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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Seven killed in bus bombing

A Palestinian suicide bomber killed seven people and wounded more than 30 in northern Israel on Wednesday morning.

A number of Israeli Arabs were among the dead, Israel Radio reported.

The bombing took place on an Egged bus near the Israeli Arab town of Umm el-Fahm, which is close to Afula.

The bus was ripped in two by the large quantity of explosives carried by the bomber.

The Palestinian Authority denounced the "operation," saying it opposed attacks on civilians within Israel proper. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the blast.

In other violence, an Israeli was wounded in a shooting attack near the West Bank city of Nablus. [Page 4]

U.S.: Arafat must do more

Wednesday's suicide bombing shows that Yasser Arafat must intensify his efforts to end violence, a senior U.S. official said.

If the United States is convinced that the Palestinian Authority president is committed to a cease-fire plan, Vice President Dick Cheney could meet with him as early as Monday, the official said.

The meeting reportedly would take place in Egypt. [Page 4]

Rabbi endorses divorce standards

Israel's chief Ashkenazic rabbi has pledged to recognize and cooperate only with those rabbinical courts outside Israel that adopt a set of standards on divorce issues.

In addition to Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, several key rabbis and Orthodox groups around the world — including the Orthodox Union and Rabbinical Council of America — have endorsed the standards, promoted by the Brooklyn-based L'maan B'nos Yisrael International, an advocacy group for agunot, or women whose husbands refuse to grant them Jewish divorces.

Among the standards is the requirement that provision of a get, or Jewish divorce, be the first step in divorce proceedings.

The standards were designed to help women navigate the rabbinical court system, which many have accused of favoring men.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish leaders note U.S. rhetoric, but say Israel ties not at crisis point

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Bush administration has been exerting increased pressure on Israel during Vice President Dick Cheney's tour of the Middle East, but Jewish leaders say the U.S.-Israeli relationship has not reached a crisis point.

While they are closely watching U.S. rhetoric, Jewish leaders are "far from panicked about the situation," said Martin Raffel, associate executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. "We believe the United States and Israel are cooperating and consulting."

Many pro-Israel activists concede that U.S. pressure on Israel played at least a part in Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's decision to drop his demand for a week of quiet before starting security negotiations and before Israeli troops withdrew from Palestinian-ruled areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which they did this week.

Sharon also agreed to lift a travel ban imposed on Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat after a series of devastating terror attacks against Israel in December.

Israel had kept Arafat confined to his Ramallah headquarters since then, demanding that he arrest the Palestinians who assassinated Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi in October. The Palestinians arrested several suspects in recent months.

But many say the pressure is due to a rare convergence of factors, and is not a major policy shift for the Americans.

The first factor is the vice president's travels. Cheney's goal in the Middle East was to garner support from Arab states for an eventual U.S. attack on Iraq. His delegation was concerned that Arab leaders would demand greater American effort to mediate the Israeli-Palestinian problem before listening to the U.S. case against Iraq.

The need to focus on Iraq led the Bush administration to dispatch envoy Anthony Zinni back to the region last week to try to negotiate a cease-fire, and pressure Israel to aid the effort.

Despite the dispatch of Zinni, Cheney was met at each stop with tough questions, both publicly and privately, about U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and with strong requests for more pressure on Israel.

Cheney has "been listening to a symphony" of concern from Arab states, which is influencing his comments, said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League. "The United States is calibrating its policies without changing them."

The second major factor has been increasingly aggressive military actions by the Sharon government. While most American Jewish leaders have justified the attacks, calling them reprisals for Palestinian violence, they note that the level of violence — and Sharon's bellicose rhetoric — warranted U.S. condemnation.

American Jewish leaders note that comments urging Israeli withdrawals and restraint have been heard throughout the 18-month Palestinian intifada, though this time the criticism of Israel is especially severe. The American calls are making news this time, in part, because the Israeli leadership is acceding to the demands.

Some argue that the most significant development is the change in tone by Sharon, and is based mostly on pressures from both the right and left wings of the Israeli unity government.

While a small right-wing party withdrew from the government this month because it felt Sharon was not being aggressive enough, the Labor Party — and many Israeli voters — were increasingly critical of Sharon's moves. "All these things coming

MIDEAST FOCUS

Jerusalem terror way up

Attempted terror attacks in Jerusalem increased by 500 percent last year. There were 50 terror attacks or attempted attacks in 2001, according to Jerusalem police.

Twenty-nine people died in the 2001 attacks, compared with two in 2000. So far there have been 25 such attacks in 2002, 10 of which have been thwarted by police.

Israel must compensate victims

Israel must compensate the families of two Palestinian victims of the first intifada, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled.

The judges determined that Israeli soldiers killed one of the Palestinians and injured the other in August 1988 in a police action, not in an act of war.

Together in death

Fallen Israeli soldiers who are not considered Jewish can be buried in the Jewish section of military cemeteries.

The new directive, ordered by Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, came after Lt. German Rozhkov, a Russian immigrant soldier killed in a clash with terrorists, was buried in the non-Jewish section of a military cemetery. Rozhkov, whose father is Jewish but mother is not, was not considered Jewish by Israel's Orthodox rabbinate.

Rabbis OK armed worshipers

Israel's chief rabbis are permitting worshipers to carry weapons and use cell phones to protect their synagogues over Passover. Jewish law forbids touching weapons and electronics on Shabbat and holidays except in emergencies, but — responding to the threat of terror attacks on synagogues and a special request from the Religious Affairs Ministry — the rabbinate is agreeing to new measures.

together make it seem like a change in policy," Foxman said. "But they are responding to circumstances."

American Jewish leaders say the new American dynamic mainly is a shift in tone, but several said they will continue to monitor the situation. They note that the important gauge for determining a change in U.S. policy will be administration rhetoric after Cheney returns to the United States.

"We will be watching to see what statements are made by senior members of the administration," Raffel said. "Are comments about Israeli defensive actions a one-time situation, or are they going to be expressed more regularly?"

Foxman said the concerns Sharon raised shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks — questioning whether Israel would be sacrificed to aggressors the way Czechoslovakia was before World War II — still loom in the back of the minds of some American Jewish leaders. Though the comments were dismissed at the time, the possibility that the analogy is accurate still worries Jewish leaders.

There also is growing concern that not enough pressure is being placed on Arafat to rein in violence.

While the Bush administration has condemned Arafat frequently over the past few months, those comments recently have become fewer — and, of more concern to Jewish leaders, often coupled with comments condemning Israeli actions.

Specifically, some Jewish groups want the Bush administration to define the consequences if Arafat ignores American demands. While Sharon is making concessions — including allowing U.S. monitors in the region — Jewish leaders are concerned that not enough attention is being paid to what should happen if the Palestinian leadership fails to uphold its commitments.

"It doesn't matter what Israel does, it doesn't matter what the U.S. does," said one Jewish leader, who argues that Arafat holds most of the cards.

"The United States and Israel share the view that it's basically up to the Palestinian leadership to move to take effective measures to bring violence on the Palestinian side under control and end incitement," Raffel said. "If that doesn't happen, there will be no cease-fire, no pathway to the Mitchell plan."

The plan, devised by an international commission led by former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell, laid out a series of confidence-building measures that would follow a cease-fire and lead to renewed diplomatic negotiations.

However, Jewish leaders were pleased that Cheney chose not to meet with Arafat during his Middle East trip.

Morton Klein, national president of the Zionist Organization of America, said Bush administration policy has been consistently bad for Israel.

"There has been some increase in the hostile rhetoric to Israel, but the policy has been essentially the same since day one," Klein said. "They have continued to try and appease the Arab regimes."

Some Jewish groups praise the movements by the United States and Israel.

"I think a more hands-on, balanced approach is sustainable, as long as they see results on the ground," said Lewis Roth, assistant executive director of Americans for Peace Now.

Roth said the parties must work simultaneously on both the security and political planes if they hope to see results.

That long has been a Palestinian demand, while Sharon — and the United States — had insisted until recently that the diplomatic process could not resume until the Palestinian offensive against Israel ended.

Anything else, Sharon had insisted, would amount to a reward for Palestinian violence.

"The 'military-only' approach simply doesn't work," Roth said. "As bitter a pill as it may be to swallow, Israel won't have the type of security it deserves until there is a political approach."

Steven Cohen, an analyst for the Israel Policy Forum, said the greater U.S. involvement is important, but it shouldn't be done solely to garner Arab support for a possible attack against Iraq.

"We understand that the war on terrorism and the war on Palestinian terrorism need to be addressed by serious American policy," Cohen said. "The administration has been very careful to try and keep all of these issues linked in the minds of the Arab world. We have to do what we can to de-link them by dealing with each of these separately." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Israel, Jews blast Annan leak

Israel and American Jewish groups criticized Kofi Annan for his letter blasting the Jewish state's recent military offensive against the Palestinians.

"The tactic of using the media for selective criticism" is "at the least counterproductive," the Israeli mission to the United Nations said. "It is regrettable that the secretary general's letter fails to reflect the basic fact that it is Palestinian terrorists that are deliberately targeting civilians."

In his letter, which he released to the press Monday, Annan accused Israel of launching illegitimate attacks on Palestinian civilians.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations said the letter, and Annan's reference days earlier to Israel's "illegal" occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, "undermine his credibility and confidence in the U.N. Secretariat and further compromise the international body."

Study: 1.5 million Jews in Russia

The number of Jews in Russia could be far greater than previously thought.

There are 1.5 million Jews in Russia, according to a new study commissioned by the Russian Jewish Congress. The figure is more than twice the number of Jews generally believed to be in Russia.

Bereaved parents unite

Bereaved Israeli and Palestinian parents urged their leaders to return to negotiations.

Parents Circle, an organization of more than 150 Palestinians and 200 Israelis, convened a press conference across from the United Nations in New York on Tuesday.

Standing before 1,050 coffins draped in the flags of the victims' nations, parents signed a letter to President George Bush, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and E.U. President Gunter Burghard.

Kosher market grows in Moscow

A kosher supermarket opened in Moscow. The complex includes a kosher food store, a restaurant and a bookstore. The store is planning to hold kashrut seminars aimed at introducing kosher products into the Russian food market.

Alabama backs Israel

The Alabama Legislature passed a resolution expressing support for Israel and supporting the international war against terror.

The resolution, passed unanimously, mentions that Alabama in 1943 was the first state to officially call for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, and "again desires to lead the nation" by expressing support for Israel

Anti-Semitic attacks in Germany sowing both confusion and anger

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — A spate of recent attacks on Jewish cemeteries in Germany has authorities confounded — and Jewish leaders mad.

Most startling was a dynamite explosion at a cemetery here on Saturday.

Police, who announced an award of nearly \$5,000 for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrators, said they were seeking information about the driver of a car seen heading the wrong way on a one-way road near the cemetery around the time of the explosion.

The attack took place shortly after another incident, in which a Soviet-era memorial in eastern Berlin was defaced with Nazi graffiti, including swastikas.

Police said there was no indication that the two incidents were connected.

Other recent incidents included the vandalism of a Jewish cemetery in the eastern German city of Rostock on March 8 and severe damage to a memorial at the former concentration camp of Wöbbelin, to a Jewish cemetery in Boizenberg and to a memorial to the death march in Raben Steinfeld.

For the residents of Rostock, the vandalism brought home an important message: Some elements in the society care just as little for the peace of the dead as for the peace of mind of the living.

"What can we do, in order to effectively protect our Jewish citizens, both the living and dead?" asked Fred Mahlborg, president of the Rostock Foundation for Jewish History and Culture, during a communal meeting that was reported in a local newspaper. "This is now about the quality of our democratic society."

The community is not discussing specific security measures, but synagogues and Jewish cultural centers here have police guards, as they do in many European cities.

Security has been stepped up lately, largely in connection with Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Still, Germany has not seen the level of anti-Semitic rage that has plagued the French Jewish community since the Palestinian intifada began 18 months ago.

Berlin police have reported 455 cases of right-wing-related crimes in 2001, among them 106 anti-Semitic incidents, about twice as many as in the previous year.

Most are so-called propaganda crimes, involving desecration of property and use of forbidden Nazi symbols and slogans.

In the Berlin cemetery explosion, the perpetrators apparently filled a metal container with dynamite and threw it over the wall into the courtyard leading to the cemetery.

The explosion, which a neighbor said sounded like an airplane crash, shattered windows in the small chapel and office facing the courtyard. There has been no estimate of the cost of repairs.

Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit told reporters that he was "dismayed" by the "shameful attack."

Michel Friedmann, vice president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, called the vandalism a "barbaric act."

The president of Berlin's Jewish community, Alexander Brenner, blamed unfair media reports on the Mideast for creating a "superheated atmosphere" that led to anti-Semitic attacks.

The Heerstrasse cemetery, dedicated in 1953 after the Cold War division of Berlin split the Jewish community, also was the site of an attack that drew media attention in 1998. At that time, the gravestone of Heinz Galinski, former head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, was destroyed by a bomb.

That unsolved crime led Galinski's successor, Ignatz Bubis, to comment shortly before his death in 1999 that he would rather be buried in Israel than in Germany.

According to a study published in September 2000, vandalism of Jewish cemeteries is on the rise in Germany.

Prepared by the Moses Mendelssohn Center in Potsdam, the study showed twice as many cases of vandalism in Jewish cemeteries in the 1990s than in either the 1970s or 1980s.

Altogether, there have been more than 1,000 desecrations of German Jewish cemeteries since the end of World War II. □

Cheney talks of possible meeting if Arafat will take cease-fire steps

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The United States is offering Yasser Arafat the inducement of his highest-level meeting yet with a Bush administration official, but in doing so is putting the ball squarely back in the Palestinian leader's court.

Vice President Dick Cheney said he would be willing to meet with Arafat as soon as next week — on condition that the Palestinian Authority president begins to fulfill steps demanded of him to effect an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire.

That came as Israeli and Palestinian security officials met Wednesday in Tel Aviv to try to arrange a cease-fire — despite a Palestinian suicide bombing in northern Israel that killed seven Israelis and wounded more than 30 on Wednesday morning.

The terrorist boarded an Egged bus in the Israeli Arab city of Umm el-Fahm and, after arguing with the driver and some passengers, detonated a massive bomb attached to his body. The quantity of explosives nearly cut the bus in two.

Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility. The Palestinian Authority denounced the "operation," saying that terrorist attacks inside Israel proper would be unacceptable to "world public opinion."

The statement said nothing about attacks in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which continued on Wednesday, with Israeli cars attacked near Nablus and Hebron, injuring one person.

Israel's Security Cabinet met Wednesday to discuss the attack, but was not expected to order a major military response to the bombing, in order to avoid derailing moves toward a cease-fire.

Among the dead were Meir Fahima, 40, from Hadera; Staff-Sgt. Shimon Haderi, 20, from Pardes Hannah; Sgt. Michael Altfiro, 19, from Pardes Hannah; Cpl. Aharon Revivo, 19, from Afula; Alon Goldenberg, 28, from Tel Aviv; and Mahanto Mogus, 75, from Holon.

Speaking to reporters Wednesday, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Arafat had done nothing to curb Palestinian attacks.

"What we are seeing is that Arafat has not strayed from his policy of terror, at this stage," Sharon said. "He has not yet taken any step, as of now he has not handed down any order, and this is, of course, something that we view as very grave, and we shall take the steps that it requires."

Despite the escalation, there was speculation that Israel and the Palestinian Authority might declare a cease-fire after security officials met Wednesday night with U.S. peace envoy Anthony Zinni.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said chances were good that a cease-fire could be arranged with the Palestinians, but it was unlikely to be "comprehensive or hermetic."

That echoed comments from Israeli security officials, who told the Security Cabinet on Wednesday that Arafat was uninterested in halting the conflict with Israel and that the violence would continue for a long time.

The officials concluded that Arafat still sought to achieve diplomatic gains — including sovereignty over parts of Jerusalem and concessions on the return of Palestinian refugees — through violence.

If so, that might jeopardize his chances for a meeting with Cheney, who infuriated Palestinian leaders by refusing to meet with Arafat during his 24-hour visit to Israel.

President Bush also has refused to meet with Arafat because of

Arafat's use of terror as a political tactic. At the end of his visit, however, Cheney held out the possibility of a meeting if Arafat finally began to take action against terror.

"I want to emphasize how important it is for Arafat to achieve a cease-fire this week," Cheney said at a news conference with Sharon on Tuesday morning.

Specifically, Cheney demanded that Arafat speak forcefully to the Palestinians about the unacceptability of terrorist attacks. If a cease-fire does allow for the two sides to move on to the Tenet plan, Arafat also would be required to dismantle Palestinian terrorist organizations and round up illegal weapons in Palestinian hands.

Israel would be required to pull its forces back to their positions before the intifada began in September 2000, dismantle roadblocks and stop bombing Palestinian Authority installations in retaliation for terror attacks.

There were several incidents of violence during Cheney's visit, including an attack on an Israeli army post in the Jordan Valley, in which one officer was killed and three soldiers wounded.

First Lt. Tal Tzemach, 20, was buried Tuesday afternoon in the Kibbutz Hulda cemetery. Later in the day, at least two border police officers were injured in a terrorist attack near Beit Shemesh, inside Israel.

"The occupation killed my son," said his mother, Malka, an activist in the Women in Black group, which calls for an immediate Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Shortly afterward, Israeli President Moshe Katsav told Israel television that the next 24 hours would test the willingness of the Palestinian Authority and Arafat to end violence against Israel.

"The time has come to tell him this is the end of the game, it's time to decide," Katsav said of Arafat.

On Monday night, Israel began pulling out of Bethlehem and Beit Jalla as well as the northern Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, Israeli troops killed three armed Palestinians in two separate incidents overnight Monday in Gaza.

In one incident, a Palestinian armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle and hand grenades was shot dead on the road as he reportedly was crossing into Israel.

In the second incident, soldiers chased five Palestinians trying to penetrate the Gush Katif settlement bloc. Two of the Palestinians were killed, while the others escaped.

The decision to withdraw from the Palestinian areas came after meetings between Israeli and Palestinian security officials Sunday night.

Those discussions were followed by a meeting of a high-level Israeli-Palestinian-U.S. security committee in Jerusalem on Monday, mediated by Zinni.

During Cheney's first meeting with Sharon on Monday night, the two leaders discussed cease-fire efforts, as well as the next stage in the U.S. war on terrorism, which could include an attack on Iraq.

Cheney met with Sharon again on Tuesday morning, following a meeting with top officials, who included Peres and Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer.

At their joint news conference Tuesday morning, Cheney said, "We've discussed ways of ending the terror in this region and opportunities to advance ways of achieving a cease-fire.

"The U.S. will do whatever it can," he said.

Sharon echoed Cheney's comments, saying, "I'll make every effort that Israel achieves peace and security, and every effort to achieve a cease-fire according to the Tenet plan." □