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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Terror bombing averted

A terrorist bombing was averted in the northern Israeli city of Afula when police detained a Palestinian man carrying a bomb in a bag.

The police were responding to a call regarding a suspicious object in a bank — which turned out to be nothing — when they noticed the Palestinian fleeing and stopped him for questioning.

The Palestinian, a resident of the Jenin area, unsuccessfully tried to set off his nail-filled bomb, which was later detonated safely.

The Palestinian said he intended to detonate the bomb in a crowded area.

Palestinian killed at roadblock

Israeli soldiers killed a Palestinian woman near a West Bank roadblock. Israeli officials said the woman was shot Wednesday after a taxi in which she was traveling ran a military roadblock south of the West Bank city of Hebron. The driver of the taxi was transporting illegal Palestinian workers from the Hebron area to the Nevatim.

In other violence, Palestinian gunmen in the Gaza Strip launched a mortar attack on a farming community inside Israel. No one in Kibbutz Nahal Oz was hurt in Tuesday night's attack.

Insurance negotiations fail

Negotiators meeting in Washington were unable to solve problems that German insurers say are preventing them from paying Holocaust-era insurance policies.

A source who attended Tuesday's meeting of Jewish groups, German firms and U.S. officials told The Associated Press that the process of paying claims is in jeopardy because of disagreements over whether the German firms must publish lists of unpaid policies, a process the insurers say is too costly.

U.S., E.U. blast demolitions

Israel's demolition of some 26 homes in the Gaza Strip drew condemnation from the United States and European Union.

The U.S. State Department called such operations "provocative." Israel said it destroyed the houses on Tuesday to deny cover to Palestinian gunmen who were attacking Israeli troops in southern Gaza near the border with Egypt.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israel hopes the fences it's building will make Palestinians good neighbors

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Even as attempts to save a fragile U.S.-brokered cease-fire continue, a "solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is quietly being implemented.

Local councils along the Green Line — the pre-1967 border between Israel and the West Bank — are building local "agricultural security fences."

The short-term idea behind the security fences is to reduce the number of Palestinian infiltrators.

But the fences are also part of a longer-term idea of separation between Israel and the Palestinians that is gaining in popularity among disillusioned supporters of the Oslo peace process.

The Israeli government has refrained so far from making an official decision to erect a wall along the 200-mile border, with officials citing both financial and ideological reasons.

But the fence building is carried out with the silent support of the Defense Ministry — and its financial backing, say local leaders.

The separation "emerges from the field, not an orderly political decision," said Nahum Itzkovitz, mayor of the regional council of Emek Hefer, which lies in the coastal plain.

"In the absence of such a decision, and the deteriorating security situation," Defense Ministry officials "prefer that the initiative is ours."

While the idea has long been floated as a possibility, the specifics of a possible plan were presented last week by scholars at a conference here.

Israel should announce the unilateral withdrawal from Jewish settlements in Gaza, where some 2,200 settlers are surrounded by close to 1 million Palestinians, said Shlomo Avineri, a scholar who was a passionate supporter of the Oslo accords — and who now backs the separation idea.

Avineri, a former director general of Israel's Foreign Ministry, believes Israel should then implement a deal that former Prime Minister Ehud Barak proposed to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and Arafat rejected — transferring to the Palestinians more than 90 percent of the territory of the West Bank.

As far as Jerusalem goes, former Internal Security Minister Moshe Shahal, who seven years ago proposed the creation of the separation line, proposes that Arab neighborhoods outside the Old City should be turned over to the Palestinian Authority, with checkpoints into Jerusalem proper.

An eastern ring road will allow Palestinian movement from the northern West Bank to the south without entering Jerusalem.

The tense status quo in the Old City will be preserved, according to Shahal — thus leaving a sore wound open.

Proponents of the plan say that while Israel's borders would not be final, a certain truce could be achieved — not unlike the quiet that prevails on Israel's current border with Syria.

Both Israel and Syria understand that the present line in the Golan Heights will not be the final border between the two countries.

Yet they treat it as if it is.

The fact that even political thinkers like Avineri have joined the camp of those who believe that Israel can no longer wait for an agreement with the Palestinians, but must take unilateral separation measures, is an indication of the depth of the ideological crisis

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel nabs 6 from terror cell

Israeli security officials arrested six Palestinians for allegedly murdering two Israelis in April as part of an initiation rite into a militant Palestinian organization. After a court's gag-order was partially relaxed Wednesday, details emerged that the six have told investigators they had formed a terrorist cell to carry out attacks inside Israel. Four other members of the cell are believed to be still at large in areas under Palestinian control.

Report: Arafat targets settlers

Palestinian officials on Wednesday denied a report that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat issued a directive to "kill a Jewish settler every day." The Israeli daily Ma'ariv published the report, citing information received by Israeli officials.

Sharon plans trip to Italy

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon plans to travel to Italy on Thursday to build European pressure on Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to halt Palestinian violence. Sharon's planned meeting with Italy's new prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, and other top Italian officials precedes a summit of the Group of Eight countries in Genoa later this month.

Ashrawi to work for Arab League

A former Palestinian minister was named spokeswoman for the 22-member Arab League. Hanan Ashrawi first came to prominence as spokeswoman for the Palestinian delegation at the 1991 Madrid peace talks. In her new role, Ashrawi will focus on promoting the Palestinian cause.

Water declared safe to drink

Israel's Health Ministry announced that water in the Tel Aviv area is safe to drink. The announcement came Wednesday after a section of the water system contaminated by fertilizer was flushed out.

that exists among members of the Israeli left.

Despite a growing consensus in favor of separation, implementing the idea indicates a reversal of policies that Israel followed for many years.

Since Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Six-Day War, tens of thousands of Israelis have settled over the Green Line — the armistice line at the end of the 1948 War of Independence — in effect blurring the line.

Separation undoubtedly would perpetuate the current situation, in which Palestinians could no longer look to Israel as a potential work market.

Before the 1987-1993 intifada, some 120,000 Palestinians worked in Israel, a number that is now far lower.

Shahal believes he has a solution to that problem of lost jobs — international loans that would help the Palestinians create jobs within their own territory.

Following the bloody terrorist attacks of 1994, Shahal worked out a separation plan that he presented to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Much to Shahal's surprise, Rabin welcomed the ideas, but was murdered before the plan could be funded.

Rabin's successor, Shimon Peres, objected to the plan because of his belief in a "New Middle East" of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation across borders.

The separation idea was put on hold — only to be revived by Prime Minister Ehud Barak at the end of his tenure.

"There is no way to avoid the decision," Shahal said last week at a symposium at the Truman Institute at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

"I don't know of any other country in the world which has given up its right to control who enters its territory," Shahal said.

He was referring to the current situation in which hundreds of Palestinians — most of whom are seeking work — enter Israel daily, and Israel's security forces are unable to stop them.

In addition, easy access to jobs inside Israel may in fact reinforce Palestinian militancy — leading Palestinians to conclude not that they are fortunate to have jobs in a foreign country, but that they have the right to work in what they still consider Palestine.

"Every Palestinian worker entering Israel realizes, in effect, the Palestinian demand for their 'Right of Return,'" said Avineri, referring to the Palestinian desire to return to homes abandoned during Israel's War of Independence.

But not everyone — whether on the left or the right — agrees on the need for separation.

"We are actually talking about forced separation, where one party would dictate the rules of separation to the weaker party," said Meron Benvenisti, the former deputy mayor of Jerusalem.

"The principle of 'separate but equal' does not work if the dominant party is the one that dictates the rules."

Hardliners, including leaders of West Bank settlers, also staunchly oppose the plan for ideological reasons, albeit different ones.

They fear the fences will lead Israel to ignore the precarious situation of West Bank settlers.

"If one wants to protect the Israelis, one should not neglect the Israelis" in the West Bank, said Ron Nachman, mayor of the settlement city of Ariel.

But these voices are not only becoming a minority — they now fly in the face of the fence-building work.

"Sometimes you pay dearly for financial savings," Shahal said. "By failing to erect the separation line in time, we have not saved money, but we continue to pay the heavy price of human lives." □

Israel's envoy to Sri Lanka riles opposition

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Islamic opposition party lashed out at the government of Sri Lanka for accepting the first Israeli ambassador to take up a post there since the two nations re-established diplomatic links last year.

The new envoy, David Matnai, presented his credentials to the president of Sri Lanka last Friday. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Swiss bank apologizes to WJC

The chairman and CEO of Credit Suisse apologized to the World Jewish Congress after an employee of the Swiss bank wrote in an open letter that Jewish leaders, including WJC officials, were responsible for creating the atmosphere that led to the recent murder of a rabbi in Zurich.

"We deeply regret that a reproach of such gravity has been voiced against representatives of Jewish organizations," Lukas Muhlemann said in a letter to the WJC.

"I can assure you that there is no place in this institution for bigotry or anti-Semitism."

Credit Suisse gave a similar assurance to the Anti-Defamation League, which called on the company to undertake a company-wide program of anti-bias education.

Hate group to shut down

An anti-Semitic group was forced to shut down and stop publishing its weekly newspaper after a U.S. court rejected its request to file for bankruptcy protection.

The Anti-Defamation League warned that the Liberty Lobby may surface again if it gets sufficient support from like-minded donors.

"While it is always good to witness the demise of an anti-Semitic organization, we are not yet ready to rejoice," said the ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman.

France blasts Sharon's bid

France criticized a call from Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for an expansion of Jewish settlements on the Golan Heights.

"An eventual peace in the Middle East is predicated on the supposition that the Golan will be returned to Syria according to terms to be negotiated by the parties," a French Foreign Ministry spokesman said Wednesday.

Sharon told Golan residents on Tuesday that only an expanded Jewish presence there could "turn the settlement of the Golan to a reality that cannot be reversed."

Soldier faces murder charge

Israeli soldier Daniel Weiz and two youths from Toronto appeared in a Canadian courtroom this week to face second-degree murder charges.

Weiz and the two youths, who cannot be named because they were under 18 at the time of the offense, are accused of kicking and beating 15-year-old Dmitri Baranovski to death for a pack of cigarettes in November 1999 — a crime that shocked the city. The preliminary court hearing that began this week is expected to last nine weeks.

Graffiti at synagogue sparks fears of far-right resurgence in Scottish city

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — Leaders of Scotland's Jewish community are concerned after far-right graffiti appeared on a synagogue in northeast Scotland.

The concerns were voiced after swastikas, skinhead symbols, obscenities about Jews and other graffiti were painted on the only synagogue in Dundee late Saturday night.

Paul Spicker, who teaches at the University of Dundee, has taken responsibility for the synagogue since the recent death of a local businessman who had been a leader of Dundee's Jewish community for many years.

He said the incident was "clearly anti-Semitic," but also described it as "very minor."

He and his children personally repainted the synagogue on Tuesday.

Anti-fascist campaigners say the incident is troubling because there is a history of extremist activity in Dundee, a city of about 145,000.

"There has always been a small core of neo-Nazis in Dundee. In the 1970s and 1980s, trouble was quite frequent," said Tony Robson of the anti-fascist magazine Searchlight.

He said an aggressive monitoring campaign had suppressed the problem.

The latest graffiti incident could be a case of "a couple of the local neo-Nazis crawling back out," he added.

Local officials condemned the attack and police said they were actively searching for leads.

But the local member of Parliament, Ernie Ross, took a different approach to the incident.

While saying that he "appreciated that the local community felt concern," Ross said he needed more information before making a definite statement.

"If the local Jewish community feels it was an anti-Semitic attack, I will condemn it," he said.

He added that the vandalism could be the work of "youngsters on school holiday. The wall is painted white, unfortunately, so it's an attraction" for graffiti.

Scottish Jewish leaders see possible connections between the graffiti and recent alleged comments by Ross.

The legislator was reported to have suggested that the recent screening on television of a drama about the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi leaders following World War II was designed to elicit sympathy for Israel during the ongoing Middle East crisis.

"When you have a local legislator prepared to resurrect anti-Semitic stereotypes, you shouldn't be surprised at this kind of thing," said one leader who preferred not to be identified.

Ross flatly denied making a link between the TV program and Jewish influence in the media, which was reported in the Scottish Sun newspaper in late May.

"Those comments were not made in the way they were reported," he said.

Ephraim Borowski, of the Scottish Jewish Representative Council, said the attack could be linked to a series of race riots in Britain in the past month or ongoing violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

"It may be significant that this comes at a time of other intercommunal strife and threats from abroad," he said.

British Jews have not been affected by the racial disturbances in industrial northern England, which have largely involved Muslims of Asian origin and the police.

But Jewish security officials have issued warnings in the wake of a threatening video issued last month by Saudi terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden.

Borowski said he hoped the Dundee attack "turns out to be an isolated incident, since Scotland has for many years been free of this type of activity."

Spicker, the university lecturer who cares for the synagogue, said it was important that the building be kept in good working order.

"It is the only synagogue for 50 miles," he said. "This is a small and fairly isolated community. If the synagogue is not maintained, there's nothing for miles. And things like this don't help." □

THE 2001 JEWISH OLYMPICS**For Australian team, real challenge is memory of Maccabiah disaster***By Chantal Abitbol**Australian Jewish News*

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — All the teams coming to next week's Maccabiah Games have to contend with the tense security situation in Israel.

But Australia's team has to contend with an additional challenge: the legacy of the bridge disaster at the last Games four years ago.

It was July 14, 1997, when a hastily constructed footbridge leading to the stadium in Ramat Gan gave way, sending athletes marching in the opening ceremony plunging into the polluted water of the Yarkon River below.

Soccer player Phil Moss, who is returning to the Games that begin this year on July 16, recalls that he was about to set foot on the bridge when it began to shake, crack and give way.

Pushed backward, Moss watched helplessly as his Australian teammates lost their balance and plunged headlong into the river below.

Overcome by panic, he saw his friends crashing into each other, submerging those already in the water, who were struggling to get their heads above the surface.

Then Moss realized that his brother, Jon, a member of Australia's cricket team, was in there somewhere.

"He was one of the first to hit the water," Moss recalls. "My immediate reaction was to race to the river bank and do anything I could to find him."

Moss spotted his brother emerging from the tangled mass of athletes and sections of broken bridge in the river.

But some of his teammates were not so lucky.

Tenpin bowlers Greg Small and Yetty Bennett drowned, and bridge player Elizabeth Sawicki and lawn bowler Warren Zines died in the ensuing weeks.

Teen-age tennis player Sasha Elterman fell critically ill as a result of swallowing polluted water, and subsequently underwent more than 30 operations.

In all, about 70 athletes were injured.

Four years later, Moss, 29, now a professional soccer player with Sydney's Northern Spirit, says the decision to compete in this year's Games was not difficult.

In fact, he says, the bridge tragedy is "part of my inspiration to return."

"I want to go there to spread the message that Australia is a country that sticks together. I can understand that some of the bridge victims' families would disapprove, but I hope they understand the motivations behind why we want to go back," he says.

"If I was one of those who were tragically killed in that accident, one of my dying wishes would be for the Australian team to go back and hold their heads up high."

Adding to the pressure is the tense security situation in the Jewish state.

Just last month, the Games were about to be postponed due to security concerns.

It would have been the first time the Games were cancelled since World War II.

At the last minute, however, the Maccabiah steering committee

decided to hold the Games as scheduled. But as a result of the situation, only about 2,000 athletes will compete, instead of the original 5,000, with Australia sending about 60 athletes and officials.

Australia's own preparations were delayed because its decision to return was contingent on the bridge compensation claims being settled. The vast majority have now been resolved, with only a handful still to be finalized.

An Israeli court found five people guilty of negligence in the collapse.

In a verdict issued in April 2000, the court found that the temporary footbridge had been built haphazardly, without any proper plan, foundation or supervision.

Two months later, the court sentenced four of the five defendants to spend up to 21 months in jail for their role in the bridge collapse. The fifth defendant was given a sentence of community service.

One of those attending the Games this year, Melbourne track athlete Zac Ashkanasy, 27, won Australia's first gold medal at the 1997 Games in the 1,500-meter run.

In the following months, he struggled to come to terms with emotions that fluctuated between anger and grief.

As one of the flagbearers leading the Australian team into the opening ceremony, he was on the bridge when it collapsed.

"I thought I was going to die," he says. It took him two years to confront his feelings about the experience.

Ashkanasy strongly believes that returning to the Games is a necessary part of the healing process.

"If you don't go, the resentment you've built up inside will take longer to resolve," he says.

He also believes it is essential for an Australian contingent to be present at the memorial service planned for July 15, the eve of the Games.

Sixth-time Maccabiah participant and Melbourne golfer Robbie Gore, 39, is equally adamant about Australians participating in the Games.

"Not going back is not going to help anyone," Gore says. "It's not meant to trivialize the loss of the victims' families or their sense of bereavement, but we have to go forward."

"We can best honor their memory by continuing to attend the event in which they obviously believed strongly enough to be there in the first place."

The families of the four victims "have always had my sympathies," agrees Sydney golfer Roy Vandersluis, 54.

"No money can replace their loved ones, but the Games will go on regardless."

Despite the security risks, Vandersluis is comfortable with the decision to hold the Games.

"There's a little bit of the attitude that if you don't go, you let the Palestinians win," he says.

"Israel will always be under pressure from Arabs, and it's important that the rest of the world supports them."

In preparation for the Games, the Australian team has attended safety seminars. Yet most members express confidence in Israel's ability to manage security.

Soccer player Jon Pillemer, 33, who will be participating in his fourth Games, is just excited to be going back after all the uncertainty.

"I've played in many other tournaments," he says, "but being Jewish and competing in Maccabiah by far holds my most special memories."