



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 78

Monday, April 29, 2002

85th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israel rejects U.N. panel

Israel's Cabinet temporarily barred a U.N. fact-finding panel that was planning to visit the Jenin refugee camp.

The Cabinet also approved a U.S. plan for ending the siege at Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Ramallah headquarters.

In another development, Palestinian terrorists wearing Israeli army uniforms infiltrated a Jewish settlement Saturday and killed four people, including a 5-year-old girl. [Page 4]

### Bush stresses Israel ties

President Bush said he told Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah that he would not "allow Israel to be crushed."

Speaking in Crawford, Texas, last Friday, a day after the Saudi leader visited, Bush said he had described America's "unique relationship with Israel" to Abdullah.

But Bush also said he believes it is time for Israel to "quit" its military incursions in the West Bank, and that Israel understands his positions. Asked about possible additional aid to Israel, Bush said he hopes Congress understands that the United States needs to maintain positive relationships with Arab countries as well.

### French official angers U.S. Jews

American Jewish leaders criticized France's foreign minister for suggesting that they are impeding Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Earlier last week, at a meeting of European and Mediterranean foreign ministers, French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine said the European Union should try to undercut American Jewry's support for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, forcing Sharon to be more conciliatory toward the Palestinians.

American Jewry is more "intransigent" than Sharon and influences the positions of President Bush, Vedrine reportedly said, adding, "The Jewish organizations have not made the switch toward peace."

"It's the ultimate chutzpah," responded Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of American Jewish Organizations.

"They believe that if they can break us, the United States won't support Israel. That is a denigration of the American people."

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Shared feelings of isolation may make Israelis, Azeris friends

By Richard Allen Greene

BAKU, Azerbaijan (JTA) — Israel's ambassador to the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan has a favorite local joke: "Are you Jewish? No, I just look intelligent."

The ambassador, Eitan Naeh, says that the joke points to an important aspect of Azeri society: Not only is there no history of anti-Semitism in the country, but many of the best educated people are actively pro-Jewish.

"There is a genuine feeling of respect toward Jews," he says.

And that, he says, gives him hope that relations between Azerbaijan and Israel can be strengthened.

At first glance, Azerbaijan is not the most obvious country for Israel to pursue as a partner. Wedged between huge and powerful neighbors including Russia and Iran, the country of nearly 8 million people is overwhelmingly Shiite Muslim.

It has rarely been in control of its own destiny, and in the early 1990s essentially lost a bitter six-year war against neighboring Armenia for control of a region called Nagorno-Karabakh.

But Naeh says those very factors — dangerous neighbors and a history of being oppressed — make Azerbaijan and Israel logical allies.

"Countries that don't have too many friends find each other," he says.

The two also share an important ally, Turkey. The Azeri language and people are very closely related to the Turkish.

And like Turkey, Muslim Azerbaijan is legally a democratic secular republic.

Professor Efraim Inbar, director of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, was instrumental in promoting Israel-Turkish relations in the early 1990s. In early April, he spent nearly a week in the Azeri capital, Baku, exploring the possibility of doing the same thing here.

He had meetings with an adviser to Azerbaijan's President Heydar Aliyev, as well as deputy ministers of foreign affairs and national security.

Describing the tone of the meetings as "very friendly," Inbar told JTA that there were many similarities between Israel and Azerbaijan: "fear of Iran and radical Islam; suspicion of Russia; friendship with Turkey; and a desire to be part of the West."

Azerbaijan's relations with Iran are tense. Although the two maintain full diplomatic relations and have recently exchanged parliamentary and business delegations, each views the other with suspicion, if not outright hostility.

The two are engaged in a territorial dispute over the oil-rich Caspian Sea, which borders on both countries, and Azerbaijan has accused Iran of violating both its airspace and territorial waters frequently in the past year.

Perhaps even more significantly, Iran is home to a huge ethnic Azeri community. Roughly a quarter of Iran's total population is Azeri, Tehran having annexed a large part of historically Azeri lands in 1828 at the end of a war with Russia over Azerbaijan.

Tehran is afraid that a wealthy, powerful Azerbaijan will be a source of attraction to its own ethnic Azeri population, stirring up discontent in Iran, says Brenda Shaffer, a Harvard University specialist in the Caspian region who is currently living in Israel.

Fear of angering Iran has made Azerbaijan reluctant to pursue relations with Israel too openly, a leading Azeri foreign policy specialist says.

"Azerbaijan was willing, but afraid of the Iranian reaction," says the analyst, Vafa Guluzade.

"But the situation changed after Sept. 11, with the American presence in Central

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Saudis rebuff Peres

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres tried to meet with senior Saudi Arabian leaders in Washington last week, but was rejected.

Peres tried to meet with Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Faisal, hoping to persuade the Saudis to convince the Palestinians to take action against terrorism and return to the negotiating table, according to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*. However, the Saudis said it was not an appropriate time to meet with an Israeli official.

### CNN looks for rooftops

CNN is surveying Tel Aviv rooftops to find a good filming position in case Iraq attacks Israel with missiles. The Cable News Network reported from the roof of the Tel Aviv Hilton during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, when Iraq sent barrages of Scud missiles into Israel.

A CNN spokeswoman said the investigation should not be meant to imply foreknowledge of a U.S. attack on Iraq, according to the Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot*.

### Dispute mistaken for terror

An Israeli opened fire in downtown Jerusalem on Sunday in what police described as a personal dispute. An Israeli and a Palestinian got into an argument, and the Israeli opened fire, wounding the Palestinian, according to a police spokesman.

In an initial statement, Jerusalem police said the incident was a terror attack.

### Russian aliyah declines

Immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union is down 50 percent this year.

More than 5,200 new immigrants arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union in the first four months of this year, a drop of nearly 50 percent from the corresponding time in 2001.



## Daily News Bulletin

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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).

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Asia, Georgia and Azerbaijan," he explains. "Our being under the shadow of America means Russia and Iran will not meddle. We are able to be more courageous."

In fact, when Naeh presented his credentials to Aliyev in October of last year, the Azeri president said Azerbaijan would open an embassy in Israel soon, and that Foreign Minister Vilayat Guliyev would visit Israel late in 2001 or early in 2002.

Guliyev has not yet scheduled a visit, but reiterated at the Israeli Independence Day party in Baku earlier this month that he would go soon.

Dating from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Section 907 — which prevented Washington from rendering direct government-to-government aid to Azerbaijan — was largely the result of successful Armenian lobbying in Washington. President Bush waived it in January, partly due to Azerbaijan's support for the U.S.-led war on terrorism.

Inbar says Azerbaijan wants to thank the world Jewish community, and also to take advantage of Israel's close ties with the United States.

"They understand that Israel has clout in Washington and appreciate what we have done on 907," he says.

Indeed, an expert who asked not to be named said that Turkey's status has increased in Washington as a result of Ankara's alliance with Israel, and that Azerbaijan's status could do so as well.

But the relationship between Israel and Azerbaijan does not go only one way, because the former Soviet republic has a crucial commodity that Israel needs: oil.

The Jewish state is the second largest buyer of oil from Azerbaijan, according to official Azeri figures.

Israel backs a plan to build a pipeline from Baku through Georgia to the port of Ceyhan on the south coast of Turkey. Washington, too, backs the pipeline as a way of getting Caspian Sea oil to the West exclusively through countries that are pro-Western — Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey — rather than through Iran or Russia.

Israel "supports an Azerbaijan that exports its oil West," the expert said. And, the source added, the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan "is a few hours from Haifa and its refineries."

Experts say there are commercial benefits to be had from increased ties as well as geopolitical and strategic ones.

"Israel is the biggest economy within three hours' flight of Baku," Ambassador Naeh points out. He adds that Israel was considered a developing economy until recently, as Azerbaijan is now. "We have a model of development to offer," he says.

He says that Israel, whose economy is based on light industry, high technology and agriculture, can help Azerbaijan develop the non-oil sector of its economy, which experts say is lagging far behind its petrochemicals sector.

Naeh adds that aliyah from Azerbaijan — an estimated 40,000 Azeri Jews have moved to Israel in the past dozen years, leaving an estimated 20,000 Jews in the country — could provide the basis for strong commercial ties.

He tells the story of an Azeri factory owner who told him that all his managers had moved to Israel. "I want to establish a strategic relationship with Israel," the entrepreneur told me, "Because they know my factory better than I do," Naeh says.

Naeh is currently in Israel meeting leaders of the Azeri community living in Israel and discussing business opportunities.

Foreign policy expert Guluzade says that Israeli investment in Azerbaijan would be good for public relations as well as for business, given the country's estimated 50 percent unemployment rate.

"If Israel will construct a factory that will give jobs to thousands, or even to hundreds, it will be good anti-Iranian propaganda," Guluzade says.

Naeh admits there can be hazards to doing business in Azerbaijan, which the anti-corruption organization Transparency International considers one of the most corrupt in the world. (Azerbaijan's defenders say that corruption here is not worse than elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, merely more open.)

"I advise Israelis to come, investigate, get to know people — that's an important part of doing business here. Be careful who you choose as your partners," Naeh says. "Be patient. Don't risk too much."

But, he adds, potential investors should not wait, either.

"Azerbaijan is not rich by any means today, but its potential will increase. In 10 years, it might be too late," he says. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Birthright combines trips

Birthright Israel consolidated two trips planned for May as a result of low registration numbers.

The program, which offers free 10-day trips for young adults, has had difficulty recruiting people in recent months due to fear of terrorist attacks. Nonetheless, Birthright expects to bring thousands of young Jews from around the world to Israel this summer. Those interested can register until June 21.

### Senators unite against racism

Ninety-nine U.S. senators signed a letter to President Bush, asking him to address international anti-Semitism.

The letter, orchestrated by Sens. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) and John Warner (R-Va.), outlines anti-Semitic actions in France, Germany, Belgium, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and in the Palestinian territories, and asks the Bush administration to raise concerns about anti-Semitism with these governments.

The only senator who did not sign last week's letter was Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), who is recovering from heart surgery in a Virginia hospital.

### Soviet emigres rally for Israel

Several thousand Russian immigrants rallied in New York on behalf of Israel.

The rally in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Brighton Beach was one of several rallies of Soviet emigres held across the United States on Sunday, according to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

### Conservative Jews visit Israel

Leaders of the Conservative movement in the United States are traveling to Israel on a solidarity mission.

Approximately 50 leaders from the United Synagogues of Conservative Judaism and the Rabbinical Assembly left Saturday and plan to meet with senior Israeli officials and Daniel Kurtzer, the U.S. ambassador to Israel. They also will attend a ceremony marking the end of the 30-day mourning period for the "Passover Massacre" in Netanya.

### Priebke life sentence upheld

Italy's highest appeals court upheld a life sentence for a former Nazi SS officer.

Erich Priebke was sentenced in 1998 to life imprisonment for his role in the March 1944 massacre of 335 Romans, including about 75 Jews, at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome.

The court ruled that Priebke, a German citizen, was not eligible for a 1966 amnesty for some wartime crimes that was granted to Italian citizens. In his mid-80s, Priebke is serving his sentence under house arrest for health reasons.

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### Skinheads using more violence in attempt to keep Russia pure

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Valentina Shur, a middle-aged employee in a small shop near here, was shocked recently by a young customer with a shaved head who was "educating" a fellow vendor.

"I am a skinhead. We are those who want to drive the Asians and the Jews out of Russia. Only Russians should live in Russia," the teen-ager said.

Shur, who is married to a Jew, says she had never heard such comments in her town before.

The rise in activity by skinheads — who espouse a racist, neo-Nazi ideology — isn't limited to words.

Last October, three Asians died when 300 skinheads attacked a market in Moscow in an incident that shocked the city.

Earlier this month, the wife of U.S. Rep. Bill Young (R-Fla.) was shopping on Moscow's popular Arbat Street when a group of skinheads attacked her black guards.

When she tried to stop the assault, the skinheads threatened her, but did not harm her.

In the latest incident, a 25-year-old Afghan was beaten to death on April 15 by a gang of skinheads near a downtown Moscow subway station after he tried to defend an African who had been attacked.

Skinheads show little tolerance toward Jews.

But there has been little serious skinhead violence on Jews reported, although last Friday a homemade explosive device went off near a synagogue in Krasnoyarsk, a city in Eastern Siberia.

Onlookers reportedly noticed two youngsters running away. No one was injured.

"Right now we are only warning the Jews, 'You have a chance to get away to Israel.' We have higher priorities now — the Caucasians, the Asians, the Africans and other blacks. But the time will come and we will get to the Jews," Sergey, 18, a skinhead in the town of Krasnogorsk near Moscow, told JTA.

Caucasians refers to people from the Caucasus Mountains — Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan — who generally are darker-skinned than Russians.

Organized groups of young extremists have no more than 1,500 members in the Moscow region and roughly 10,000 across the country, according to official statistics.

But they are becoming more and more active, perhaps because hate crimes in Russia often go unpunished.

There reportedly have been nearly 100 racially motivated attacks in Moscow, many of them involving foreigners, since the beginning of the year, an increase from 2001.

In the face of perceived indifference from police, officials at Russian universities say they are employing security guards and even forming self-defense teams to protect their 70,000 foreign students from racist attacks.

Over the weekend, Moscow police took special security measures to prevent potential violence around Hitler's birthday on April 20.

Police reinforcements were brought to Moscow from other cities to protect synagogues and marketplaces. In the city's eastern neighborhoods, home to many people from the Caucasus, a police patrol was posted on every apartment block.

The day passed with few disturbances, however.

The Russian president recently declared war against racially motivated violence.

"The growth of extremism is a serious threat to stability in the country," Vladimir Putin said in his April 18 state of the nation address. "I am referring first of all to those who under extremist and fascist slogans and symbols organize pogroms and beat people."

Putting Putin's words into practice on the local level has proven to be difficult.

On the whole, Russian analysts agree with Lev Gudkov of the VTSIOM public opinion center.

Gudkov believes that the general level of anti-Semitism in Russia remains unchanged, but the level of xenophobia and anti-Semitism among the younger generation is rising dramatically. □

## Israel's Cabinet: Yes to U.S. plan, no to U.N.'s mission to Jenin camp

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In two key decisions this week, Israel made it clear that when it comes to international intervention, there are those it can trust and those it cannot.

During a marathon Cabinet session Sunday, Israel put the United Nations in the second category, voting against allowing a U.N. fact-finding panel to visit the Jenin refugee camp.

Earlier during the Cabinet meeting, the government gave an altogether different verdict regarding U.S. and British soldiers when it approved an American plan for ending Israel's siege of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Ramallah headquarters.

The meeting took place one day after Palestinian terrorists killed four people in a West Bank settlement near Hebron.

After the Cabinet voted Sunday to bar temporarily the fact-finding panel, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres spoke to the head of the U.N. team and "informed him that the arrival of the committee will be delayed until further clarifications about current issues," according to a spokesman for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Spokesman Arnon Perlman also said Sharon has been invited to Washington next week for talks with President Bush.

Following the Cabinet decision, the U.N. panel members, due to arrive in Israel on Sunday from Geneva, canceled their flights.

The panel was going to investigate Palestinian claims of an Israeli massacre at the camp when Israeli forces scoured the camp for terrorists earlier this month.

Prior to the Cabinet meeting, Peres said the panel's mission amounted to a search for a "blood libel" against Israel.

Concerned about a possible anti-Israel bias in the panel, Israel sent a team to New York late last week in an effort to change the committee's composition and mandate.

Some progress was made in those efforts. According to reports, U.N. officials had agreed to Israel's request that military personnel who testify before the panel will be anonymous and will be immune from legal proceedings against them. At the same time, U.N. officials retained the right to determine the witnesses it calls.

The panel originally was slated to arrive Saturday, but U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan postponed its arrival until Sunday following an Israeli request earlier in the weekend.

The other major decision reached Sunday by Israel's Cabinet soon elicited a positive response from the United States.

After the Cabinet agreed to an American plan for ending the siege at Arafat's headquarters, the White House issued a statement saying, "The president views the vote of the Israeli Cabinet as helpful and constructive.

"The next move is up to Yasser Arafat," the statement added.

Hours after the Cabinet voted its approval, Arafat also accepted the U.S. plan, according to a Palestinian spokesman.

Israel's communications minister, Reuven Rivlin, hinted at a link between Israel's acceptance of the Ramallah proposal and the decision about the U.N. panel. Amid uncertainty and wariness over how the U.N. mission will proceed, Israel will need firm U.S. backing, Rivlin said Sunday.

Under the U.S. plan, American and British troops would guard Palestinians wanted by Israel for last October's murder of Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi.

Last week, a Palestinian tribunal handed down sentences ranging from one to 18 years to four men for Ze'evi's murder. But Israel called the move a sham and demanded their handover.

The troops would also guard a Palestinian official who is alleged to have overseen an attempt to smuggle arms aboard the *Karine-A*, a ship intercepted by Israel in January.

After the Palestinians are turned over to U.S. and British officials, Israel would withdraw from Ramallah and allow Arafat to travel between the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke three times over the weekend about the Ramallah proposal with the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud Faisal, who in turn was in touch with Palestinian officials.

The two sides' acceptance of the U.S. plan came as Bush met at his Texas ranch with Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah.

During the visit, Abdullah presented Bush with an eight-point peace plan that included an end to the Israeli siege at Ramallah.

One point of disagreement between the United States and Saudis is a Saudi proposal to station an armed multinational peacekeeping force in the region. Bush supports unarmed monitors.

"We believe, on the other hand, that the situation is so complex now that mere observers would not do the job," the Saudi foreign minister said Sunday on ABC-TV's "This Week."

Progress on the Ramallah proposal came amid a weekend of renewed Palestinian terror. On Saturday, Palestinian terrorists wearing Israeli army uniforms infiltrated a Jewish settlement and killed four people, including a 5-year-old girl.

The gunmen wounded seven other people, including the girl's mother and two siblings, aged 2 and 4.

The attack occurred after at least two terrorists cut through the perimeter fence of the Adura settlement near Hebron. They burst into several homes, shooting some of the victims as they lay sleeping before escaping toward Palestinian-controlled Hebron.

Several hours later, Israeli security forces searching the surrounding area killed one of the terrorists. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility for the attack.

In what was described as an unprecedented move, the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, permitted television camera crews to enter the victims' homes and film the blood-soaked mattresses and floors.

According to an initial inquiry, the fact the attackers wore Israeli army uniforms confused settlement residents and troops who encountered them — and contributed to the tragic outcome of the attack.

In another development, Israeli officials said the IDF foiled Palestinian plans to explode a bomb beneath a Tel Aviv-area high-rise.

The attack was one of several the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was planning to carry out soon, the officials said.

Acting on intelligence information, Israeli troops entered the West Bank town of Kalkilya over the weekend, arresting several militants belonging to the group. The head of the Popular Front in Kalkilya, Ra'ad Nazal, was killed in exchanges of gunfire.

Israel says Nazal was responsible for dispatching suicide bombers to Israel, including the terrorist who killed three teenagers in a February attack in the West Bank settlement of Karnei Shomron. During the Kalkilya operation, troops discovered a car bomb as well as three labs containing bombs, explosive belts and grenades. □