and Iran and the peace process.

"The lineup on both sides of the aisle is very attentive to the security needs of Israel and are activists of a close U.S.-Israel relationship," said Jason Issacson, director of government and international affairs for the American Jewish Committee. "They get it."

The International Relations committee is also switching leaders on the Democrats' side.

The defeat of Rep. Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.) has paved the way for Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) as ranking minority member.

Lantos, a Holocaust survivor, is seen as a strong advocate for Israel. His role on the committee may increase because of the close split between Republicans and Democrats in the House. □

Some violence erupts after Arafat's call for calm

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's pressure on the Palestinians to halt violence is beginning to work, although the situation remains volatile, the Israeli army's chief of staff said this week.

While they were somewhat optimistic, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz's remarks Sunday, made during a visit to an army base, nonetheless reflected Israel's skepticism after Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat ordered Palestinian gunmen last Friday to stop firing at Israelis from Palestinian-ruled areas.

Though Prime Minister Ehud Barak has demanded that Arafat issue a public call to stop the violence as a condition for renewing diplomatic contacts, his initial response to Arafat's statement was dismissive, saying Israel wants to see actions, not words.

Israeli army officers were equally skeptical, saying it is possible Arafat had given implicit approval for Palestinians to shoot from areas under Israeli control.

Army officials noted that while there had been a drop in Palestinian violence, there were nonetheless some grave incidents that took place over the weekend.

On Saturday, a Palestinian policeman infiltrated the Jewish settlement of Kfar Darom in the Gaza Strip, killing an Israeli soldier and seriously wounding two others before being shot dead by Israeli troops at the site.

The soldier killed in the attack, Staff Sgt. Baruch Snir Flum, 21, of Tel Aviv, was among the last Israeli troops to withdraw from Lebanon in May.

He had four months left until his army discharge.

On Sunday, Barak told his Cabinet that he does not plan to retaliate for Saturday's attack.

"Israel would make a mistake if it caused an immediate escalation, since there is no doubt that we would be accused of torpedoing chances for calm," he said in a statement after the Cabinet meeting.

The Palestinian Authority denied involvement in the attack and said it would investigate the incident.

Also on Sunday, an Israeli diplomat in Amman, Jordan, was slightly injured when he was shot at while getting into his car in front of his home.

Yoram Havivian was struck by shards of glass from his car window, but it was unclear whether he was hit by gunfire, Jordan's Interior Ministry said.

Barak called the shooting "very grave" and urged Jordanian authorities to find the perpetrator.

In another incident, Palestinian gunmen opened fire on a bus carrying Israeli civilians in Gaza. No one was hurt, and Israeli troops returned fire.

In the midst of the ongoing violence, Israel kept diplomatic efforts on a back burner.

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross was expected back in the region this week for further talks on trying to end the violence. □

JEWISH WORLD

Genetic engineering kosher, says Jewish medical ethicist

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — If a carp is genetically engineered so that it has no scales, is it still kosher?

After all, fins and scales are what make a fish kosher in the first place.

The question might not have as wide an application as whether a tree that falls to a forest floor without anybody hearing it makes any noise, but the theoretical issue is making some waves.

Abraham Steinberg, a leading Jewish medical ethicist, says the scaleless carp would still be kosher.

Steinberg argues that altering a carp's genes so that it does not have scales does not change anything fundamental about the fish.

Since we know carp is kosher, he said, it doesn't matter whether it actually has scales.

The carp example was part of Steinberg's larger point that Judaism does not forbid genetic engineering, an argument he made at the first Chief Rabbi Jakobowitz Memorial lecture on Medical Ethics last week.

In a wide-ranging lecture that also covered abortion, medical confidentiality, eugenics, genetic screening and genetic determinism versus free will, Steinberg emphasized that science and technology per se are morally neutral.

"The morally determining factor is their use," he said.

The Jewish approach, he said, is extreme caution in accepting innovations and changes.

But if there is no reason to forbid something, it is permitted, he said, pointing out that the Torah emphasizes prohibitions.

Genetic engineering that does not violate Jewish law, he concluded, is permitted to improve products for profit and for medical purposes.

Steinberg, who won the 1999 Israel Prize for medical ethics, is a pediatric neurologist at the Shaare Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem and the author of the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Law*.

Genetic engineering is neither "playing God" nor "interfering with nature" in an unacceptable way, he said.

It is not "playing God," Steinberg said, because it does not entail creating something from nothing.

"The genetic revolution is technical, not fundamental. It is revealing existing material, not creating new material," he said.

In fact, he said, "Studying genetics is not only not a way of playing God, but a way of strengthening belief in God."

He argued that genetics provide clear evidence of a plan in nature, and where there is a plan, he said, there must be a planner.

And while he conceded that manipulating genes was "interfering with nature," he said that in Judaism, doing so was not only permissible but also sometimes required.

Healing, Steinberg said, is interfering with nature, and is clearly permitted by Jewish law.

He quoted the midrash, based on the creation story in Genesis, that God left the world incomplete for man to complete.

There is a "duty to continue what God has started," Steinberg said, which includes battling Jewish genetic diseases such as Tay-Sachs via gene therapy.

But, he said, there are restrictions on allowable genetic engineering.

"The actual act must not involve any inherent halachic prohibition, such as mixing species, and must lead to no unavoidable or irreversible result which is halachically prohibited," he said, referring to Jewish law.

Hence, artificial insemination of a woman by a donor other than her husband is not allowed because the child would be a mamzer, the product of adultery, Steinberg said.

A third qualification is that the benefit of the act should outweigh the detriment, he said. □

Italian insurer to pay survivors

An agreement to provide \$100 million in payments for insurance claims and humanitarian assistance to Holocaust survivors was finalized between the Italian insurance company Assicurazioni Generali and the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims.

Settlements with other insurance companies that are part of the commission's Holocaust-era restitution program are said to be nearing conclusion.

British group turns 240

Britain's central Jewish organization celebrated its 240th birthday on Sunday. The Board of Deputies of British Jews was formed in 1760, the same year that King George III assumed the throne.

NPR Mideast coverage blasted

The U.S. public radio network National Public Radio is biased in its coverage of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence, a Middle East watchdog group claims in a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times*. In Sunday's ad, headlined, "NPR Is Lying About Israel Again," CAMERA charges that NPR has unfairly cast "Israel as a ruthless aggressor against unarmed Palestinian children."

Chechens may help Palestinians

Chechen warlords are considering assisting the Palestinians in the ongoing conflict with the Israelis, according to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews and the Russian security service. The commander of an Islamic brigade in Chechnya said in a recently intercepted telephone conversation: "It is necessary that all true believers rise to fight the Jews."

Canada party asked to ID deniers

B'nai Brith Canada asked the country's Liberal Party to identify the individuals in the opposition party it has referred to as "Holocaust deniers, racists and bigots" in its campaign for prime minister.

The heated race between Prime Minister Jean Chretien, of the Liberal Party, and Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day prompted the Jewish organization to ask the parties to expel all members who are involved in "anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism."

Jewish pop star jailed in Morocco

A Moroccan court sentenced a Jewish pop star to three years in jail and fined him \$13.3 million because he did not have the necessary papers to take foreign currency abroad when he prepared to leave Morocco earlier this month. The fine against Pinhas Cohen came after Morocco suspended low-level diplomatic ties with Israel to protest what it considers the Jewish state's harsh treatment of the Palestinians.

Israeli Supreme Court to rethink ruling to let women pray at Wall

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's High Court of Justice is reconsidering whether to allow a women's group to pray at Jerusalem's Western Wall.

An expanded panel of nine justices convened Sunday at the request of the state, which had asked the court to reconsider the ruling it issued six months ago in favor of the women's prayer group.

In May, the High Court of Justice recognized the right of women to hold prayer services at the wall and gave the government six months to arrange for police protection for the women to pray at the Wall, also known as the Kotel. The landmark ruling capped an 11-year legal battle by the group.

The state maintains that the presence of the group, whose members wear tallitot and read aloud from the Torah during their service, would represent a significant shift from accepted prayer ritual at the site.

The state has also argued that the women's prayer services could pose a threat to public safety and to the sensitivities of Orthodox worshippers. In recent years, such services sparked violent protests by fervently Orthodox Jews.

Earlier this year, fervently Orthodox legislators initiated bills to bypass the court's ruling. One bill would sentence women to seven years in jail for reading from the Torah, blowing the shofar or wearing a tallit at the Western Wall.

Other legislators have suggested a compromise under which the women's group would not pray at the main plaza of the Western Wall, but would hold its services at Robinson's Arch, which is at the southern end of the Western Wall.

During Sunday's hearing, Jerusalem's police chief, Yair Yitzhaki, cautioned the court that the women's services could prompt disturbances and even bloodshed. The justices plan to resume deliberations after touring the Western Wall site to familiarize themselves with the situation there.

Although the court is re-evaluating its earlier decision in favor of the women's group, Jerusalem city councilwoman and Women of the Wall member Anat Hoffman said the group is prepared to accommodate the sensitivities of other worshippers. But she said it would not yield on its insistence to pray at the Western Wall.

For this reason, she said, the group has rejected the compromise offer to hold its prayer services at Robinson's Arch. □

ARTS & CULTURE

First part of Israel documentary tells the story of the early years

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — True to its title, the documentary "In Search of Peace (Part One: 1948-1967)" covers the broad sweep of history during Israel's first two decades. But it is the small human touches that stick in the mind.

Golda Meir, engulfed by a mass of humanity outside a Moscow synagogue in the late 1940s, tells the crowd, "Thank you for having remained Jews." Dancers are jubilant in Tel Aviv on the

day Israel declares its statehood, while a heavy-hearted David Ben-Gurion, recalls Shimon Peres, prophesies, "Today, they are dancing, tomorrow they will be fighting."

The Moriah Films division of the Simon Wiesenthal Center scoured two dozen film and photo archives across the world to create a dense pictorial narrative of the tumultuous 20 years, starting with the United Nations' partition vote in 1947 to the stunning Six-Day War victory in 1967.

In introducing the Los Angeles premiere of the 105-minute documentary last week, co-producer and co-writer Rabbi Marvin Hier, the dean and founder of the Wiesenthal Center, promised, "This film is not an infomercial for Israel. We are showing its history, warts and all. Yet, the creation of Israel was not only one of the greatest events of the 20th century, but in all human history."

The film was completed after its first version was canceled for still-debated reasons.

The actors in the drama tread across the stage of history: Yitzhak Rabin, Moshe Dayan, Shimon Peres, Menachem Begin and King Hussein of Jordan, Yasser Arafat before the chin stubble and kaffiyeh. The peaceful triumphs of the state are celebrated, from the mass absorption of refugees and the blooming of the desert to the vibrant intellectual and cultural life.

True to Hier's promise, the warts are there, too, including the controversial killing of Arabs at Deir Yassin during the War of Independence, religious strife and Palestinian grievances against the military occupation that followed the Six-Day War.

The professional skill and production values of the Wiesenthal Center's film division, which has racked up two Oscars in five times at bat, is evident, thanks in large measure to director and co-producer Richard Trank.

The documentary was first shown in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and then New York, and a series of follow-up premieres are planned for major American, Canadian and European cities. Filming has already started on the second part, which will take Israel's history to the present.

Originally, the film was conceived as a centerpiece in the celebration of Israel's 50th anniversary in 1998, and was to cover the entire five decades of the Jewish state in one film.

Moriah Films entrusted the project to veteran filmmaker Mark Jonathan Harris, winner of two Academy Awards, the second as writer-director of the Wiesenthal Center's own "The Long Way Home." The co-writer was Stuart Schoffman, a well-known American-born Israeli journalist.

After some 15 months work, Hier and Trank canceled the film, titled "A Dream No More." At the time, the embittered Harris and Schoffman argued that the project was scuttled because American Jews — and by extension the Wiesenthal Center — wanted a "feel-good Diaspora jubilee film."

Hier and Trank responded that "A Dream No More" simply didn't work as an effective documentary and that ultimately conceptual and creative differences between producer and director doomed the film.

Neither Harris in Los Angeles nor Schoffman in Jerusalem — both listed as interviewers in the "In Search of Peace" credits — has seen the film, but the resentment lingers.

"I wasn't invited" to see the film, said Harris in an interview last week. "My experience was quite bitter. Our film did deal with some of the major polarities in Israel and could have contributed" to the "debate about Israel's direction and future." □