



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 105

Thursday, June 6, 2002

85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

17 killed in bus attack

At least 17 Israelis were killed in a car-bomb explosion Wednesday beside a bus in northern Israel.

At least 40 people were wounded, 10 of them seriously, in the attack near the town of Megiddo. [Page 3]

Sharon cancels N.Y. meetings

Ariel Sharon canceled meetings planned for this weekend in New York after the bus bombing in northern Israel.

The Israeli prime minister delayed his departure for the United States and now will leave Israel on Saturday evening. He will meet as planned with President Bush on Monday, then will leave Washington on Wednesday to return to Israel. [Page 3]

Official: Turkey to host meeting

The planned Middle East peace conference will be held in Turkey, a U.S. official said. The official also told The Associated Press on Wednesday that the conference would involve foreign ministers. That would sidestep the issue of whether Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat should attend.

Senate condemns anti-Semitism

The U.S. Senate passed a resolution condemning anti-Semitism in Europe. The resolution, which passed unanimously Tuesday, urges European leaders to protect and ensure the security of Jewish citizens and institutions, and to investigate the violent attacks that have occurred in recent months.

The Anti-Defamation League hailed the resolution, which included a call to make the issue a priority in U.S.-European contacts. A similar resolution is pending in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Lawmaker may switch parties

A prominent Republican Jewish lawmaker is considering switching parties.

Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), former chair of the House International Relations Committee and one of two Republican Jews in the House of Representatives, is interested in switching to the Democratic Party because of a redistricting proposal in New York state.

Gilman, who now chairs the Middle East subcommittee, is also considering legal options to keep his House seat from being redistricted away from him.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Shift of focus to Kashmir conflict gives quiet opening in Middle East

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Other international stories may have moved the Israeli-Palestinian conflict temporarily off the front pages of American newspapers, but the Bush administration continues preparing for its next diplomatic steps in the Middle East.

The threat of nuclear war between India and Pakistan has pushed that region into the headlines and has resulted in a new American effort to settle the conflict over the disputed region of Kashmir. Both Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage are heading to South Asia hoping to prevent hostilities between two countries with nuclear capabilities from escalating into a war.

Yet the shift of focus won't last long: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak will meet with Bush this weekend, and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will visit early next week.

The visits come as the administration is working to pressure the Palestinian Authority toward comprehensive reforms and is trying to arrange an international conference on Middle East peace. There also are discussions in Washington about laying out a timeline toward a Palestinian state.

Officials working toward Middle East peace have been enjoying a week where quiet diplomacy has replaced hourly bantering on television and constant progress checks.

"You can get some real work done when people aren't looking at you every minute, seeking results," one American Jewish official said of American efforts.

That's a change from the pattern of recent weeks, when newspapers pondered daily about the future of the planned peace conference and what the United States could accomplish. Speculation also grew about the future of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

CIA Director George Tenet and the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, William Burns, both have arrived in the Middle East in the past week, but the results of their meetings largely have gone unreported as the focus has shifted to South Asia.

"When you have serious discussions going on now, it doesn't hurt for the parties to have a little bit of leeway," a State Department official said.

Ironically, the similarities between the two hot spots — both are land disputes that involve terrorism — mean that many of the negotiating tools used in the Middle East conflict will be applied to the Kashmir dispute. Analysts believe both conflicts need to be managed, even if they can't be conclusively settled right now.

As it does with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the United States will need to look at the international community's potential role in defusing the Kashmir crisis, as well as the importance of the Bush administration's anti-terrorism initiatives.

"The same fundamentals exist in both conflicts — extremists looking to attack Indian civilians and some form of complicity by some leaders of Pakistan," an American Jewish official said, making parallels between the Pakistani and Palestinian sides.

Unlike the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, the dispute over Kashmir involves two states with large armies and nuclear weapons.

There has been a growing feeling in the international affairs community that the international war on terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have hijacked the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel complains to Al-Jazeera

Israel's Foreign Ministry complained to Al-Jazeera after the Qatar-based TV network said Israeli extremists were responsible for Wednesday's suicide bombing in Israel.

The ministry's deputy director general, Gideon Meir, said "we immediately complained" after Al-Jazeera said the outlawed Kach organization was behind the attack.

Even after Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack, Al-Jazeera "of course did not bother to apologize and say that there was a mistake with their broadcast," Meir said.

Palestinian killed near border

Israeli forces killed a suspected Palestinian terrorist near the border fence in the northern Gaza Strip. Troops spotted two figures approaching the fence near Kibbutz Nahal Oz in the western Negev.

The troops opened fire, killing one of the men. The other escaped. Two large knives were found beside the body of the Palestinian.

Arrests made in Nablus raids

Israeli security forces arrested 13 Palestinian terror suspects near Nablus. Another five Palestinians were arrested in the northern West Bank and around Hebron.

Officials from the Shin Bet domestic security service are saying that Hamas lost most of its top leaders in the West Bank as a result of the Israeli roundups during the past several weeks.

Labor vows to back economic bill

The leader of Israel's Labor Party promised that his party would support an economic austerity bill in the Knesset. Benjamin Ben-Eliezer informed Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Wednesday that Labor would back the bill.

Bush administration's foreign policy, and that the brewing conflict between India and Pakistan had been ignored. The State Department and the White House now are playing catch-up, designating Armitage as the key player on the India-Pakistan conflict and giving South Asia the amount of time and energy that normally is reserved for the Middle East.

The lack of media focus on the Middle East has made it easier for Burns and Tenet to have productive meetings in the region on the future of the Palestinian Authority.

"Arafat is always more likely to comply when people aren't paying attention," the State Department official said.

But analysts say there is no chance that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be ignored for any length of time. "It's not one at the expense of the other," an Israeli official in Washington said. "We can't expect the American administration only to deal with us, that would be selfish."

The visits of Mubarak and Sharon are expected to heighten attention to the prospects of an international conference on the Middle East conflict, now being proposed for July.

The White House's announcement Monday that Sharon would visit Washington caught many by surprise. Sharon met with Bush at the White House only a month ago, though their talks were cut short when a suicide bomber attacked an Israeli pool hall.

"The American administration is going through a process where they are discussing what are the next steps to be taken," an Israeli official in Washington said. "It is very important that we put forward our concerns and our ideas." □

Study finds anti-Semitic themes in German reporting about intifada

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — A vengeful God. An eye for an eye. Israelis as Nazis.

Such themes are as common in German reporting about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as weeds on a summer lawn, according to a new study by the Berlin office of the American Jewish Committee.

The themes are dangerous, the study suggests, because they perpetuate stereotypes that promote anti-Semitism.

The study, "Mideast Reporting on the Second Intifada in German Print Media," concludes — as do many observers in Germany — that "there is often distortion in the image of Israel, a lack of context and an aggressive tone" in Germany's Middle East reportage, said Deidre Berger, director of the AJCommittee's Berlin office.

The study could provide the basis for a "dialogue on the subject in Germany," she said, adding that she hopes members of the media would "take this further."

Observers say the outlook for change is not hopeful.

Working under deadline pressure and without a firm foundation in history, they say, journalists likely will continue to reach for the nearest descriptive tools at hand — the simplest metaphors, the oldest stereotypes, images that resonate with religious authority and, last but not least in Germany, comparisons with Nazi Germany that have the ultimate function of relativizing German guilt.

The study found instances of "racist anti-Semitism"; abuse of the Holocaust; anti-Semitic fantasies of blood libels and Jews as child-murderers; and Zionist conspiracy theories. The study also found anti-Islamic stereotypes.

One hazard of conducting such studies is that anti-Semitism can be difficult to pin down, said Christina Spaeti, a Swiss scholar at the University of Fribourg who is evaluating views of Israel in the Swiss left-wing media.

Many examples cited in the AJCommittee report are "very strong, pertinent and true," said Spaeti, who had read a short version of the report.

But other examples, she added, are subject to debate.

For example, she thought not all experts on anti-Semitism would agree that calling Jewish settlers "fearful of attacks" was tapping into stereotypes of Jewish cowardliness.

"I think it is very important not to dismiss their argument" that this should be included, Spaeti said. "We do have to be aware that such terms as 'fearful' might resonate in some anti-Semite's head. But then anything might, I fear." □



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.
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JEWISH WORLD

U.S. governors back Israel

Forty-two U.S. governors signed declarations supporting Israel. "Today, governors from around the country send a powerful message that America stands firmly with the people of Israel," New York Gov. George Pataki said Wednesday.

Pataki headed the initiative along with Gov. Gray Davis of California.

Controversial novel to go on sale

The publisher of a German novel that was branded anti-Semitic even before it was published said the book will go on sale this month. Suhrkamp Verlag said Wednesday it would publish "Death of a Critic" by Martin Walser, one of Germany's best-known writers, because there have been so many accusations yet so few people have actually read the work.

Middle East clouds Ala. election

A candidate vying for a U.S. congressional seat overcame anti-Semitic accusations to advance to a runoff.

After finishing second in Tuesday's primary, Artur Davis will face off against Earl Hilliard in the June 25 runoff for a seat from the mostly rural, majority-black district.

Davis had criticized the six-term incumbent for being unwilling to support anti-terrorism legislation.

Both candidates are African American. During the campaign, Davis was berated in an anonymous memo for support he received from Jewish donors.

Anti-Semitic signs in Russian city

Three posters saying "Death to Jews" appeared in a Russian city. The signs in the city of Voronezh appeared Wednesday, a week after a similar sign posted outside Moscow exploded in the face of a woman who tried to remove it.

The signs had packages attached to them that police suspected might be explosives, Alexander Axelrod, an official with the Anti-Defamation League, told The Associated Press. Security officials shot water cannons at the packages, but they turned out to contain bricks.

Australia to search for suspects

Australian officials said they would investigate the whereabouts of 22 suspected Lithuanian Nazi war criminals who fled to Australia after World War II. The announcement came after Efraim Zuroff, the head of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Jerusalem office, recently gave the names of the 22 to Australia's ambassador to Israel, Ross Burns.

Making the announcement Wednesday, Australian Justice Minister Chris Ellison said, "Australia takes its responsibility as an international citizen seriously."

Israeli officials seek response following latest Palestinian attack

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Confronted with a seemingly unending wave of terror, Israeli officials are searching for a response to the latest attack — this one a bombing that killed 17 people.

Finding a response is becoming increasingly urgent, given warnings of a possible Palestinian "mega-attack" that will dwarf earlier attacks in terms of fatalities.

Hours after a Palestinian suicide car-bombing killed 17 Israelis traveling in a bus Wednesday in northern Israel, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon convened the Security Cabinet to consider Israel's response.

As Israel vowed to retaliate, U.S. officials voiced increasing frustration with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's failure to implement security reforms to prevent such attacks.

Moreover, U.S. officials have begun hinting that they will not try to restrain Israel's response.

Along with the 17 fatalities, at least 40 people were wounded, 10 of them seriously, in the attack near the town of Megiddo.

An Egged bus was traveling from Tel Aviv to Tiberias when the driver of an explosives-laden car pulled up alongside and detonated his cargo. Most of the bus passengers were Israeli soldiers.

Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack, which coincided with the 35th anniversary of the start of the 1967 Six-Day War.

Hezbollah television said the terrorist came from the Jenin area, which the Israeli military targeted hours after the bombing.

The explosion went off just outside Megiddo Prison, where many Palestinian prisoners are held. Inmates broke into cheers at the sound of the explosion, police said.

The attack came as CIA Director George Tenet held talks in the region aimed at pressing Arafat to reform the Palestinian security services, and as President Bush prepared for weekend discussions on advancing a peace initiative.

The Palestinian Authority issued a condemnation of the bombing, saying it had no connection to the attack.

But that did not hold back a cascade of world condemnation, including sharp criticism from the White House.

Along with saying that Bush condemned the bombing "in the strongest terms," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said, "In the president's eyes, Yasser Arafat has never played a role of someone who can be trusted or effective.

"This attack underscores the fact that these terrorists are the worst enemies of not only the people of Israel who seek peace, but also of the Palestinian people," Fleischer said.

Meanwhile, one report quoted Tenet as telling Arafat in Ramallah on Wednesday that if terrorism continues, Arafat would have to face Sharon's wrath alone.

After the bombing, Sharon canceled meetings planned for this weekend in New York.

He delayed his departure for the United States by two days, announcing that he would leave Israel on Saturday evening.

Sharon will meet as planned with President Bush on June 10, then will leave Washington on June 12 to return to Israel.

Along with the military operation in Jenin, which involved Israeli troops, tanks and helicopters, Israeli naval ships bombarded Palestinian targets in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinians braced for a more massive reprisal. In Israel, there were growing calls for the army to reoccupy the West Bank and move against Islamic Jihad headquarters in Gaza.

Given the upcoming Bush-Sharon meeting in Washington, Israeli commentators speculated that Sharon was unlikely to order a broad offensive on the scale of Operation Protective Wall, the anti-terror campaign in the West Bank launched in late March.

Wednesday's bombing occurred around 7:15 in the morning.

The force of the blast flipped the bus over, and a fire left only charred, twisted remains. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Can the leopard change his spots?
Israel says Yasser Arafat cannot***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Three weeks ago, shortly after Israel lifted its siege on Yasser Arafat's compound in Ramallah, the Palestinian Authority president hinted that he was ready to turn over a new leaf in Palestinian history.

Assailed by critics at home and abroad, with his popularity at just 35 percent in the polls, Arafat told the Palestinian legislative council that he intended to reform the Palestinian Authority and hold elections.

Israel, the United States and Europe were demanding reforms that would lead to greater democratization, an end to corruption, a separation of governmental powers and the unification of the myriad Palestinian security forces.

This last component was seen as the most important by Israel and the Americans. Reducing the number of Palestinian security organs from more than a dozen to just a few, and centralizing their control, would lead to more effective oversight and reduce anti-Israel violence, it was believed.

Yet skeptics said that after nearly 40 years of terrorism and misrule, Arafat could not change his spots. What he would do, they warned, was to offer lip service to reform, winning praise from the international community; wait for the storm of criticism to pass while gutting the reforms of real content; and then demand Israeli concessions in exchange for his declarations.

So far, the jury is out: After three weeks, there is still a lot of talk of reform, but very little progress.

No date has been set for elections, no significant action has been taken to change the structure of the Palestinian Authority, and terrorism once again is escalating — primarily at the hands of the Al-Aksa Brigade of Arafat's own Fatah Party.

Arafat reportedly has decided to shrink the number of ministries in his Cabinet from 30 to 18. Yet the housecleaning is not exactly what Israel had in mind. Among those offered Cabinet posts were four terrorist groups — Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine — though all rebuffed Arafat's offer. Arafat met Tuesday in Ramallah with CIA Director George Tenet to discuss reforms in the Palestinian security forces.

During the meeting, Arafat presented a plan that called for reducing the number of security forces by half and tightening their supervision, though Arafat would retain overall security control.

The meeting came amid reports that Abdel Razak Yehiyeh, who has been involved in security talks with Israel, had been chosen to head a new, centralized security apparatus.

The appointment of Yehiyeh was seen as a snub of Mohammad Dahlan, head of the Preventive Security Service in the Gaza Strip, who had been expected to be given that post.

Dahlan has close ties with U.S. officials and is believed to have maintained a back channel with Israel. Israel Radio reported that Dahlan has requested a monthlong leave to consider a proposal to become a security and political adviser to Arafat.

Tenet and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon met Monday to discuss the Palestinian reforms, which the United States hopes will result in a reduction of Palestinian terror attacks on Israel.

Despite the reports regarding Yehiyeh's new position, Arafat

will nonetheless remain in charge of the various security forces as head of a "supreme security council."

Arafat has refused to give up overall control of the security services, saying that he must serve as interior minister, with the new security commander as his deputy.

Arafat likewise refuses to give up control of Palestinian Authority finances. He also is unwilling to appoint a prime minister, continuing a pattern he has followed throughout his career of blocking other Palestinian officials from accumulating too much power. The result, Israeli officials warn, is a continuation of Arafat's absolute rule under the guise of reform.

With no prime minister running the day-to-day affairs of government, and with his control of armed forces and money assured, Arafat will retain the tools to continue a terrorist onslaught that Israel says is coordinated and financed by the Palestinian Authority.

In other words, Israeli officials warn, it will be business as usual for Arafat. Thus, when Tenet met with Sharon this week, he heard Sharon's familiar tune: There will be no real reform as long as Arafat is in power.

The solution, according to Sharon, is that Arafat must go.

The problem is that Arafat has no intention of going anywhere. He may have railed against the restrictions on his movement during the Israeli siege of Ramallah, but since his release Arafat has refrained from leaving the Palestinian areas. For the time being he sticks to another favorite hobby — keeping everyone guessing.

When Operation Protective Wall ended a month ago, there was a general feeling in Israel and the Palestinian Authority that something had changed. Surveying the destruction that the intifada had brought on them, many Palestinians called openly for a re-evaluation of P.A. policy and criticized the use of terror.

For a while, it seemed as if there was a rare meeting of the minds between Israel and Palestinian reformers. But that illusion was shattered when it became clear that Arafat had no intention of relinquishing or diluting his power.

For Israel, the contradictions can be illustrated by the demand that the Palestinians institute more democracy. Israel is not interested in Palestinian elections that will strengthen Arafat — yet Arafat will only hold elections if he knows he will win.

It took only a few days after Operation Protective Wall for Israelis to realize that there would be no change in the situation: Terrorist attacks resumed and Arafat condemned them, even while they were being carried out by his party loyalists.

Brig. Gen. Yehiam Sasson, the outgoing head of the anti-terror headquarters in Sharon's office, said over the weekend that the Palestinian Authority is doing nothing to prevent terror attacks. Avi Dichter, head of the Shin Bet, told the Security Cabinet that it was only thanks to Israeli efforts that as many as 40 suicide attacks had been prevented in the past few weeks.

So what motivates Arafat? First, experts say, is the need to win back the support of his people. Arafat came under particularly fierce criticism for his willingness to allow six Palestinian militants to be jailed under British and American supervision in Jericho — in return for Israel lifting its siege on his compound — and to allow the exile of 13 Palestinians from the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Second, Arafat wants to show Israelis that Operation Protective Wall, which so deeply humiliated him, has not ended terrorism. Third, Arafat continues to believe that violence is the most effective means of achieving Palestinian goals, analysts say. □