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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Blair backs Palestinian state

British Prime Minister Tony Blair gave his support for the creation of a "viable Palestinian state." Blair made the statement Monday after a 90-minute meeting in London with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Denying that he was shifting British policy to placate Arab states uneasy over the U.S.-led strikes against Afghanistan, Blair said that "a viable Palestinian state, as part of a negotiated and agreed settlement, which guarantees peace and security for Israel, is the objective" of renewed Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Later Monday, British officials said Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Blair agreed to meet in London early next month. A spokesman for Blair said he had spoken to Sharon by phone hours after hosting Arafat. [Page 4]

Brandeis hit by anthrax scare

A suspicious envelope that arrived in the president's office at Brandeis University was found to be harmless.

Classes at the university continued, but two administration buildings were closed while the incident was investigated Monday.

In a related development, Israeli officials are conducting tests on a suspicious white powder found on an El Al cargo plane that arrived Monday from Europe. The area where the powder was found was cleaned and the plane was allowed to take off.

Also on Monday, Israeli police sent six letters to the government's biological laboratory for testing for possible anthrax contamination.

The letters tested negative.

Police have been called to examine more than a dozen letters that bore suspicious signs such as too much postage paid or an unknown sender, a police spokesman said Monday.

Trial of N.J. rabbi begins

The trial of a New Jersey rabbi charged with arranging the death of his wife started Monday.

Rabbi Fred Neulander, who plans to testify in his defense during the trial, has pleaded innocent to the charges.

His wife, Carol, was found beaten to death at the couple's home in 1994.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Deaths of Palestinian protesters provoke domestic crisis for Arafat

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Yasser Arafat is facing what may prove to be the most serious threat to his leadership since he returned from exile in 1994 to lead the Palestinian Authority.

A week after three Palestinians were killed following a Hamas-led demonstration in the Gaza Strip in support of suspected terror mastermind Osama bin Laden, Gaza remains tense.

On Sunday, the families of Palestinians killed during the demonstration threatened to organize mass street protests unless those responsible for the deaths were punished.

The threat was issued a day after a third Palestinian died from wounds suffered during the Oct. 8 clashes. Two died at the demonstration, during which 10 Palestinian police were injured.

The Palestinian Authority rejects accusations that police killed the three, saying "masked men" had opened fire.

Immediately after the demonstration, Palestinian police ordered the closure of several schools, briefly arrested at least one Palestinian journalist who had been critical of the Palestinian Authority, and kept foreign journalists from entering Gaza to prevent coverage of any future demonstrations.

Those restrictions were lifted in subsequent days. On Saturday, Palestinian officials allowed the reopening of two Hamas-run universities, Al-Azhar and the Islamic University.

Just the same, angry students warned that clashes with police would recur if the Palestinian Authority failed to punish those responsible for the three deaths.

Arafat has been in a bind since the Sept. 11 terror attacks against the United States.

Referring to the 1948 incident when Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, ordered the downing of a boat running weapons to dissident Jewish groups that threatened to undermine the central government, one Israeli security source called the current showdown "Arafat's Altalena."

Arafat has been forced to choose between President Bush and bin Laden — and despite bin Laden's popularity among some segments of Palestinian society, he chose Bush, at least initially.

He made the choice as a matter of survival, even if the decision ultimately pits him against Palestinian militants, who overwhelmingly support bin Laden.

Some analysts, however, question Arafat's sincerity, noting that he has done just enough to appear to be taking a stand against terror while leaving himself the option of allowing terror again if he concludes that the Bush administration is not serious about pressing its war against terror globally.

Arafat became the first Arab leader to condemn the attacks against the World Trade Center and Pentagon and express support for the international anti-terror coalition Bush began building.

Bush responded by making two recent statements supporting the creation of a Palestinian state.

The most recent came during a primetime news conference on Oct. 11, when Bush said he believes that if Israel and the Palestinian Authority could end violence and begin political negotiations, then "there ought to be a Palestinian state, the boundaries of which will be negotiated by the parties."

Bush also said the Palestinian state would have to recognize Israel's right to exist

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel withdraws from Hebron

Israeli troops withdrew Monday from Palestinian-controlled areas in the West Bank city of Hebron.

On Oct. 5, Israel seized two neighborhoods in Hebron after Palestinian gunmen repeatedly fired from the hilltop areas at Jewish enclaves in the center of town.

The withdrawal came after Israeli-Palestinian security talks were held Sunday.

Party bolts Sharon coalition

The hawkish National Unity Party resigned Monday from the coalition government of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The party, which holds seven seats in the 120-member Knesset, said it opposed the army's withdrawal from Palestinian-controlled sections of Hebron and the lifting of sanctions against the Palestinians, Israel Radio reported.

Choice of Nobel winners blasted

The speaker of Israel's Knesset protested the awarding of this year's Nobel Peace Prize to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the United Nations.

In a letter to the prize committee that was obtained by Reuters, Avraham Burg cited U.N. handling of a case in which Hezbollah gunmen kidnapped three Israeli soldiers last October.

IDF chief backs off criticism

Israel's army chief of staff backed down after he criticized a government decision to withdraw from two Palestinian neighborhoods in Hebron.

"I regret if anyone was offended and if my statement was worded and understood not as I intended," Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz said Monday. Angered by Mofaz's criticism, Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer had reprimanded him and ordered him not to grant interviews until further notice.

and treat Israel with respect. On Monday, after meeting with Arafat in London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair also gave his support for the creation of a "viable Palestinian state."

Referring to the Bush statements backing Palestinian statehood, Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the Palestinian legislature and spokeswoman for the Arab League, called them a "marked departure from standard operating procedure."

"This is the first time that it is not basically an Israeli" document simply "given an American seal of approval," she said.

While Arafat and Bush are giving each other mutual support, there is a growing rift separating Arafat from radical Palestinian Islamists.

"The present intifada has undergone a process of Islamization," wrote Danny Rubinstein of the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz. "Not in vain is it called 'the Al-Aksa Intifada,'" he said, referring to the Jerusalem mosque where Palestinian violence erupted in September 2000.

Arafat rode the Islamic wave of anti-Israel sentiment from the outset of the intifada. The move both ensured his survival and deflected criticism of Palestinian Authority responsibility for the plight of the Palestinian-ruled territories.

In Israel, right wingers — and even many former peaceniks — saw Arafat's support for the violent uprising and his tolerance of terror as proof that he never really intended to make peace with Israel.

But now, faced with American warnings that Arafat could be considered part of the terrorist camp if he did not come out squarely against bin Laden, Palestinian police arrested several Islamic terrorists for the first time since the intifada began last fall.

But even this was done in typical Arafat fashion: Out of a list of 108 terrorists on Israel's most-wanted list that Israel had asked him to detain, Arafat had only six or eight put under "house arrest" — a comfy status that Israel says is designed to protect the men from possible Israeli reprisals.

At the same time, Palestinian authorities clamped down on media coverage of anti-American protests. Along with the newspaper editor who was arrested, a TV show criticizing a police crackdown of a pro-bin Laden rally was taken off the air.

In an effort to follow up on Bush administration requests to defuse Israeli-Palestinian violence, over the weekend Arafat reportedly reached an agreement with Hamas and Islamic Jihad that the two groups would refrain, at least temporarily, from carrying out terror attacks on Israeli targets.

Publicly, however, there was no sign that the groups had reached such an agreement.

Quite the opposite: Over the weekend, the Islamic groups issued statements vowing to continue the struggle against Israel and again charging that Palestinian police were responsible for killing the three at last week's demonstration.

Maj. Gen. Amos Malka, head of intelligence for the Israel Defense Force, said at the Israeli government's weekly Cabinet meeting Sunday that any agreement between Arafat and the fundamentalists could well prove short-lived.

This opinion was shared by reserve Col. Yonni Fiegel, a former military governor in the West Bank and presently a senior lecturer at the Inter-Disciplinary Academic Center in Herzliyah. Indeed, Fiegel said that "if Islamic militants feel that they want to act inside Israel, they will not necessarily ask for Arafat's permission."

Two incidents in recent days could well spark renewed terror attacks against Israel.

On Sunday, Israeli soldiers shot and killed Abed-Rahman Hamad, a Hamas leader accused of dispatching the suicide bomber who carried out the June 1 attack outside a Tel Aviv disco that killed 21 Israelis.

Hamas vowed that "Israel will pay a very heavy price for this act." Hamad had been arrested by the Palestinian Authority in June, but was released in August.

On Monday, an Islamic militant was killed in an explosion in the West Bank city of Nablus. Palestinian officials said Israel was behind the death of Hamas member Ahmed Marshoud, but Israel had no immediate comment.

It remains to be seen how far Arafat will go to stop any threats to his authority from Hamas or Islamic Jihad.

"The question is whether he is willing to risk a civil war to enforce his will," Fiegel said.

On the other hand, he added, Arafat might be more inclined to pursue a "shoot and talk" policy, which "he has long been accustomed to" when dealing with Israel. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Ex-envoys press Bush on Mideast

A group of former U.S. ambassadors and State Department officials urged President Bush to become more engaged in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because solving the conflict would hamper enemies of the United States looking for recruits for further terrorist actions.

"Until Palestinians and Israelis can live normal lives," the ambassadors wrote, "Americans, too, are unlikely to be assured a return to domestic security and tranquility." The group included Edward Walker, a former ambassador to Israel, and former State Department officials Joseph Sisco and Thomas Pickering.

Birthright extends deadline

A program that sends young Jews on free trips to Israel extended its registration deadline to Nov. 5 in the hopes of attracting more participants for winter trips.

Officials with Birthright Israel, which has approximately 8,000 North American Jews signed up this year compared to 25,000 at this time last year, attribute the reduced registrations to the fact that Americans have been hesitant to make travel plans in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Attendance up at AIPAC summit

Attendance at the national summit of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in Boston is three times more than originally anticipated, an AIPAC spokesperson said.

The large number of participants at the weekend summit is a reflection of concern among American Jews about the situation in the Middle East and domestically following the Sept. 11 attacks, the spokesman added.

During the summit, the group of 270 major donors listened to addresses by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres via satellite from Israel, and by two U.S. officials, House Minority Leader Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) and Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.).

Praying prompts flight fears

A Delta Air Lines flight from Atlanta to Newark was diverted to Charlotte, N.C., on Sunday after passengers complained of two "Middle Eastern" men who were huddled in the back of the plane speaking a language other than English.

After the plane landed in Charlotte, investigators found that the two were Orthodox Jews who were saying prayers during the flight.

"Everybody is kind of on edge, and it just doesn't take much to upset a lot of people," an official at the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport was quoted as saying.

The flight continued to Newark after officials were satisfied there was no threat.

N.Y. services for WTC tragedy end period of Jewish mourning

By Amy Sara Clark

NEW YORK (JTA) — Like hundreds of thousands of other New Yorkers, Shira Klein has had a difficult month since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

So last week, Klein attended one of three major services being held here on the shloshim, the end of the month of mourning that marks the Jewish grieving for the dead.

"I needed to come and be a participant as a member of a community," said Klein, a music teacher and performer. "I came for the depth of the ritual of shloshim. I hadn't realized that it had been 30 days. I believe very much in the Jewish way of honoring time. I knew that I needed to come back to the community."

Klein was one of approximately 500 people who gathered on the evening of Oct. 11 at the New York Society for Ethical Culture in Manhattan.

Organized by the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan, the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services and Upper West Side congregations, the memorial included cello and choral performances and group singing led by singer Debbie Friedman.

Few of the participants who came to the evening service lost family members in the attacks.

But many of them came because they wanted to support those who did lose people on Sept. 11, and because they felt the need to come together as a community.

Some were most touched by the group singing — during one song, audience members linked arms and swayed — some by the poetry, and others by the individual testimonies remembering victims.

"They were mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, children, lovers and friends," Rabbi Joy Levitt of the JCC in Manhattan said during her invocation. "Each person a whole world. Each person a tragic loss. Each person irreplaceable."

Firefighter Stuart Keane of Ladder Company 19 spoke at the service, remembering several of his friends who died during the attack.

"Pete thought he could borrow some gear from the fire station across from the Trade Center," Keane said of one friend. "He went in, borrowed some gear and left a note with his wallet and keys. The note said, 'I'm with ladder 42. Please hold my stuff. Tell my family I love them.' Pete is still missing."

If this memorial was part spiritual gathering and part sing-along, a memorial service earlier that day at Manhattan's Park East Synagogue was more traditional.

That service — attended by some 300 — featured reflections by Jewish leaders, Jewish liturgy and speakers who honored firefighters involved in rescue efforts.

The specter of the Holocaust was apparent at the service, which was co-sponsored by American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors.

Rabbi Arthur Schneier, Park East's spiritual leader and several other Holocaust survivors drew parallels between the Holocaust and the attacks on the World Trade Center. Shana Grossman, the 11-year-old granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor, lit yahrzeit candles to honor those killed in the attacks.

The service focused not just on the loss of Jewish life but also on non-Jews killed on Sept. 11.

Several firefighters from a local fire station were honored at the service, and a priest who was attending the service joined the speakers on the podium.

The service ended with the singing of "God Bless America."

Corinne Nhaissi attended the service along with her eighth-grade class from the day school affiliated with the synagogue.

Nhaissi, whose mother worked across the street from the World Trade Center but escaped unharmed, said she still has nightmares about the attacks.

Last Friday morning, a third shloshim service took place.

Held at Ground Zero, the service included representatives of some 40 national Jewish organizations as well as New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani's chief of staff, Tony Carbonetti.

Giuliani was slated to speak but had to cancel at the last minute in order to deal with anthrax attacks in the city. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Arafat, Blair use their meeting to send messages to the world

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — British Jews are taking Prime Minister Tony Blair's support for a Palestinian state in stride.

But they say Blair should make clear to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat that terror against Israel is no different — and no less reprehensible — than the Sept. 11 attacks against the United States.

Blair met Arafat in London on Monday as part of Blair's effort to maintain the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism.

As President Bush did recently, Blair expressed his support for a Palestinian state "as part of a negotiated and agreed settlement which guarantees peace and security for Israel."

Blair also praised Arafat for "his efforts to control violent rejectionist groups within the ranks of the Palestinian people."

"I recognize that Palestinian violence has significantly reduced in the last week," he said.

Arafat's police apparently killed three Palestinians last week in suppressing a pro-Osama bin Laden demonstration in the Gaza Strip, and recently detained a handful of Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants wanted by Israel.

Israel claims the arrests are essentially a cosmetic measure designed to shield the militants from Israeli reprisal.

Arafat, for his part, said that he condemned all forms of terrorism, "including state-sponsored terrorism," a reference to Israel. He also called for the immediate resumption of peace talks.

An Israeli spokesman responded with praise for Blair, but was skeptical about Arafat.

"We welcome Tony Blair's reaffirmation of commitment to the Middle East peace process," said D.J. Schneeweis, a spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in London.

"Not only has he expressed his support for a Palestinian state, but Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and former Prime Minister Ehud Barak have expressed willingness to discuss the idea on the assumption that such a state would be a force for peace and stability in the region," he said.

But, he added, "this is a key test that Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority has failed abysmally so far."

A leading British Jewish analyst said the meeting served an important purpose for Arafat.

"Blair is serving as a stalking horse for George Bush, softening up American politicians and media so that Arafat can go to America," said Barry Kosmin, director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, a London-based think tank.

The terror attack on America put Arafat in an uncomfortable position. Having used, or at least allowed, terror by Hamas and Islamic Jihad — and even by members of his private guard — during the yearlong Palestinian uprising against Israel, Arafat is worried that the Palestinian Authority might be targeted in a concerted international anti-terror effort.

At the same time, as suspected terrorist mastermind bin Laden tried to use the Palestinian issue to whip up Arab and Muslim anger at America, Arafat had tremendous leverage over Bush in his efforts to mollify the Arab world.

Bush, and now Blair, have made several statements in recent weeks backing the idea of a Palestinian state. The Bush administra-

tion reportedly has prepared a new Mideast peace initiative, and Blair on Monday called on Sharon to return to peace talks despite continuing Palestinian violence.

Arafat, for his part, is showing his support for the Western coalition against bin Laden.

"The last thing he wants to do is repeat the mistake of the Gulf War," when he backed Saddam Hussein, Kosmin said. "He's been trying to work out who's going to win the war, and now he's come down. He assumes the Americans are serious this time."

To demonstrate his support for the West, Arafat uses forums like the meeting with Blair to "send messages to the Palestinians of what he wants them to do," Kosmin said.

Arafat, who speaks English, spoke only Arabic during his appearance with Blair. Critics of the Palestinian leader often have accused him of saying one thing to international audiences — in English — while sending a different message to his own people in Arabic.

If Arafat's condemnation of terrorism "discourages even three or four guys from blowing themselves up on the streets on Netanya, that's positive," Kosmin said.

A British vice president of the World Jewish Congress welcomed any pressure Blair may have put on Arafat to stop Palestinian terrorism.

"I hope the prime minister made clear to Arafat that all terrorism, whether in the United States or in the Middle East, must be condemned," said Lord Janner. "Suicide bombers and extremists are a universal menace, and their fanaticism should never be rewarded."

An Israeli source backed that sentiment, voicing an "assumption" that in their meeting, Blair made it clear to Arafat that violence against Israelis had to stop.

The source cautiously welcomed the Blair-Arafat talks.

"We have no problem with renewed British involvement in the peace process, as long as Israel is not excluded," said an Israeli source who asked not be named.

Israel has been furious at some recent British diplomatic moves in the Middle East, such as comments made in an Iranian newspaper by Foreign Secretary Jack Straw that appeared to sympathize with terrorist attacks against Israel.

But Britain has learned from that mistake, the Israeli source said.

"Trying to score points with the Arabs at Israel's expense is going to backfire," the source said.

London is making "a clear effort to keep Israel in the loop" during the Arafat visit, the source added. Straw spoke to Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres the night before the visit, and Blair phoned Sharon after speaking to Arafat.

A spokesman for Blair said Blair and Sharon would meet in London next month. The Israeli source said Israel is prepared to be reasonable regarding a Palestinian state.

"Obviously, there will be angry noises coming out of Israel from right-wingers who believe that everything Arafat does is inherently bad," the source said. "But fundamentally, Sharon and the Labor party are willing to pay a political price to do what is responsible and appropriate."

However, the source added that Britain had to press Arafat for action, not just words. "What Arafat has done is frozen the situation, not rolled it back," the source said. "I don't know if it's in the freezer or in the fridge, but what Arafat has to do is cook up a whole new broth." □