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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Terror attack in Netanya

At least three Israelis were killed and about 58 others injured as a result of a suicide bombing Sunday in Netanya.

The attack came as security forces were on alert after receiving information that a suicide bomber was preparing an attack. [Page 4]

Bin Laden warns Israel backers

Any nation that supports Israel is a target for Islamic terrorists, Osama bin Laden reportedly said in a video.

The Sunday Times of London obtained the previously unseen 40-minute video, which was purportedly shot eight weeks ago, from a Pakistani intelligence official. The newspaper said, however, that the video did not provide enough clues for it to be dated with any precision.

Arafat hints at destroying Israel

Yasser Arafat hinted that he intends to rip up any peace treaty he signs with Israel.

In a speech last week to Palestinian legislators, Arafat made a reference in Arabic to the Hudibiyya Pact, an accord that Islamic tradition says was signed by the Prophet Mohammad.

Two years after Mohammad signed the treaty with an enemy tribe, his military position improved — and he tore up the agreement and slaughtered tribe members. [Page 4]

Al-Qaida says it hit Tunisia shul

An Al-Qaida official said one of its terror cells was responsible for a truck explosion in April at a Tunisian synagogue. The London-based Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper reported that Abdel Azeem Muhajir, described by the paper as a "senior military leader" of Al-Qaida, made the claim when he was interviewed in the Pakistani mountains near the border with Afghanistan.

Muhajir was also quoted as saying that Al-Qaida would give the United States "a more painful hit" than the Tunisian attack. Israeli, German and U.S. officials have recently said there are indications that the attack in Tunisia was linked to Al-Qaida. Nineteen people, including 14 German tourists, were killed after a truck rammed a wall protecting the Ghriba Synagogue on the Tunisian island of Jerba on April 11.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

For Israelis traveling in Guatemala, home is just a computer click away

By Peter Ephross

ANTIGUA, Guatemala (JTA) — It's late afternoon, and a group of young Israelis are doing what everybody else does in this Central American tourist town — shopping for bargains.

But as they browse through the brightly colored tapestries, shoulder bags and scarves in the marketplace, or just walk the town's cobblestone streets, they admit their minds sometimes wander to the ongoing violence back home.

It's a situation that differentiates them from the American and European backpackers.

The others "travel because they are bored," says Idan Dovev, 22, from Moshav Sde Varborg, north of Tel Aviv. "We travel because we want to escape."

Like many other tourists here, Israelis spend part of their travel days in an Internet cafe. But their searches have a serious purpose — scouring Israeli Web sites for news of the Middle East conflict and reading e-mails to make sure that their families and friends are safe.

Even tens of thousands of miles away from home, "the world, the Internet, doesn't let you forget," Dovev says.

For many Israelis, these post-army "escapes" have become a rite of passage. These long-term trips offer an opportunity to see the world and, after a stint in the army, to unwind outside of the Israeli pressure cooker.

"We say we can find two things around the world — Coca-Cola and Israelis," says Chen Grazutis, 24.

Indeed, there are parts of the tourist world that Israelis seem to dominate: Kathmandu, Nepal; Goa, India; and Cuzco, Peru, for example. Restaurants offering Middle Eastern food are plentiful — some with signs written in Hebrew — and Hebrew can be heard in the streets.

The Israeli tourists haven't always been good ambassadors for the Jewish state: In Thailand and India, Israelis are notorious partiers.

In the United States, a few were arrested after posing for photos along the New Jersey side of the Hudson River as the Twin Towers burned in the background on Sept. 11. The culprits eventually were sent home for having overstayed their visas.

Israelis learn about places that are Israeli-friendly before they leave. Once on the road, word-of-mouth tells them which cities are the most hospitable — and the cheapest.

Central America hasn't been on the Israeli tourist map for long, but it has seen increasing numbers of Israeli travelers in recent years.

Politics play a role: Central American governments and their people are friendly to Israel. El Salvador and Costa Rica even have their embassies in Jerusalem.

Almost all countries, including the United States, maintain their embassies in Tel Aviv because Jerusalem is a disputed city.

Guatemala backed the Jews in the United Nations in 1947, during the struggle over Palestine that led to the creation of a Jewish state. The Central American nation also was the lone voice questioning the anti-Israel atmosphere at the recent Human Rights Commission in Geneva, says Dina Siegel Vann, the U.N. and Latin American affairs director for B'nai B'rith International.

Guatemala's support for Israel may be based on economics, as the two countries boast extensive military and agricultural ties. Despite these ties, Israelis haven't reached

MIDEAST FOCUS

Report: 20 defended arms ship

Some 20 armed men were reported ready to fight to protect an arms ship recently sunk by Israel.

According to the British magazine *Foreign Report*, Israel's original plan was to seize the boat and publicly display its contents. But Israeli officials decided to sink it when they learned that the 20 were ready for any attempt to intercept it. The sinking of the ship was first reported last week by the *New York Post* newspaper. Israeli officials refused to confirm that report.

Four soldiers injured in Gaza

Four Israeli soldiers were lightly wounded in an attack Sunday in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian gunmen simultaneously detonated a roadside charge and opened fire on an army jeep that was accompanying a convoy of cars on a Gaza road. The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility for the attack.

Two try to infiltrate settlements

Israeli security forces killed two armed Palestinians who tried to infiltrate Jewish settlements over the weekend. In the West Bank, a security officer in Beit El was stabbed in the neck by a Palestinian who entered the settlement. In the Gaza Strip, Israeli security forces killed an armed Palestinian in an exchange of fire near the settlement of Dugit.

Far-right Israeli party votes

Israel's far-right *Moledet* Party held elections Sunday for a new leader. The two candidates seeking the position are *Palmach Ze'evi*, son of the slain *Moledet* leader and Tourism Minister *Rehavam Ze'evi*, and *Knesset* Member *Binyamin "Benny" Elon*.

Elon was expected to win, after the party's judicial board decided ahead of the vote to permit some 700 new members of the party to take part in the vote. Most of the 700 are believed to back Elon.



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the critical mass in Antigua that they enjoy in Asia and South America. But this town, which sits about 45 minutes away from the country's capital, Guatemala City, is gaining in popularity. It's easy to see why.

Home to more than 30,000 Guatemalans, Antigua has a quaint feel to it. It's noted for its cafes, low-rise colonial buildings — which better survive the occasional earthquakes — and surrounding volcanoes.

The town also is a magnet for tourists wanting to learn Spanish, with some 65 Spanish schools serving some 800 to 1,000 students each week.

Now that the civil war that plagued Guatemala for 30 years has abated, the country has become much safer for travel.

Perhaps the 20 Israeli security firms estimated to be operating in the country are partially to thank for that.

Antigua has become the center of the country's tourist life. Internet cafes abound, as do restaurants, bars and used bookstores.

Storefronts offer inexpensive excursions to Lake Atitlan, further to the west, or the longer trip to Tikal, which is one of the world's largest jungles and home to spectacular Mayan ruins. There also is a simpler reason to stay in Antigua: It's cheap. Young Israelis say shared rooms can be had for as little as \$10 per person each night.

"This is the main city in Guatemala," Grazutis says. "It's got a night life and it's cheap."

There's even a restaurant, *Cafe 2000*, run by an Israeli expat. Here, Israelis can quaff cheap Guatemalan beer, watch movies for free on a big-screen television — and sometimes even get some pickles with their meals, *Tel Aviv* style.

"It's kind of like home. You have *shesh-besh*," Dovev says, using the Hebrew term for backgammon.

This year, Chabad, the fervently Orthodox group known for its outreach activities, held a *Passover seder* in Guatemala. While it didn't attract huge numbers like Chabad seders in Asia, approximately 90 people attended.

Despite the comfort level Israelis feel in Antigua, there's a certain anxiety now.

Cafe 2000 didn't hold its annual Israeli Independence Day celebration this year, in keeping with the Jewish state's toned-down commemoration because of ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Grazutis and his companions, other former army officers, stay in touch with their superiors to see if they have to return home for reserve duty.

For some, the crisis back home makes them think of returning to Israel.

"I now feel like I want to go home," says Roy Sason, 23, of *Kiryat Ono*, who's been on the road for more than six months.

The Israelis say they try to avoid talking about politics when they meet travelers from other countries. When politics does come up, they say, they often find sympathy — particularly from Americans, who seem to understand Israel's predicament.

Some Europeans see the conflict only from the Palestinian point of view, they say. Dovev got into a conversation with a man who recently finished a stint in the Swiss army.

"He told me he didn't understand what we are doing to the Palestinians," Dovev says. Dovev tried to explain that the conflict is "nothing like he sees on TV."

After a long discussion, Dovev felt he had helped the Swiss man "get" the Israeli point of view. "In the end, I think I convinced him," he says. □

Evangelicals show support for Israel

NEW YORK (JTA) — Evangelical leaders from around the United States celebrated *Jerusalem Day* at the Consulate General of Israel in New York.

Speaking at the recent event, Israel's consul general in New York, Alon Pinkas, spoke of the special relationship between the evangelical community and Israel. "It is a relationship that has not been twisted or dictated by politics or interests," he said, "but instead by a very pure and moral bond. And we are very thankful for the commitment of the evangelical Christian community, especially in this time of crisis."

Thomas Phillips, vice president of the *Billy Graham Association*, reiterated the community's support of Israel. "The Bible says very clearly to pray for the peace of Jerusalem," he said. □

JEWISH WORLD

Bombing at Quebec shul

A bomb exploded Sunday at the only synagogue in Quebec City, but caused no injuries.

One man was arrested in connection with the blast, which damaged the front door and shattered windows. Following the attack, the premier of Quebec, Bernard Landry, phoned local Jewish leaders to voice outrage and offer support.

Laura Bush visits Terezin

U.S. first lady Laura Bush took part in a ceremony marking the liberation of the Terezin transit camp. "It was a very moving ceremony," Bush said after laying lilies Sunday at the grave for some 10,000 Holocaust victims. "I was proud to be part of it."

Czech Prime Minister Milos Zeman and Slovak Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda spoke at the ceremony, attended by representatives from some 25 other nations. Also known by the German name of Theresienstadt, the 200-year-old fortress town of Terezin was transformed by the Nazis into a camp where Jews from across Europe were held until they could be transported to concentration camps.

N.Y. police train in Israel

Some New York police force traveled to Israel to get training in preventing suicide bombings. The group is expected to return this week and then will provide training to other members of the force.

According to a high-ranking member of the city's anti-terrorism task force, Islamic extremists may attempt to carry out a suicide bombing in New York.

NASA fears terror attack

A space shuttle that will carry an Israeli astronaut in July could become a target for a terror attack, NASA officials fear.

Although American intelligence services have not received a specific warning, sources at the U.S. space agency told ABC-TV they are worried that the shuttle, whose crew will include Col. Ilan Ramon, could be targeted.

Azeri leader to meet pope

A Jewish leader is one of three religious figures who will meet the pope when John Paul makes his first visit to the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan on Thursday.

Semyon Ikhidov is president of the country's community of roughly 10,000 Mountain Jews. The community is believed to have been living in the Caucasus for as many as 2,500 years.

He will join Sheik-ul-Islam Allashukhur Pasha-Zade of the Caucasus Muslim Board and Russian Orthodox Bishop Alexander for a joint meeting with the pope.

Religious leaders hope to push hate crimes bill through pipeline

By Sharon Samber

NEW YORK (JTA) — Perhaps the power of faith can move the hate crimes bill through the legislative process.

Jewish, Christian, Muslim and other religious leaders were hoping they could do just that as they joined together May 15 to press the U.S. Congress to take action on anti-bias legislation.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, noted the biblical passage that one cannot stand by as a neighbor's blood is shed.

"We cannot stand idly by while our brothers and sisters, parents and children, live in fear that racism, bigotry, homophobia, misogyny and xenophobia continue to go unchecked," Saperstein said at a news conference on Capitol Hill. "We cannot stand idly by while hate crimes destroy the sense of community that we and so many others have worked so hard to build."

The Interfaith Alliance, a nonpartisan, clergy-led grass-roots organization, released a letter signed by more than 500 clergy members supporting a bill that will begin to wend its way through Congress.

The bill has been brought up time and again during the past several years, but always falls short of final passage.

The legislation, known as the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act, authorizes federal prosecution of crimes motivated by sexual orientation, gender, or disability, expanding current laws that protect victims of crimes motivated by race, color, religion or ethnicity.

Under the legislation, state and local law enforcement agencies still would have primary responsibility for investigating and prosecuting hate crimes, but would receive assistance from the federal government.

"Americans must live in principle and practice the values of liberty and justice for all," said Imam W. Mahdy Bray.

Hate crime legislation would be a "great step toward eradicating hate in our society," said Rev. Welton Gaddy, executive director of the Interfaith Alliance.

The hate crimes bill has not changed much in recent years, but the situation surrounding it has.

Under the Clinton administration, the president and the Justice Department solidly backed the legislation, but the support of President Bush and his Justice Department is questionable.

The Democrat-controlled Senate is confident it can shepherd the bill along. The bill has 61 co-sponsors in the Senate, and Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) said it will pass both houses.

"Then hopefully we can convince the president of its wisdom," Kennedy said. Last year, the Senate passed a hate crimes amendment, only to see the provisions stripped out of a defense bill by Republican legislators at the last minute.

The House of Representatives has been a tougher nut to crack for the bill's supporters, although there are enough legislators there on record in support of anti-bias provisions to pass a bill.

Supporters of the bill fear the House Republican leadership would block a move to bring the measure up as a separate bill, forcing supporters to tack the hate crimes provisions onto legislation that must be passed for the government to function.

Most Jewish groups support national hate crimes legislation.

In recent years hate crimes targeting Jews caught the national spotlight, such as the April 2000 shooting in Pittsburgh that killed a Jewish woman, a white supremacist's shooting rampage in the Midwest in July 2000, and the 1999 shooting at the North Valley Jewish Community Center in Los Angeles.

Some congressional Republicans oppose hate crimes legislation because they don't want to create special classes of victims, they say.

There also is concern that the federal government might overstep its bounds and interfere with state and local officials in their investigations of hate crimes. □

Netanya bombing leads skeptics to further doubt Arafat's motives

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A suicide bombing this week in Netanya has only reinforced Israeli officials' skepticism regarding Yasser Arafat's call for reform in the Palestinian Authority.

Sunday's bombing in Netanya came days after Arafat delivered a speech before Palestinian legislators in which he vowed to make reforms.

The Palestinian Authority president also used the speech to denounce Palestinian terror attacks on Israeli civilians — a denunciation that apparently fell on deaf ears among some of his constituents.

Hours before the Netanya attack, Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said at the weekly Cabinet meeting that Arafat's call for reforms was just another of his "tricks."

After the attack, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office said Israelis should not believe that Arafat's criticism of terrorism would result in a halt to such attacks.

The attack has also prompted speculation of retaliation by the Israeli military.

Earlier this month, Israel planned and then called off a military operation in the Gaza Strip following a terror attack at a pool hall in Rishon le-Zion that killed 15 and left more than 60 injured.

There have been numerous Palestinian terror attacks in Netanya.

One such attack, at a Passover seder in late March, prompted Israel to launch a massive anti-terror military operation in the West Bank.

At least three Israelis were killed and about 58 others injured in Sunday's suicide bombing. The bomber arrived at Netanya's open-air market in a taxi and was wearing an Israeli army uniform, reports said.

The attack came as security forces were on alert in central Israel after receiving information that a suicide bomber was preparing an attack, Israel Radio said.

Last week, Sharon set two preconditions for the resumption of negotiations with the Palestinians: a halt to terror and reform in the Palestinian Authority.

Sidelining Arafat from the diplomatic process is the chief reform that Sharon is seeking.

In a move that is likely to provide additional ammunition to those who question Arafat's sincerity, the Palestinian leader hinted in his May 15 speech to Palestinian legislators that he intends to rip up any peace treaty he signs with Israel.

In the speech, Arafat made a reference in Arabic to the Hudibiyya Pact, an accord that Islamic tradition says was signed by the Prophet Mohammad. Two years after Mohammad signed the treaty with an enemy tribe, his military position improved — and he tore up the agreement and slaughtered tribe members.

It was widely reported that Arafat used the speech to call for unspecified reforms in the Palestinian Authority and to tell legislators, without mentioning a date, to prepare for new Palestinian elections.

But according to the official Palestinian Authority translation of the speech, Arafat also said: "Let us remember the Hudibiyya Conciliation Accord out of our concern for the national and pan-Arab interest of our people and nation, and out of our concern

for strengthening international solidarity with your people and your cause."

Arafat also provided yet another reason for skepticism: After issuing the call last week for Palestinian elections, Arafat amended it over the weekend, saying there would be no elections until all Israeli troops withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But perhaps the chief cause for skepticism among Israeli officials was Sunday's attack. Both Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility, but Israeli security forces said the Popular Front's claim appeared more credible.

According to Israeli media reports, security officials believed Ahmed Sa'adat, the Popular Front leader who remains jailed in Jericho under British supervision, most likely masterminded the attack.

Several hours before the attack, which was believed to have been launched from the West Bank city of Tulkarm, Israeli security forces went on heightened alert for a possible attack in central Israel. However, Israel's police chief said there was no concrete warning that Netanya would be targeted.

Despite the surprise blockades and other measures carried out as part of the alert, the terrorist managed to get into Netanya.

On Sunday, Vice President Dick Cheney called on Arafat to crack down on terror, but added that there were some terror groups over which Arafat has little or no control. At the same time, however, Cheney warned that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process will not get "back on track until the violence ends."

"We've got to find a way to get a handle on it," Cheney said on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press," warning that if suicide bombers "achieve their desired results" in the Middle East, it would heighten the possibility they use the tactic in the United States.

In another development, CIA chief George Tenet is said to be planning to invite top Israeli and Arab intelligence officials to Washington for security talks.

Israel would likely send Mossad chief Ephraim Halevy as its representative, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Sunday.

Senior intelligence officials from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian Authority would also be invited, the paper said.

It is not clear whether the intelligence officials would meet together or separately with Tenet.

President Bush announced on March 7 that the CIA director would come to the Middle East to help rehabilitate the Palestinian Authority's security forces. However, the trip was delayed for two reasons, according to the paper: Tenet has yet to formulate a clear plan, and Israel opposes his meeting with Arafat. □

Peres releases peace plan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Foreign Minister Shimon Peres has released details of a diplomatic plan calling for the quick creation of a Palestinian state.

The plan is based on understandings the Israeli foreign minister reached earlier this year with Palestinian Authority official Ahmed Karia.

It calls for the establishment of a centralized Palestinian Authority quickly followed by the declaration of a Palestinian state and negotiations on final-status issues, including borders, refugees, Jerusalem, settlements and security arrangements.

Peres said Sunday that it was better to negotiate than to "continue shooting." □