



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israeli, Palestinian representatives try to reduce violence on the ground

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Israeli-Palestinian violence enters its third month, representatives from the two sides are trying to reduce the scale of the fighting.

There has even been talk of a new initiative to reach a peace deal.

But the real test of these efforts will be seen on the ground, where the violence continues to claim Israeli and Palestinian lives.

With the start Monday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, traditionally a time for Islamic militancy, Israeli security forces are bracing for the conflict to intensify.

Meanwhile, over the weekend, the two sides met on the diplomatic and security level. In a phone call initiated last Friday by Russian President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat pledged to work to resume security coordination.

The day before, Israel ordered the joint liaison offices with the Palestinians closed after an Israeli soldier was killed in a blast at one of the Gaza Strip offices.

That phone conversation was followed by a reported meeting Saturday night between Arafat and Israeli Cabinet minister Amnon Lipkin-Shahak. And on Sunday, the head of Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service, Avi Dichter, met in Egypt with the head of the Palestinian security service in Gaza, Mohammed Dahlan.

At the same time, regional commanders of the Israel Defense Force reportedly met with their Palestinian security counterparts.

The site of the Dichter-Dahlan meeting indicates that Egypt is not yet abandoning its role of mediator, even though it recalled its ambassador to Israel last week.

Also on Sunday, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak met with Barak's chief security adviser, Danny Yatom. During the meeting, Mubarak reportedly told Yatom that Israel must implement confidence-building measures before the Palestinian Authority can justify taking any steps to stop the violence.

As a gesture linked to the start of Ramadan, Israel on Monday reopened the Karni Crossing into Gaza to allow the flow of food, medicines and other essentials.

Despite the various contacts, violence on the ground has continued largely unabated. Over the weekend, at least 10 Palestinians and two Israelis were killed in clashes in the West Bank and Gaza.

On Monday, gun battles erupted in the West Bank after Israeli troops killed five Palestinians near Kalkilya the night before. In that incident, Israeli soldiers opened fire after they "identified an armed gang of terrorists" that had opened fire on an Israeli vehicle traveling toward a Jewish settlement, according to an army statement. Palestinian officials said the five were unarmed civilians.

Israel is demanding that violence be reduced before political negotiations resume.

Observers are split over whether Arafat has lost control over all the Palestinian forces operating on the ground, or whether he is using the unrest for political gain.

Meanwhile, Barak has signaled a shifting of diplomatic gears.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Sunday that Barak had directed senior advisers to begin drawing up a new political plan for resuming negotiations with the Palestinians.

On Monday, media reports indicated that various advisory forums including the National Security Council and the IDF general staff were working on position papers for a "long-term" interim agreement with the Palestinians. The reports noted that Likud opposition leader Ariel Sharon, while serving as foreign minister in the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, had presented such a plan to the Palestinians, who rejected it. The

### Fighting persists in West Bank

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Israeli security forces have been bracing for a possible surge in Palestinian violence after the Islamic holy month of Ramadan began Monday.

Israeli police have not yet decided whether to restrict access to Jerusalem's Temple Mount for Friday prayers.

Palestinian officials have warned Israel against trying to limit access to the compound. [Page 1]

### Knesset to vote on elections

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak will be fighting for his political life Tuesday, when the Knesset is slated to hold the first of three votes on a motion to dissolve the legislature and hold early elections.

Members of Barak's One Israel bloc say early elections will weaken Israel at a time when it is involved in deadly clashes with the Palestinians.

Israel's High Court of Justice is slated to consider what kind of legislative majority is required to dissolve the Knesset and hold new elections.

The petition was brought by the Likud opposition against the Knesset speaker's requirement that there be an absolute 61-vote majority for the bill to pass.

### Romanian extremist forces runoff

A far-right nationalist who publishes anti-Semitic magazines is poised to take part in a Dec. 10 runoff in Romania's presidential elections.

According to partial results from Sunday's elections, Corneliu Vadim Tudor surprised analysts by getting 28 percent of the vote, second to former President Ion Iliescu, who got an estimated 37 percent of the vote.

Tudor ran a protest campaign promising law and order.

The former lackey of Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu also has a history of vicious, overt and outspoken anti-Semitism. [Page 3]

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Panel to visit Mideast soon

Former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell said a fact-finding commission he heads on Israeli-Palestinian violence will soon go to the region to study the situation there.

Speaking after meeting Monday with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Mitchell said the panel plans to complete its report by March.

### U.N. official accuses Israel

The U.N. human rights commissioner accused Israel of using excessive force during the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians.

In a report to the U.N. General Assembly, Mary Robinson also called for an "international monitoring presence" to be set up in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

### High court convicts extremist

Israel's Supreme Court overturned a previous ruling and convicted Binyamin Ze'ev Kahane of incitement to rebellion.

Kahane, son of the late, militantly anti-Arab Rabbi Meir Kahane, had been accused of distributing leaflets calling on the army to bomb the Israeli-Arab town of Umm el-Fahm.

In another ruling Monday, the high court reversed a previous ruling and acquitted journalist Mohammed Jabrin of incitement. Jabrin had published articles praising the 1987-1993 Palestinian uprising.

### Troupe takes part in festival

The Cameri Theater of Tel Aviv took part for the first time in the International Festival of the Union of European Theaters.

The annual gathering of the top European theater companies, which began in 1990, was held this year in Budapest. The Cameri troupe played two nights and would have played a third, but an insufficient budget forced the players to return home.

papers have yet to be submitted to Barak, but the working assumption for the idea is that the Palestinians are not yet prepared to reach a final peace agreement with Israel.

Observers also noted that were the sides to resume negotiations, the fast-approaching end to President Clinton's presidency will not provide enough time to come up with a comprehensive agreement. □

### FOCUS ON ISSUES

## Israelis angered by textbook with photo of Beatles, but not Ben-Gurion

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli politicians and academics are again fighting over how history should be taught to students in the Jewish state's school system.

In an unprecedented step, an Israeli parliamentary committee last week called on the Education Ministry to stop using a controversial high school history textbook, which critics say omits seminal events pertaining to the history of the Holocaust, Zionism and the founding of the State of Israel.

The controversy is the latest evidence of the growing debate about the study of Israeli history.

"Post-Zionist" historians say they are debunking myths that Israelis have been taught about their history.

But others say they neglect the heroism of Israel's founders and the opposition of the Arab world to the Jewish state's existence.

In a meeting of the Knesset Education Committee, legislators from across the political spectrum as well as academics denounced the ninth-grade textbook, "A World of Changes," for what they called the exclusion of vital events.

"I am aware that we are talking about intervention of the legislature in educational content, but we cannot avoid this in the face of grave concern over the detachment of Israeli students from their true heritage," said the committee's chairman, Zevulun Orlev of the National Religious Party. "The amount invested in producing the book is minuscule compared to the educational and moral damage it could inflict."

Former Education Minister Yossi Sarid of the secular Meretz Party criticized the decision, telling the Israeli daily Ha'aretz that it "could create a dangerous precedent."

Less than a year ago, however, Sarid pushed through his own revisions to a professional committee that had just drafted a new literature curriculum. He wanted to include the works of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, whose writings contain anti-Israel themes.

Though the committee decision to suspend use of the book was nonbinding, the ministry's director general, Shlomit Amichai, said she would see that a team is appointed to look into the complaints. If necessary, she said, the ministry would issue a corrected version of the textbook.

Among the omissions that have drawn criticism are lack of specific references to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising during the Holocaust, illegal immigration activities during the British Mandate period in pre-state Israel, the Ma'alot and Munich terrorist massacres in the 1970s and the Israeli hostage rescue at Entebbe.

The book contains a photograph of the Beatles rock group, but no image of Israel's founding father, David Ben-Gurion.

Other historians noted that the book makes no mention of the belligerent Arab acts that preceded the 1967 Six-Day War — and complained of the text's failure to emphasize that Israel's 1948 War of Independence was initiated by the Arab states, which rejected the 1947 United Nations partition plan that created the State of Israel.

The book's editor, Danny Ya'acobi, said the textbook cannot be judged as a single unit, but part of an overall history curriculum taught to students over the course of several years.

He added that the book, which was produced in consultation with leading scholars, is intended to help students understand long-term processes and central events of the past. He noted that the book does generally address terrorist attacks and the Jewish underground, but not with specific references. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### S. African Jews: We may leave

More of South Africa's Jews may leave the country if the governing African National Congress continues to side with the Palestinians in the ongoing Middle East crisis, a Jewish leader warned.

"We note that the ANC condemns only Jewish aggression and never PLO aggression. When Israelis are killed the government is silent," Russell Gaddin, national chairman of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, said during a meeting with an ANC official.

The meeting came after several prominent ANC officials recently made anti-Israel comments.

### Panel: Wallenberg was shot

A Russian commission is convinced that Raoul Wallenberg was shot in a Soviet prison after World War II and plans to ask prosecutors to rehabilitate him as a victim of Stalinist repression, according to Russia's Interfax news agency.

It has long been suspected that the Soviets killed Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews during the war, but the Soviets claimed he died of a heart attack in 1947.

### O.U. to weigh in on religion case

The Orthodox Union plans to weigh in on a case that the U.S. Supreme Court may use to determine whether religious groups should have equal access to public school facilities during non-school hours.

The O.U. argues that school officials in Milford, N.Y., violated the rights of the Good News Club when they refused to let the Christian youth group meet because they felt the meeting was the equivalent of religious worship.

### German to face war crimes trial

A German court plans to start proceedings next week against an 82-year-old man for allegedly gunning down seven Jewish concentration camp inmates during World War II. The court reached the decision Monday after doctors found that Julius Viel is fit to stand trial.

### Media blamed for mosque fire

Canadian Muslim leaders are charging that purportedly pro-Israel media coverage of the Middle East crisis may have played a role in a fire that seriously damaged the oldest mosque in British Columbia.

They want last Friday's fire at the Surrey Masjid investigated as a possible hate crime.

"The racist tone of pro-Israel commentaries in the current Middle East crisis only serves to fan the flames of existing prejudice and stereotyping," said Sheema Khan, director of the Canadian office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

## Contender for Romanian president known for outspoken anti-Semitism

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — A far-right nationalist party described by Jewish groups as Romania's "most nationalist and anti-Semitic" party has become Romania's main opposition force in parliament and its leader has a shot at becoming the country's next president.

In elections held Sunday, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the 51-year-old leader of the extremist Greater Romania Party, came in second out of a dozen candidates for president with an estimated 28 percent of the vote. The results were preliminary, with the final tallies not expected until later in the week.

He will face former Communist Ion Iliescu, 70, who served as Romania's president from 1990 to 1996, in a run-off vote for president on Dec. 10. Iliescu led the first-round vote with 37 percent.

Polling organizations predicted that the run-off would be tight and at least one said there were indications that Tudor, who has been compared to other extreme right figures such as Austria's Jorg Haider and France's Jean Marie Le Pen, could win.

Like Haider, Tudor ran a protest campaign promising law and order. He appealed to the desperate and disaffected masses in a country where the average salary is \$100 a month, 40 percent of the population lives on little more than one dollar a day, inflation is estimated at 40 percent, and unemployment is 11 percent.

But, unlike Haider, Tudor has a history of vicious, overt and outspoken anti-Semitism. He is a poet who came to fame as a lackey of Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who was deposed and executed in the Romanian revolution of December 1989.

He transformed himself into an outspoken nationalist who published magazines and newspapers filled with anti-Semitic attacks and xenophobic diatribes directed against Gypsies, also known as Roma, and ethnic Hungarians.

During Iliescu's tenure as president in the first part of the 1990s, Tudor repeatedly attacked Iliescu's efforts to maintain warm relations with Israel, to acknowledge Romania's complicity in the Holocaust and to show support for Jewish causes.

His party's newspaper, Romania Mare, accused Iliescu of "selling out to the Zionists."

Today, about 12,000 Jews are known to live in Romania.

The book *Anti-Semitism Worldwide*, funded by the Anti-Defamation League and the World Jewish Congress, states that Tudor "is obsessed with the alleged Jewish campaign to cooperate with Romania's enemies in order to 'destabilize Romania' and 'falsify history.'"

Whether or not Tudor, also known for his xenophobic sentiments, becomes president, his party will form the main opposition force in parliament.

Iliescu's left-wing Party of Social Democracy got an estimated 37 to 38 percent of votes in both houses of Parliament. But Tudor's Greater Romania Party came in second with an estimated 20 to 21 percent — a huge surge forward since local elections in June when the party received little more than 2 percent of the vote.

These results were a crushing blow to the five-party centrist coalition that ruled Romania for the past four years. They represented a dramatic backlash against the widespread corruption, economic failure, and bitter political infighting that characterized the outgoing government. But the strong showing of Tudor and his Greater Romania Party in particular shocked many observers and raised concern about the future course of Romania's development.

"Romania has entered a new era on Monday," said the independent Romanian daily *Evenimentul Zilei*. "It becomes a European country suspected of nationalist excesses without a democratic opposition on which people can count."

Said another newspaper, *Adevarul*, "In November 2000 we are the only case in Central and Eastern Europe where economic reforms have not succeeded" and "the ascension of the Greater Romania Party will raise great questions in the West about the success of political reforms." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Mexico's Jews eye country's first openly religious president***By Rhona Statland de Lopez*

MEXICO CITY (JTA) — As religion mixes with politics in a way Mexico has not seen in its modern history, Mexico's Jews are watching their new president closely.

When Vicente Fox is inaugurated on Friday, he will become Mexico's first openly religious Roman Catholic president in more than a century.

The Institutional Revolutionary Party, known by its Spanish initials PRI, was voted out after more than 70 years in power. Fox, of the conservative National Action Party, known by the acronym PAN, beat Francisco Labastida of the PRI in July's vote.

Mexican Jews tend to keep silent in public when it comes to politics.

When Fox held a meeting with Jewish leaders soon after he was elected, one newspaper called the meeting "discreet" and no names of Jewish leaders appeared in print.

"There are about 50,000 to 60,000 Jews in Mexico, but we don't have a lot of political representation," says Abram Shamai, a Jewish businessman. "We just want to be left alone."

The Jewish community keeps a low profile partly because several of its members have been kidnapped.

"Jews have been targeted perhaps because they are viewed as wealthy," says one member of the Jewish community who would not give a name for publication.

The habit of keeping a low profile may have come from the 1970s, when then-President Luis Echeverria spearheaded the 1975 United Nations resolution equating Zionism with racism.

The Mexican Constitution of 1857 separated church and state, and other laws removed marriage and divorce from church jurisdiction.

Even tougher limits were imposed on the church in 1917 after the Mexican Revolution.

And in this country, where 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, religion has been officially invisible since 1929.

Until 1992, priests and nuns were not allowed to wear their clerical garb in public, and religious leaders were restricted from interfering in politics.

Political leaders kept their religious practices from public view.

Religious restrictions gradually faded in practice, and a 1992 law formally ended most of them.

Since then, church and state in Mexico have sparred over just how far priests can go to influence politics under a reform that ended many of the laws imposed on clergy.

But laws still ban religious involvement in politics — a ban that was constantly tested during Fox's campaign in which religion played a prominent role.

The media repeatedly showed him going to mass and he has pushed the limits of the church's prominent new role in politics.

He once displayed a banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint, at a campaign rally.

One of the major subjects on the agenda when Fox, 58, met with Jewish leaders was safety. Fox said many Jewish concerns are national concerns.

"The Jews voted for Fox along the same lines as the rest of Mexicans did because we share many of the same problems and hopes," says Esther Shabot, a columnist who writes about Israeli issues for a leading Mexican newspaper.

While many Jews voted for Fox, they remain concerned about his conservative political party, which is considered to be allied with the Catholic Church.

Soon after the election, the central state of Guanajuato, where Fox had been governor, proposed banning abortion in cases of rape. Abortion is generally outlawed in Mexico, but just about every state has permitted abortion in the case of rape.

There was such an outcry against the measure that the current governor sent the bill back to the state congress for further study, which, in essence, serves as a veto.

Fox himself has said that while he is religious, he would not impose his spiritual views on the nation.

He has also called for an end to aggression against people of different faiths and promises to push an initiative to guarantee more religious liberty for all.

"Jews are afraid of intolerance," says Vivian Antaki, dean of Endicott College in Mexico City.

"While to many the PAN means Christian intolerance, Fox has promised religious freedom and a continuation of secular education in the public schools. He is in no way hand in glove with the church."

Businessman Abram Shamai agrees.

"We believe that Fox is not representative of the PAN. He's divorced and doesn't attend Mass frequently. We're not talking Joe Lieberman here," he said.

Mexican Jews like what they view as Fox's pro-business position.

He was an executive of Coca-Cola for Mexico and Central America and also ran his own agricultural and shoemaking businesses.

Fox has expressed his support of free enterprise and sustained economic growth.

As governor of the state of Guanajuato, he was known for cutting bureaucratic red tape to help businesses export their products more easily.

"He is a free marketeer, which, from an economic point of view, is excellent," says Richard Pick, who was in the textile business here for 40 years.

"We are all very happy there is a change and hopefully, as Fox said, he will reduce corruption and create a better climate for investments." □

**Canada group wants Nazi deported**

TORONTO (JTA) — The Canadian Jewish Congress is calling on Canada to deport a man convicted in an Italian court of committing war crimes while he worked as a guard at a Nazi concentration camp.

Michael Seifert, a 76-year-old resident of Vancouver who received Canadian citizenship in 1970, was convicted in absentia of killing, raping and torturing prisoners at a camp in northern Italy in 1944 and 1945.

An official with Canada's Department of Justice would not confirm whether the government has received an extradition request from Italy. □