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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Sharon vows war on terror

Ariel Sharon pledged to fight, and win, Israel's war against Palestinian terrorism.

In a special address to the nation Monday, the Israeli prime minister repeatedly said that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat is responsible for the continued terrorism against Israel.

After the speech, Sharon convened his Cabinet to decide on Israel's next steps in the fight against Palestinian terrorism.

Israel fires at Palestinian targets

Israeli helicopters fired at least nine missiles Monday at targets near the headquarters of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat in Gaza City. The missiles hit the barracks of Arafat's presidential guard. They also destroyed several of Arafat's personal helicopters, as well as a helipad there. Arafat was in the West Bank city of Ramallah at the time of the attack.

About two hours later, Israeli warplanes fired missiles at a Palestinian police post in the West Bank city of Jenin.

The White House implicitly supported the Israeli air strikes.

"Obviously Israel has the right to defend itself, and the president understands that clearly," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

Holocaust hero dies

Gerhart Riegner, who first alerted the world to the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews, died Monday in Switzerland at the age of 90.

Riegner was working for the World Jewish Congress in August 1942 when he sent a now-famous cable to England and the United States.

"Received alarming report" that the Nazis are discussing a plan "according to which all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany, numbering 3-1/2 to 4 million, should, after deportation and concentration in east, be exterminated," the cable read.

The State Department, however, said it would not pass on cables from private sources. "Never did I feel so strongly the sense of abandonment, powerlessness and loneliness as when I sent messages of disaster and horror to the free world and no one believed me," Riegner later wrote.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Arafat makes arrests, but Israelis doubt he will ever mean business

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Shortly after Sunday's fatal bus bombing in Haifa, Mohammad Dahlan, head of Palestinian security in the Gaza Strip, phoned Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

His request: Hold Israeli fire and give the Palestinian Authority "a few extra days" to act against Palestinian terrorist groups.

"Just like we did in 1996," Dahlan said, referring to the strong measures the Palestinian Authority took against Hamas and Islamic Jihad following a similar series of massive terrorist attacks in February and March of 1996.

It's not known what Peres answered Dahlan, but Israel's response came indirectly with Monday's air raid on Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's headquarters in Gaza and the demolition of his private helicopter fleet.

With Hamas and Islamic Jihad acting underground, Israel was unable to aim directly at terrorist targets.

Instead, it attacked the symbols of power of Arafat, the man it considers responsible for the infrastructure of Palestinian terror.

It was a two-fold message. First, it showed Arafat that his political status, if not his personal security, is on the line. Second, it showed that Israel no longer has any faith in Arafat's frequent pledges that this time he really, really means it when he says he will crack down on terror.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government does not believe that the reported arrests of more than 100 militants indicate a genuine plan to end Palestinian terrorism. In Sharon's words, Arafat has built "an empire of lies" that Israel may one day have to destroy.

In an address to the nation Monday on his return from the United States, Sharon said repeatedly that Arafat himself is responsible for the carnage Palestinian suicide bombers wreaked this past weekend — despite Arafat's condemnations of the attacks and his initial steps to round up terror suspects.

Past experience has shown many Israelis that it is foolhardy to trust that Arafat means business.

Too many times, they say, he has vowed to take action against the terrorists, and he orders some well-publicized arrests.

A few days later, however, when international pressure eases, the terrorists are quietly released from jail. Attacks then soon slowly escalate to or beyond their previous level.

An eternal question remains unchanged for Israeli policymakers: Is Arafat unable to crack down on the terror groups, or does he simply not want to?

Either choice is bad news for Israel, as it presents little hope of curbing terrorism as long as Arafat remains in power.

Palestinian officials say Arafat is making the utmost effort to curb terror, but that Israel's military actions push him into a corner.

"Israel does not let Arafat rule," protested Hisham Abdul Razek, a member of the Palestinian Cabinet. "Arafat cannot act" against the terrorists "because of the way Israel tries to force its will on him."

Abdul Razek added one more sentence that may serve as a clue to the political mentality of the P.A. leadership.

"The Palestinian Authority desires very much" to put an end to terrorism, he said,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Netanyahu: Topple Arafat

In a speech at Yeshiva University's Chanukah dinner, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel should give the Palestinian leader no more than several hours to "crush" terror groups before launching its own attack that would destroy the Palestinian Authority.

Echoing President Bush's ultimatum to the Taliban, Netanyahu said Israel should tell Arafat: "Surrender terrorism or surrender power" — and if he doesn't do it, "out he goes, just like that."

With the weekend's suicide bombings still fresh in the public consciousness, Israel must act quickly to mobilize American public opinion for a decisive strike, Netanyahu said, or "the naysayers in Washington will win the day instead of us."

Suicide bombers' kin arrested

Israel arrested nine relatives of the two Palestinians who carried out Saturday night's suicide bombings in Jerusalem. The two were residents of Abu Dis, located on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

Hamass leader said under arrest

Palestinian officials said they placed the spiritual leader of Hamas under house arrest and ordered him not to speak with reporters. However, the family of Sheik Ahmed Yassin said there were no restrictions on his movement. Palestinian security officials also said they arrested more than 100 militants, but some Israeli officials dismissed the arrests as a sham.

Newspapers call for war

Israeli papers reflected public anger after the weekend terror attacks. "We are at war," said a banner headline in Yediot Achronot.

Ma'ariv wrote in a front-page editorial that "Israel must embark on an offensive that will obliterate Palestinian terror."



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"but Israel must allow the Palestinian Authority to do it with dignity."

"Dignity" is a frequent motif in the Palestinian lexicon. Several years ago, Palestinians complained that former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu humiliated Arafat when for a time he refused to meet him or shake his hand. They also complained that former Prime Minister Ehud Barak humiliated them during the Camp David negotiations.

Now, they say, "the air raid against Arafat's helicopters was designed to humiliate him."

The political logic behind it is that a humiliated leader cannot convince his people to make compromises.

Many Israelis, however, consider this a cop-out that allows the Palestinians to shirk responsibility for their political ineptitude. Rejection of Israeli peace offers and 14 months of violent uprising can hardly be explained by claiming that Barak spoke brusquely at Camp David or omitted some of Arafat's honorifics when addressing the P.A. leader, they say.

In any case, taking offense may be too much of a luxury for Arafat right now. Put simply — say observers both here and abroad — his time for sitting on the fence is finished.

"Arafat now has his last 24 hours to make a switch," Middle East expert Yosef Ginat of Haifa University predicted Sunday.

If Arafat does not take real measures to stop Palestinian terrorism, he will seal his doom, Ginat said.

Still, Israel was not expected to take direct measures against Arafat.

"We have no intention to destroy the Palestinian Authority," Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer said. The message: No one will try to kill Arafat, and his freedom of movement will not be curbed.

However, if Monday's air strikes in Gaza and the West Bank are only the beginning of Israeli retaliation, further blows to the Palestinian Authority infrastructure could mortally wound Arafat's political standing. That, in turn, might lead indirectly to his downfall.

Ghazi Abu-Jihad of the Fatah movement in Gaza advised Israel not to rush into toppling Arafat. "Whoever believes that getting rid of Arafat will bring peace and quiet is totally wrong," he said.

But some Israelis, Sharon among them, do not accept the common wisdom that the alternative to Arafat will only be worse.

Sharon even has spoken mockingly of those who threaten that Hamas will surely take over.

Sharon's political rival, Netanyahu, has a similar view regarding a possible Arafat successor.

Speaking in New York on Sunday, Netanyahu said plainly that Israel should give Arafat just several hours to "crush" the Palestinian terror groups — and if he doesn't do it, "out he goes, just like that."

The identity of Arafat's successor is irrelevant, Netanyahu said.

"Whoever replaces Arafat will understand that if he engages in terror, he will not survive very long in power," he said.

Some influential Palestinians, like Sari Nusseibeh, the Palestinian official in charge of Jerusalem, came out openly against the latest wave of terrorism, arguing that it only damages the Palestinian cause. Others expressed their opinion — quietly — that Arafat is not powerful enough to tame the situation.

By Monday night, it seemed Israel had given up on Arafat as a partner for negotiations.

If that is the case, Ginat suggested, Israel might one day see the implementation of a plan suggested in the past by a former head of the Mossad, Shabtai Shavit, and currently championed by Avigdor Lieberman of the far-right National Union — Israel, Our Home faction.

Shavit suggested dividing the Palestinian Authority into cantons, each with its own warlord and its own record of behavior.

Those with good behavior will enjoy Israeli benefits. while those who support terrorism will be heavily punished.

This might prove an effective formula — on paper, at least.

In practice, however, Israel's current options are far from ideal. □

JEWISH WORLD

Germany funds Latvian memorial

Germany funded a memorial in Latvia to Jews murdered in the Holocaust.

The \$242,000 memorial was placed at Bikernieku forest, an area just east of the capital, Riga, where Nazis shot some 30,000 Jews from across Europe in 1941 and 1942.

Victims' cities of origin are engraved on miniature obelisks that fill a hollowed-out section of the forest floor, symbolizing the pits where Jews were forced to lie on the bodies of previous victims before being shot.

A capsule inside the memorial also contains the names of Latvian Jews deported to their deaths.

Last Friday's event came on the anniversary of the killing of 28,000 Latvian and Lithuanian Jews at another forest, Rumbula. That site has a memorial to "victims of the fascists" that is barely noticeable, situated behind a used car market on the Moscow-Riga highway.

France to probe Shoah deniers

France's minister of education appointed a commission of historians to examine the influence of Holocaust-denying professors at the University of Lyon III.

The move by Jack Lang was prompted by a campaign waged by the Union of Jewish Students of France and other student organizations to publicize the Holocaust-denial research of a group of scholars with strong ties to extreme right groups.

The students also want some recent doctoral theses that sought to minimize the Holocaust to be nullified.

The commission, which is headed by a leading historian of wartime France, Henry Rousso, plans to render its judgment by April.

The students hope the commission's conclusions will play a role in the selection of the next university president in July 2002.

The current president, Gilles Guyot, has defended the scholars and theses in question, and has threatened legal action against the students.

Canadian chain cuts 'Mein Kampf'

The largest book retailer in Canada has pulled Hitler's "Mein Kampf." Indigo Books banished what it called the "hate literature" from its store shelves and from the chain's Web site.

The move came after Indigo CEO Heather Reisman said she was appalled to find a copy of the book prominently displayed in one of the chain's stores. Indigo also operates stores under the names Chapters, Coles, SmithBooks and World's Biggest Bookstore.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jerusalem businesses reawaken from weekend nightmare of terror

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It isn't the first time that Charlotte Rosensweig is sweeping up broken glass outside her store on Ben-Yehuda Street. And it probably won't be the last time, says her daughter, Etti Doron, who was busy tidying up her family's stamp shop after the suicide bombings here on Saturday night killed at least 10 young Israelis.

"I'm not even sure why we go through this whole process," Doron said, pointing out the new glass in the storefront. "It's not like there are any tourists coming anyway."

The streets of downtown Jerusalem were fairly quiet Monday afternoon, less than 48 hours after two bombers blew themselves up in a crowd of teen-agers.

Most of the passers-by were stopping at two makeshift memorials on the Ben-Yehuda pedestrian mall, where dozens of memorial candles and flower wreaths commemorated the 10 young men.

Traditional black-and-white printed memorial flyers at the memorial listed the names of the victims, all but two of whom were from Jerusalem: Assaf Avitan, 15; Michael Moshe Dahan, 20; Israel Ya'akov Danino, 17; Yosef Elezra, 18; Sgt. Nir Heftzdi, 19; Yuri Korganov, 20, from Ma'aleh Adumim; Moshe Yedid Levy, 19; Golan Tourjeman, 15; Guy Vaknin, 19; and Adam Weinstein, 14, from Givon Hahadasha.

Avitan and Tourjeman were next-door neighbors.

"Guy, we'll remember you forever," read one hand-printed sign hanging from a lamppost.

Vaknin loved hanging out in Jerusalem's city center, according to his friends and family.

Teen-agers gathered around the two memorial sites, some reading psalms, others weeping. One boy ran to a nearby flower shop to buy a bunch of red-and-violet anemones, which he placed near a sign bearing his friend's name.

Except for some shards of glass still littering the cobblestones, there were few remaining signs of the horrors of the Saturday night attack. Most of the stores have already had their windows replaced. In one cell-phone store, a plasterer filled the holes in the ceiling, as other workmen repaired the shop's shelves.

But the Sweet T-shirt store, just two doors down from the stamp shop, is still a gaping hole. Everything, from the ceiling down to the floor has to be replaced, said Mayer Pruess, an employee who was standing outside the shop.

"They had to take it all out because it was full of blood, the suicide bomber's blood," he said.

The police told Pruess and his boss that the suicide bomber had the bomb strapped to his back, which was facing their shop. When he detonated himself, his body parts were blown into the store.

"I've never seen anything so horrible in my life," said Pruess, who immigrated to Israel from South America. "The blood and the smell, the pieces of flesh scattered throughout the shop. I can't sleep, I can't eat. I can't even explain in Spanish what the scene was like."

For many of the store owners along Ben-Yehuda, the Saturday night attacks could mean the end of their business. Stamp-shop owner Rosensweig, who has been in business since 1939, said this year was one of the worst in recent memory.

Pruess said his boss was probably going to close the T-shirt store because of the dearth of tourists. "There haven't been customers, and now there definitely won't be any," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

Meanwhile, life appeared to be returning to normal on Rav Kook Street, where a car bomb was set off Saturday night, but claimed no victims. Cabs and van services were driving in and out of the taxi stand, embarking on their usual routes around town.

Meanwhile, soldiers and police swarmed the intersections and main streets of Jerusalem, keeping an eye out for any suspicious people. They sat on the red and white construction barriers surrounding Zion Square, currently undergoing a major renovation.

"Life goes on," said one policeman who was guarding Zion Square, located near the pedestrian mall. "Where else are the kids going to hang out, if not here?" □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Court won't hold rabbis liable for sharing congregants' secrets

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Can you sue your rabbi for not keeping a secret?

According to New York state's highest civil legal authorities, rabbis are not liable for squealing on you — but at least your secret will be inadmissible as evidence in court.

The question arose in a recent ruling by New York's Court of Appeals, which dismissed a suit by Chani Lightman of Long Island. The court ruled that the First Amendment prevents it from ruling in cases that would require an interpretation of religious law.

Lightman, who is now divorced, sued two Orthodox rabbis after they told her husband that she had acknowledged "seeing another man in a social setting" and discontinuing certain ritual practices, including going to the mikvah, or ritual bath.

The rabbis — Tzvi Flaum of Queens and David Weinberger of Lawrence, N.Y. — said they felt a religious obligation to notify Lightman's husband, since Orthodox Jews are not supposed to have sexual relations if the wife has not gone to the mikvah.

In addition, the rabbis argued they did not know the information was secret, since other people had been present when Lightman spoke to them.

The case highlights how rabbis' approach to secrets differs from priests' — whose religion forbids them from divulging information shared in confession — and even from that of lawyers and therapists.

Jewish leaders say rabbis generally are discreet with personal information. However, like other professionals, rabbis feel compelled to divulge secret information if it poses a threat to other people, such as plans to commit a crime or hurt someone.

But unbeknownst to some congregants seeking counsel, many rabbis also feel they must share information that poses a religious problem for others.

Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, said he might divulge religious transgressions if they affected other people.

For example, if a congregant said he or she was bringing nonkosher food into a kosher kitchen or pretended to have had a Jewish divorce in order to remarry, Meyers would share the information with the people affected.

First, however, he would suggest the person come clean.

In the case of the secretly nonkosher kitchen, "I'd say, 'You must say to your family what you're doing. You're causing your family religious harm,'" Meyers said.

Only if the person refused would Meyers approach the other family members.

Whether Lightman's husband was indeed in religious danger from his wife's behavior is up for debate. Lightman apparently told the rabbis she was not having sex with her husband, so she was not causing him to violate commandments on family purity.

In addition, some have criticized the rabbis for divulging the information because Lightman's husband later tried to use it against her in a custody dispute.

Esther Macner, a New York attorney who chairs the lawyers and judges division of Emunah of America, an Orthodox Zionist organization that until recently admitted only women, said she

supports the court's decision. "Society cannot and should not regulate rabbis or any religious clergy, because they then get into the big problem of violating the separation of church and state," Macner said.

However, she disapproves of the rabbis' behavior in this case, since the fact that Lightman was not having sex with her husband meant she was not causing her husband to commit a transgression.

Blu Greenberg, president of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, echoed Macner's support for the courts but displeasure with the rabbis. Lightman "had the misfortune to confide in two rabbis who had neither a sense of responsibility to her nor compassion to her, nor integrity to at least inform her of their intentions of what they were about to do," Greenberg said.

The court ruling is a reminder that congregants should be careful and evaluate their rabbis' integrity, rather than think they can fall back on the protection of the law, Macner said. Psychiatrists, lawyers and other professionals face legal sanctions if they violate confidentiality regulations.

"The next time you go to a rabbi to spill out your heart, know there isn't any governmental regulation that will punish the rabbi for disclosing what you say," Macner said.

However, she said, the decision is good because it means that rabbis "don't have to be scared that if they follow what they think are dictates of halachah" or Jewish law, "they are going to be hit with a lawsuit."

Rabbi Tzvi Blanchard, director of organizational development at CLAL: The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, said "people are naively trusting with respect to rabbinic figures, and the only antidote to that is full disclosure of the ground rules."

Lightman "probably felt, and many people think when speaking to a rabbi, that they're speaking to someone on their side," Blanchard said. "But that's not true for all rabbis. These rabbis felt their moral role as community leaders overruled their responsibility to" Lightman.

Blanchard, who is an Orthodox rabbi, said part of the dilemma is that there is no consensus code of ethics for rabbis.

"When people come to talk to rabbis, they don't know what the limits are," he said. Rabbis could avoid some problems by stating up front what their approach to confidentiality is, he said.

Meyers said his policy has always been to say, "I will try to keep this confidential, but I'd like to hear what you're going to tell me first." Despite these exceptional cases, Meyers said, "The public generally will find that clergy are quite good at keeping confidences."

Rabbi Steven Dworken, executive vice president of Orthodoxy's Rabbinical Council of America — which includes the rabbis in the Lightman case — said he is pleased they were vindicated.

"Were they held culpable it would truly interfere with their roles as religious and moral leaders and teachers of Torah," he said. "What they did was within halachic parameters. They were trying to prevent a serious transgression within Judaism."

Rabbi Paul Menitoff, executive vice president of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis, said he agreed with the ruling.

However, he expressed concern that it would "convey the wrong impression to rank-and-file members of congregations, that if they go to a rabbi they can't count on him or her keeping what they say in a counseling relationship confidential." □