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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel targets Syrian radar post

Israel staged mock air raids over Lebanon hours after it fired on Syrian radar sites deep inside Lebanon, reportedly killing three Syrian soldiers.

Israel said Monday's attack came in retaliation for a Hezbollah assault on Saturday in which an Israeli soldier was killed, and called on Syria "to exert its influence on Lebanon."

Calling the Israeli strike a "dangerous escalation," Syria put its 35,000 troops in Lebanon on high alert, according to a Lebanese official.

Several Israeli Arab legislators also condemned the Israeli attack, and one described the Israeli government as "terrorist."

U.S. blames Hezbollah

United States officials blamed Hezbollah for a cycle of attacks in Israel and Lebanon in recent days.

While issuing the familiar call to "end the cycle of violence in the Middle East," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said Monday that a Hezbollah attack over the weekend that left one Israeli soldier dead was a "clear provocation designed to escalate an already-tense situation."

The United States called on Israel, Syria and Lebanon "to exercise restraint" following Israel's attack on Syrian radar sites in Lebanon.

Jewish author wins Pulitzer

An American Jewish author won a Pulitzer Prize for his novel about a young Jew who escapes from Czechoslovakia on the eve of World War II.

In Michael Chabon's "The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay," Joe Kavalier makes it big in the U.S. comic book business before the events of the Holocaust catch up with him.

Israel blasts Gaza target

Israel launched a missile strike on the headquarters of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's elite Force 17 guard in the central Gaza Strip.

Monday's attack came hours after Palestinian gunmen fired mortars at the Israeli town of Sderot, located three miles from the border with Gaza and just down the road from Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's ranch.

The Sderot attack marked the Palestinian mortars' deepest penetration into Israel to date.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Intifada reopens old wound of unequal reserve duty burden

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — "We're not freiers," read the signs held by T-shirted reserve soldiers sitting in a makeshift army tent outside the Tel Aviv train station.

In Hebrew slang, a freier is a fool, a pushover, someone who can be suckered into anything.

These days, increasing numbers of Israeli reservists feel like the suckers of society, carrying the burden of reserve duty while others dodge their annual notices.

In recent weeks, several reservists' groups have been mobilizing their lobbying organizations, sending the message that they're no longer prepared to tolerate the situation.

Such voices have been out there for some time.

But with six reservists killed in Israeli-Palestinian violence that has raged since September, it appears that some Knesset members and Cabinet ministers are starting to listen.

"We're in a fighting situation, and only 20 percent do reserve duty," said Eitan Cabel, a Labor legislator who is a sergeant major in the reserves. "It's not fair. And the atmosphere is that if you do reserve duty, you're an idiot."

Several organizations have rallied their forces since last summer, when the government passed the Tal Bill, which temporarily continues the system under which fervently Orthodox yeshiva students can defer military service.

One pro-draft group is the Awakening Movement, whose members returned their military identification cards and went on a hunger strike last summer to protest the Tal Bill — and who organized the Tel Aviv tent last week.

"The army takes us for granted because they know we'll do what we're supposed to do," said Chili Tropper, a 23-year-old former paratrooper and a founding member of Awakening.

The Israel Defense Force has always relied on its reservist forces, in addition to the core of career officers and conscripts.

After an initial three years of compulsory army service, men serve an average of 40 days of reserve duty a year until the age of 45.

According to figures from Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, there are some 445,000 reservists in the Israeli army — and just 186,500 full-time soldiers.

Tropper and many of his fellow protesters in Awakening, and the nationwide university student reservists' organization, are in their early-to-late 20s.

All of them were drafted at 18. Many spent their first year after army service traveling the world, and then returned to Israel for university studies — and reserve duty.

Students make up about one-quarter of the reserve force.

Recent figures show that only about half of Israeli men serve in the army. Arabs — except for Druse and some Bedouins — and many fervently Orthodox Jews are exempted.

One out of three is then called to serve in the reserves, and one out of 10 serves in a job that is considered dangerous — often supporting combat units as a driver, medic or ammunition supplier.

"The general public doesn't get involved in this problem, even though it affects everybody's security," said Lior Shtrassberg, chairman of the Tel Aviv University

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon told not to use son

Israel's attorney general told Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that he must stop sending his son on diplomatic missions to meet with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Elyakim Rubinstein said Sunday that using Omri Sharon for this purpose violates a law that forbids senior officials from employing close relatives.

Jordanian minister visits Israel

Jordan's foreign minister is visiting Israel as part of an effort to promote a Jordanian-Egyptian proposal for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Abdulilah Khatib met Monday with his Israeli counterpart, Shimon Peres, to discuss the proposal, which calls on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to implement a cease-fire accord brokered last October by the United States.

Militia member wounded

A member of the Palestinian Tanzim militia was wounded Monday when shots were fired at his car in the West Bank city of Hebron.

He accused Israel of trying to kill him, but the Israeli army said it is not aware of the shooting.

Bombs rock Tel Aviv suburb

Two bombs exploded within a short period in the Tel Aviv suburb of Kfar Saba on Saturday. One man was seriously injured in the second blast. A day later, no was injured when a bomb went off near an Israeli checkpoint close to the West Bank city of Kalkilya.

Palestinians free master bomber

Palestinian officials released a Hamas terrorist mastermind from a Gaza Strip prison last month, according to Israel's Army Radio. Mohammed Deif, who was captured by the Palestinian Authority last May, is believed responsible for planning and carrying out numerous terror attacks against Israelis.



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student organization and a reserve commander in an artillery unit.

"We need a major response to this. The IDF has to re-evaluate the reservist system."

During the last five years, as the peace process with the Palestinians appeared to be bearing fruit, Israel relaxed the terms of reserve duty.

The army began canceling reserve duty for men older than 45 and planned to cancel call-ups for reservists older than 41. There also was talk of shortening mandatory service for draftees.

But with the current round of Israeli-Palestinian violence now in its seventh month, many reservists already have served much of their annual reserve duty — often in strife-torn areas of the West Bank or Gaza Strip.

Now, the IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, has made a request to lengthen reserve duty — and reservists are fearful about how this will affect their lives.

"A reservist goes to do guard duty in the settlements and misses half a semester," said Cabel, who has served 37 days since last April — and recently received a notice for another 10 days of reserve duty in July. "Who's paying for his loss?"

Here is what the protesting reservists want:

- Financial compensation. Payment for students in reserve duty according to the average wage, not the minimum wage, as well as tuition reimbursement. They also seek discounts on city and income taxes for days served, credits for mortgages and insurance policies, and special grants for serving in combat duty.

- Educational support. No college or university has a formal alternative for soldiers who miss tests or school work. The students want a service at each institution of higher learning to help them defer reserve duty when necessary. They also want three alternative dates for exams, tutoring for missed classes and financial aid for videotaping lectures.

- Work compensation. Reservists want to raise the \$4,000 fine on employers who fire employees because of their reserve duty. They also are seeking compensation for the self-employed.

Ironically, the ongoing Palestinian violence "sort of helps" reservists press their demands, Tropper said.

Representatives met with Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer late last week, and on Monday they met with several Knesset committees and with legislators from the left wing Meretz Party.

But some reservists say they've had enough of commissions and committees. They want some real decisions soon.

If the talks and discussions don't come to fruition by Independence Day, which falls next week, the groups threaten to strike at the universities, block highways, picket the Knesset and wage a hunger strike.

"I'm not optimistic," Cabel said.

Some 23 proposals on the subject are currently on the Knesset agenda.

But Cabel dismissed the attention from the media and the Knesset discussions as "just talk."

"I expected more of an awakening from the public," he said. "There's no real drama going on here; it's just lobbying, not real pressure groups."

The Awakening and student representatives are more fired up about the situation, possibly because they have more adrenaline and more time, Tropper said.

"Our job isn't to find the solutions. Our first goal was to get the issue out there. Now we're passing the ball to the politicians," he said.

"We feel like the boy who put his finger in the dike. We're in control now." □

Israeli astronaut to get kosher food

NEW YORK (JTA) — NASA has agreed to provide kosher food for an Israeli astronaut who is training for a U.S. space shuttle mission, according to the South Florida Sun-Sentinel.

Col. Ilan Ramon, 47, from Tel Aviv, told the paper he is not particularly religious, but realizes that as Israel's first astronaut, "I'm kind of representative of all the Jewish community."

While his launch date has not yet been scheduled, he is expected to take off some time next year. □

JEWISH WORLD

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jews worry that Russia TV takeover is prelude to anti-Semitic crackdown

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The weekend takeover of Russia's only independent, nationwide television channel by the state-owned natural gas monopoly Gazprom is being seen here as a crackdown on free speech.

The NTV channel had been the property of Vladimir Goussinsky, the former president of the Russian Jewish Congress — leading some Russian Jews, who flocked to demonstrations in Moscow protesting Gazprom's "coup" against NTV, to worry that a crackdown on the Jewish community might also be in the offing.

"I don't sympathize with the NTV fat cats, including Goussinsky," said Yevgenia Krukovskaya, a Jewish university student.

"It is well-known that some of the top NTV people are former KGB officers," Krukovskaya said in a downtown Moscow square full of NTV supporters, expressing a widespread belief. "But I am going to this demonstration because I understand that if they are closing down this independent channel, they are closing down the freedom of speech and democracy — and after that, as usual, they will crack down on the Jews."

As if to support her misgivings, a group of middle-aged women a dozen steps from Krukovskaya carried posters reading "Close Down the Zhids' TV Box" and "NTV People — Servants of Israel."

An elderly man harangued passersby with the argument that Jews have plundered Russia and that NTV is a platform for Zionists.

Some of the thousands of pro-NTV demonstrators quickly tore down the anti-Semitic posters.

But the small group probably reflected the feelings of many thousands of Russians who viewed NTV as a mouthpiece of Russian Jewry.

Gazprom, NTV's main creditor and shareholder, said it took over the station to improve the channel's management and recoup some of the \$200 million to \$400 million it had lent NTV. Still, the move is believed to be political.

"There is much more here than a simple business deal gone bad," said Mark Levin, the executive director of the Washington-based NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia. "This clearly goes into the issue of whether the government is going to allow an independent voice in the media."

NTV sharply criticized the Kremlin's war against Muslim separatists in Chechnya, and during the last presidential election in 2000, it supported Vladimir Putin's rival, liberal Grigory Yavlinsky. Soon after Putin became president, the Kremlin launched its campaign against Goussinsky, who fled to Spain and is now fighting Russian attempts to extradite him to face embezzlement charges.

Sources say that if Moscow's extradition efforts prove unsuccessful, Goussinsky will move to Israel, where he owns 25 percent of the Ma'ariv newspaper and has a substantial stake in the country's mobile communications market.

He also is reportedly financing a new Russian-language Israeli TV channel, which could allow him to become a major player in Israel's huge Russian community.

Some Jewish observers believe the takeover has dashed the hopes of Russian Jewry to become a major, albeit behind-the-scenes, player in Russian politics.

Both Goussinsky and Boris Berezovsky, another Russian media tycoon with Jewish roots, had played such a role.

Another Jewish umbrella group, the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Soviet Union, reportedly is considering entering the political fray. But sources say the federation's political activities depend on the personal relationship between Israeli-based diamond tycoon Lev Levayev and Kremlin official Alexander Voloshin — and that Voloshin's influence is weakening.

Meanwhile, the latest developments have brought longtime foes Berezovsky and Goussinsky closer. Many of the NTV journalists quit the station after the takeover and, with Goussinsky's help, are trying to create a new independent channel at Berezovsky's TV-6.

"We are very different people, although of the same ethnicity," Berezovsky said. "But we managed to cut a deal and joined forces at a critical juncture." □

U.S. again targets Demjanjuk

U.S. prosecutors are asking a judge to penalize alleged concentration camp guard John Demjanjuk after his lawyer failed to turn over documents they suspect implicate Demjanjuk, according to the Cleveland Jewish News.

The move by the prosecutors from the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations comes as a second U.S. trial into Demjanjuk's wartime actions is scheduled to open May 29 in Cleveland.

Groups blast likely ambassador

The Zionist Organization of America and other Jewish groups placed ads in several Jewish newspapers criticizing the likely selection of Daniel Kurtzer as the next U.S. ambassador to Israel.

The ads quote former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir as saying Kurtzer, an Orthodox Jew who is ambassador to Egypt, "frequently pressured Israel to make one-sided concessions to the Arabs."

Boston man charged in sex case

A suburban Boston man was charged with sexually assaulting two boys, including one he was matched with through the Jewish Big Brother and Big Sister Association of Greater Boston, according to the Boston Globe.

Eric Hindin, 37, faces two counts of rape of a child, two counts of indecent assault and battery and two counts of statutory rape. The association's director called the allegations "deeply disturbing" and said it conducts psychiatric evaluations and checks the criminal histories of all prospective volunteers.

Ex-O.U. head to lead Zionists

The immediate past president of the Orthodox Union was hired to head the Religious Zionists of America.

Saying he plans to re-energize the group's advocacy for Israel, Dr. Mandell Ganchrow added that he hopes to attract more young people, particularly the thousands of American Orthodox students who study in Israel each year.

The almost 100-year-old organization has been relatively dormant in recent years.

Torah scroll heads to Bulgaria

A Torah from Kansas City is slated to arrive in Sofia later this week as part of a program to replace 11 scrolls stolen in late February from the Bulgarian capital's Central Synagogue.

The Torah, part of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's program to replace the scrolls, originally came from Romania. International police are investigating the theft of the Torahs, believed to have been spirited out of the country.

For Jewish groups, Bush budget is a case of the glass being half full

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Bush's proposed budget is not what many Jewish groups hoped for, but it's a lot better than they feared.

Under the plan, social service programs of key importance to the Jewish community don't suffer the potentially severe cutbacks they had feared under budget plan.

But Jewish groups say the proposed funding still falls well short of what they want.

Groups that work for refugee assistance and affordable housing for the elderly say their causes would receive a slight increase in funds under the plan, but their needs still far outweigh the money proposed.

Other programs, such as health care for the uninsured and environmental programs, are marked for cuts.

Still, Diana Aviv, vice president of public policy for the United Jewish Communities, the Jewish community's central social services agency, summed up the reaction of much of the Jewish community: "This could have been much worse, and it's not."

With months to go before a final budget is approved — the House and Senate have passed their own plans in recent weeks, which will need to be reconciled with Bush's proposal — the final budget numbers are far from certain.

The cornerstone of Bush's economic policy is an across-the-board tax cut that he says will amount to \$1.6 trillion over 10 years.

The House budget largely tracked Bush's proposal, while the Senate proposed more discretionary spending than did Bush, along with a smaller tax cut of \$1.18 trillion over 10 years.

Many Jewish groups, however, say a tax cut should be placed on the back burner until social service programs are sufficiently funded.

Bush's priorities and restrictions would leave no room for discretionary spending increases, and will make it difficult for the budget to keep up with inflation and population growth, according to the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

"This budget has the feel of a document prepared after the tax cut," said RAC Associate Director Mark Pelavin. "The decisions don't make sense."

For example, Pelavin pointed out that despite the nation's continuing energy crisis, funding would be cut for research into alternative energy sources.

Bush released his budget plan April 9.

The route to a final budget is lengthy and arduous. The House and Senate plans include their own targets for spending, revenues, and the surplus, and the two chambers now will set to work on the raft of annual appropriations bills necessary to implement the budget.

Congress will examine the Bush budget in detail, and over the next few months committees and subcommittees will hold hearings on relevant proposals under their jurisdiction. The deadline is Oct. 1, the start of the next fiscal year, but the government can continue functioning under an interim framework if the deadline is missed.

The Migration and Refugee Assistance Program, which funds overseas refugee assistance and U.S. admissions, would increase from \$700 million to \$715 million under Bush's budget. But UJC

and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society have been pushing for \$800 million for the program to meet the needs of a refugee population estimated at 14 million worldwide.

Aviv said funding for elderly housing would increase slightly — from \$779 million to \$783 million — but that still is far below the \$1.3 billion allocated in 1995.

"We're going backwards," she said.

Sammie Moshenberg, director of the Washington office of the National Council of Jewish Women, agreed that the surplus should be invested rather than returned to the public as part of a tax cut.

The budget proposal also includes language on helping faith-based organizations that provide social services. The Bush administration wants to encourage more charitable giving to such groups, and has created a federal Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to foster partnerships between government and religiously based social service groups.

Jewish groups are concerned that the government will step back from its role of providing social services, and that the program may cross the lines of church-state separation.

Orthodox groups, however, back the faith-based initiative as a way to increase funding for religious-based social service programs. And Nathan Diament, the director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, also praised the 11.5 percent boost in spending that education received in the proposed budget.

Details of Israel's foreign aid package were not included in Bush's budget plan, but will be spelled out by Congress.

Groups expect the funding to include \$2.04 billion in military aid and \$720 million in economic support. □

Jewish leader: New Croatian law on restitution unlikely to bear fruit

By Vlasta Kovac

ZAGREB, Croatia (JTA) — Croatia is considering legislation that would return property to Jews who used to live in the Balkan nation.

But a leading Croatian Jewish official doubts that properties will be returned before their owners — many of them Holocaust survivors or their heirs — die. "I have the feeling that the restitution is still being postponed and that even these amendments will not bring it nearer," said Dragan Ekstajn.

Even so, the very possibility that the property may be returned has sparked an anti-Semitic backlash in some Croatian newspapers.

In a recent closed session, the Croatian government agreed to take up amendments to a 1996 law dealing with property restitution in Croatia. The Croatian Parliament is expected to vote on the matter before the fall. The amendments would greatly expand the classes of people eligible to reclaim their property.

The current law was passed in 1996. Under its provisions, only those who were Croatian citizens when the law was passed — and whose property was confiscated by the Communists after 1945 — could submit claims for their possessions.

Many Jews who left in 1948 and 1949, as Israel was being formed, were forced by Yugoslav law to give up their citizenship.

The amendments would make it possible for individuals who are no longer Croatian citizens to claim property, as well as those whose property was confiscated during World War II.

During the war, 20,000 of Croatia's 25,000 Jews were killed. More than half of the survivors emigrated after the war. □