



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 141

Tuesday, July 30, 2002

85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

West Bank curfews lifted

Israel called off curfews in several Palestinian cities in the West Bank on Monday.

The Israeli army lifted the curfew on Kalkilya "indefinitely" and also called off curfews in Tulkarm and Hebron, Israel Radio reported.

Also, senior Israeli and Palestinian officials were due to meet soon as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered restrictions on the Palestinians eased.

The talks between Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer and senior Palestinian officials were expected as Israel was set to transfer some \$15 million in frozen tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority.

Israel captures Hamas leader

Israel captured a Hamas military leader on its most wanted list.

Hussein Abu Kwaik and his top lieutenant were captured during an operation near Bethlehem on Sunday, according to the Israeli army.

In March, Israel killed his wife and three of his children in what appeared to be an assassination attempt gone awry.

Israel: Six attacks were planned

The Hamas leader killed in last week's airstrike was planning simultaneous terror attacks in six Israeli cities, according to Israel's defense minister.

Benjamin Ben-Eliezer made the remarks concerning Salah Shehada on Monday to a Knesset committee meeting. Shehada was killed July 23 in an attack that also killed at least 14 civilians.

Chirac rebuffs Israel on Hezbollah

French President Jacques Chirac rejected Israel's request to add Hezbollah to the E.U.'s list of terrorist groups.

Chirac told Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres on Monday that Hezbollah fulfills social and political functions in Lebanon — and that denouncing the fundamentalist group could harm Israel because it would weaken Lebanon's central government.

Chirac also reportedly denounced what he called a campaign being run in the United States to present France as an anti-Semitic country. France experienced a wave of anti-Semitism earlier this year, but there have been no major incidents in the past few months.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Possible Palestinian cease-fire bid poses a strategic dilemma for Israel

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli politicians are divided over whether a cease-fire proposal that the Palestinians reportedly were about to present last week was genuine.

The July 23 assassination of Hamas' military leader, a bombing that also killed 14 civilians, temporarily shelved the plan.

The impetus behind the proposal remains the same, however, raising the likelihood that — with some prodding from the international community — the Palestinians indeed may soon put a plan on the table.

According to reports, despite the killing of Hamas military leader Salah Shehada, talks are still under way among various Palestinian factions to work out such a plan.

Some Israeli officials believe it would show that Israeli steadfastness against the intifada has pushed the Palestinians to the breaking point.

That would present Israeli leaders with a difficult dilemma: Should they keep up military pressure to finally crush the intifada? Or should they respond to a cease-fire plan, even one about which they have reservations, with concessions of their own?

Israeli officials continue to regard with skepticism reports of Palestinian readiness for a cease-fire. What is needed, they say, is not a truce that leaves Hamas, Tanzim and other terrorist groups and militias intact to fight another day, but reform of Palestinian institutions to concentrate all military power in one body and dismantle any competing power centers.

Yet especially after the July 23 raid in Gaza City, which killed Shehada and at least 14 civilians, Israeli leaders might find their freedom of action circumscribed. Coming just as reports were emerging of an imminent Palestinian cease-fire plan, the Gaza attack opened Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to charges that he was torpedoing progress toward peace — and might make it more difficult for his government to dismiss a new Palestinian plan that bears the imprimatur of European negotiators.

In Israel, the different views of the Palestinian plan that was emerging derive, at least partly, from different analyses of the Palestinians' motives.

According to one account, there has been a major change in Palestinian thinking. Young members of the Tanzim, the militia of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, recognize that the intifada is getting them nowhere and want a cease-fire to build a new relationship with Israel and the United States.

The economic hardship caused by Israel's reoccupation of Palestinian cities a month ago has made this need even more urgent. A cease-fire might encourage the release of Palestinian tax money Israel is holding — after the Gaza debacle, Sharon began releasing some of the money — and additional aid from the United States and other quarters to help rebuild life in the Palestinian territories.

Left-wing politicians, like the Labor Party's Haim Ramon, the new chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, say that if this is the thinking behind the cease-fire drive, it constitutes the beginning of a strategic change and is of vital importance. Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti, who is in an Israeli jail awaiting trial, is said to think this way.

Others offer more tactical explanations for the cease-fire effort. According to a rival theory, Tanzim activists feel threatened by the moves to reform Palestinian military and political institutions. The activists fear they might be sidelined as Arafat's cronies control the reform process and use it to shore up the old guard's strength.

The stature of the Tanzim fighters has grown immensely in Palestinian society

MIDEAST FOCUS

Minister vows to punish rioters

Israel's justice minister condemned rioting by Jewish settlers during the funeral Sunday of an Israeli killed in a Palestinian ambush.

Speaking on Israel Radio, Justice Minister Meir Sheerit promised to deal harshly with those involved in the riot. Fifteen Israeli police officers and border police officers were injured when funeral-goers began scuffling with security forces during the funeral procession for Staff Sgt. Elazar Leibowitz.

Israel also asked the Palestinian Authority for cooperation in investigating the Palestinian claim that a 14-year-old Palestinian girl was killed by Israeli fire during the funeral procession, Israel Radio reported.

Four Israelis were detained in connection with the unrest.

Abdullah against attack on Iraq

Jordan's King Abdullah said he opposes U.S. efforts to topple Saddam Hussein without first making progress in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Speaking in London where he met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Abdullah told the London Times that "military action against Iraq would really open a Pandora's box."

Abdullah is expected at the White House on Thursday to meet with President Bush.

Israeli symphony cancels tour

The Israel Philharmonic canceled a U.S. tour after it couldn't find an American security company willing to guard its 100 musicians.

Avi Shoshani, chief executive of the orchestra, told the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot that security companies told the orchestra's American agent, "We are unwilling to take the risk, because we are fearful of terrorist attacks."

The philharmonic will go ahead with scheduled summer tours in Australia and Taiwan.

during nearly two years of warfare with Israel. Yet they realize that their power has no political outlet, and what they are trying to do through the cease-fire bid, according to this theory, is to place their movement at the center of the Palestinian political map, dictating a timetable and an agenda and stealing the initiative from Arafat and Hamas.

According to this theory, the Tanzim activists want a cease-fire to create a climate for elections. Their plan is to push first for internal Fatah elections, in which they can take control of the movement's institutions and establish a power base for municipal and national elections that would follow.

The cease-fire bid, then, is part of an internal Palestinian power struggle, a tactical move that might not change attitudes toward Israel, even if the young Tanzim activists win a greater measure of power.

As for Hamas, the theory goes, they want a cease-fire to pre-empt attempts to disband their military wing as part of the reform of the Palestinian armed services. Israel insists on one unified Palestinian force, which would mean the disbanding of all rival militias, including Hamas.

During the past few weeks, European representatives on the ground saw which way the wind was blowing, and tried to give the cease-fire idea direction and substance. The main player was Alistair Croke, a British intelligence officer who has been active in the Palestinian areas during the 22-month-long intifada.

Croke also met with the Israeli defense establishment and politicians and informed Israeli intelligence of the cease-fire plan 36 hours before Shehada's assassination.

The idea was for the Tanzim to publish a unilateral cease-fire declaration in various Western newspapers, in the Arabic press and in a Hebrew daily. Mark Perry, an American lobbyist for the Palestinians, helped draft the English text.

As the initiative gained momentum, Mohammad Dahlan, the former head of Palestinian security in the Gaza Strip and one of Arafat's potential successors, was brought in. Arafat's top aides were left out.

Hamas leaders were approached and, according to reports, at least some indicated that they would be ready to go along.

However, according to Israeli intelligence, Arafat found out what was going on and made it clear that he had no interest in a cease-fire at this juncture. The activists on the ground got the message, and Israeli defense and intelligence officials insist that the terrorist rank-and-file would not have respected the cease-fire that the political leaders had negotiated in their names.

Writing in the Israeli daily Ma'ariv, political commentator Ben Caspit reflected the Israeli quandary: "Those who believe the Palestinians are simply trying to gain time on the way to more terror don't buy all this stuff," he wrote. "But those who think every chance should be given for the creation of a new leadership that springs up from below regret yet another missed opportunity, and anticipate rivers of blood that will wash its way into the sea."

At Monday's meeting of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Ramon produced a version of the cease-fire document and asked Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer whether he had known about it before Shehada was killed.

Ben-Eliezer said he had, but played down its significance. He described it as an initiative by the leaders of the organizations and not the grassroots terrorists, who he said would have ignored it.

And, Ben-Eliezer added, so would Shehada himself, who at the time of his assassination was planning acts of mega-terror, including a one-ton truck bomb, and simultaneous bombings in six different Israeli cities.

Ben-Eliezer made the official Israeli position clear: A genuine cease-fire would be welcomed, but not at the expense of reform of the Palestinian security services. He is convinced that the most effective guarantee of long-term peace and quiet is a single armed Palestinian force, in total control of Palestinian territory, and cooperating with the Israel Defense Force on security matters.

Ben-Eliezer intends to discuss his plan for implementing this model first in Gaza with the new P.A. security chief, Gen. Abdel Razak Yiheyeh, as soon as possible.

But the bottom line hasn't changed. Israel continues to insist on two conditions before peace talks with the Palestinians can be resumed: Arafat must go, and there must be thorough reform of the Palestinian security forces. A cease-fire in itself, no matter how well-intentioned, will not be enough. □



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

Israel pressed on temple fund ban

Israel's High Court ordered the government to explain why it won't allocate public funds for construction of a Reform temple.

The court ordered the Housing Ministry and the city of Modi'in to explain their refusal to build a synagogue for the Reform congregation in the city.

It also issued an interim junction freezing the use of public funds allocated for the construction of an eighth Orthodox synagogue in the city, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

Embassy employee suspended

The Israeli Embassy in Ireland suspended an employee for publicly comparing Israel's airstrike in the Gaza Strip last week to Palestinian suicide bombings.

The press officer, Noreen O'Carroll, is an Irish citizen who wrote a letter to the Irish Times newspaper saying she is "appalled and ashamed" at Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's initially hailing the attack as a success even though civilians were killed along with Hamas military leader Salah Shehada.

German Shoah memorial going up

Construction will begin on Germany's national Holocaust memorial in September.

Speaking at the 21st annual World Congress of Architects in Berlin on July 25, the memorial's designer, architect Peter Eisenman, said the first step would be to prepare the ground for the 2,700 cement slabs that will stand like a rolling field on the site.

Construction is expected to be completed in 2004.

Elie Wiesel museum opens

A museum dedicated to Elie Wiesel opened near his birthplace in Romania.

Dedicated Monday by the Romanian government in the town of Sighetu Marmatiei, the museum will feature exhibits on the Nobel Peace Prize-winning author and on Jewish culture in the region.

Half of Romania's 800,000 Jews died in the Holocaust.

Fewer than 14,000 Jews live there today.

Wiesel said he had come to the event "without hate or bitterness," and praised Romanian efforts to overcome its wartime fascist past.

German students march for Israel

Some 300 German students demonstrated for Israel and against anti-Semitism.

One banner held up last Friday in Munich challenged Germany's leading politicians and anti-Zionist left wingers to "Keep your hands off Israel."

The demonstrators also criticized mainstream German political parties for tolerating anti-Semitism.

Maccabiah victims' families upset after negligent official gets new jobs

By Henry Benjamin

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — The families of four Australian athletes who died in a bridge collapse at the 1997 Maccabiah Games are outraged that a man found guilty of negligence in the disaster was appointed to new positions in the Maccabi sports movement.

Both Maccabi World Union and Maccabi Israel recently found new jobs for Yoram Eyal, who served six months of community service for his part in the tragedy.

In July 1997, the Australian team was making its way across a hastily constructed footbridge to the opening ceremony of the 15th Maccabiah in Israel's Ramat Gan stadium.

The bridge collapsed, hurtling the team into the murky, polluted waters of the Yarkon River.

Four members of the team died and 70 were injured.

Eyal, the head of the organizing committee for the international games, was sentenced two years ago after he commissioned the ill-fated bridge.

Four others were sentenced to jail time for their role in the tragedy.

Colin Elterman, whose daughter, Sasha, was seriously injured in the accident, is the spokesman for the families who lost relatives in the disaster.

He told JTA: "We will not rest until this man has been removed from any official Maccabi position. Maccabi should not have a convicted criminal in any role within its organization."

Elterman plans a media campaign to inform international Jewish communities and Israeli taxpayers, who pay part of the fee for the Maccabiah Games, of Eyal's appointments.

Maccabi World Union has appointed Eyal head of the North American desk and has given him back his old \$120,000 job as head of Kfar Maccabiah in Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv.

Maccabi Israel has made him responsible for the registration of the country's sports clubs.

The president of Maccabi Australia, Phil Filler, said: "When Eyal's appointments were announced at the world conference, they were met with resounding applause. The Australian delegation sat on their hands."

Eyal has said that he will never again take part in organizing a Maccabiah. But he said: "I didn't elect myself to those bodies. I have paid the price according to the courts and I don't think I need to stay home for the rest of my life."

Maccabi Israel Chairman Igal Carmi and Maccabi World Union President Jean Futeran told Filler that Eyal had served his sentence and deserved another chance.

Not everyone in Israel agrees.

Sports Minister Matan Vilnai brought the appointments to the attention of the Knesset.

The Israeli daily Yediot Achronot received more than 200 complaints from readers condemning the appointments after it published the story.

Zevulun Orlev, head of the Knesset's Sports and Education Committee, said of Eyal's appointments: "This was not a smart decision. There has been no thought given to the feelings of the Jewish people of Australia." □

Poland to buy Israeli weapons

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Poland said it will purchase tens of millions of dollars in anti-tank missiles from Israel.

The deal for several thousand missiles is worth up to \$250 million over 10 years and will help bring Polish armed forces up to NATO standards, Polish officials said.

Poland's deputy defense minister, Janusz Zemke, said Poland had considered bids from companies in South Africa, France and Sweden, but ultimately decided that the Israeli missiles were the "most effective, although not the cheapest."

Poland will receive the first missiles from Israel next year. □

A story that ran in the July 29 Daily News Bulletin incorrectly stated a link between a reward program for information on Nazi-era war criminals and a dispute over the wartime actions of an Estonian police battalion. This version of the story relates the developments properly.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Attitude toward Holocaust could sink Estonia's NATO bid

By Adam B. Ellick

TALLINN, Estonia (JTA) — A heated dispute between the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Estonia Security Police Board over Estonian participation in the Holocaust could hinder the country's bid to join NATO.

Meanwhile, a Wiesenthal Center program launched two weeks ago, offering \$10,000 rewards for information leading to the conviction and punishment of Nazi war criminals, has aroused anti-Jewish sentiments across the Baltics.

Last week, Efraim Zuroff, director of the Wiesenthal Center in Israel, requested that the Estonian Security Police Board investigate 16 Estonians from the 36th Estonian Police Battalion, a large unit that he says participated in the murder of Jews in Nowogrudok, Belarus, on Aug. 7, 1942.

The Police Board, which is in charge of prosecuting war criminals, responded by denying the participation of the 36th Battalion in any killing on that date in Nowogrudok.

"There was no evidence that the 36th Battalion took part in any crimes," said Henno Kuurmann, a Police Board spokesman.

However, according to a report from the Estonia International Commission for Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, a group of historians founded in 1998 by former President Lennart Meri, the 36th Police Battalion helped in "the gathering together and shooting of almost all the Jews still surviving in the town of Nowogrudok."

Meelis Ratassepp, however, said "a historical commission is one thing, and a criminal investigation is another."

Nine of the 16 men on Zuroff's list died during or immediately after World War II, he said, and the whereabouts of the other seven couldn't be ascertained.

The battalion was awarded the Iron Cross by the Germans for bravery. But Ratassepp insists the decoration recognizes the units participation in the battle at Stalingrad, USSR, in November 1942, not for killing Jews in Belarus, as Zuroff suggested.

Zuroff demanded a retraction from the Security Police, while the U.S. Embassy in Tallinn also contacted the Security Police about its hasty response. "Our wish is to understand how the Security Police could arrive at such a different conclusion" than the International Commission, said Thomas Hodges, public affairs officer at the embassy.

"We understand the historical commission surely consulted evidence and historical documents to arrive at their conclusion," he said. "We seek to understand from the Security Police if they consulted the same material. We have no answer yet."

During the past year, Western diplomats have closely tracked the Jewish question in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as the three Baltic states prepare to join NATO in November.

Though NATO is a defense alliance, aspirant countries are expected to maintain shared values about treatment of religious

minorities. They therefore have prioritized Jewish issues such as Holocaust restitution, Holocaust education and honest evaluations of their history.

NATO entry also requires two-thirds approval in the U.S. Senate. Bruce Jackson, president of the U.S. Committee for NATO, says Holocaust issues have topped the NATO agenda over the summer in a handful of Central and Eastern European aspirant nations. "These issues still need work," said Jackson, who plans to meet with the Estonian prime minister in Washington in September.

"It does not surprise me that we hit this pothole," he said. "It's clearly something that over the next 18 months, through reforms and ratifications, Estonia will be working on. But we're going to get it solved."

The issue is sensitive in the Baltics, where rates of local collaboration with the Nazis were among the highest in Europe. The region also had among the highest rates of murdering Jews during World War II.

More than 94 percent of the Jews in Lithuania and Latvia were murdered during the Holocaust. Only 5,000 Jews lived in Estonia before the war, and 4,000 escaped to Russia and survived.

Of the 1,000 that remained, only seven survived.

About 3,000 Jews live in each of the three Baltic states today.

The countries have struggled to confront their Holocaust history since gaining independence in 1991.

Though governments recently have tried to increase sensitivity to ethnic minorities, anti-Semitism still runs strong. In addition, citizens here are intensely nationalistic after emerging from Polish, German and Russian occupation during the past century.

Some wonder how well Estonia is able, even today, to look objectively at its history.

"The unprofessional and incompetent results of the investigation carried out in this case raises serious doubts as to the ability of the Security Police Board to properly investigate the cases of Estonian Nazi war criminals," Zuroff said. "Under these circumstances, one can only doubt whether any Holocaust perpetrators will ever be held accountable in Estonia."

Meanwhile, Zuroff's Operation Last Chance program has been blasted in the media as immoral for offering monetary rewards for criminal information. A Web site that posts reactions swelled with more than 1,600 messages, many of them anti-Semitic.

Other articles have sought to deflect blame by suggesting that Jewish KGB agents who deported Balts to Siberia after the war be prosecuted.

An Estonian man said he would reward \$20,000 to anyone with information on Jewish KGB officers involved in oppressing Estonians. "The Nazi and Soviet occupations are mixed together immediately," said Simonas Alperavicius, the chairman of Lithuania's Jewish community, whom the media has criticized for assisting Zuroff.

"I think it's because the burden of guilt is so big and they don't want to accept it, so their counter reaction is such," he said. "There's a lack of education, a lack of understanding about what happened."

In Lithuania, meanwhile, Parliament member Egidijus Klumbys said Zuroff should possibly be banned from the country.

Then, according to the Wiesenthal Center, a member of the city council in Taurage, Lithuania, burned a replica of an Israeli flag and drove through the streets of his town playing Nazi military music in what he said was a response to the Operation Last Chance reward program. □