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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

2 killed in West Bank attack

Two Israeli brothers were killed Tuesday when they entered a Palestinian village in the West Bank.

The two were ambushed when they drove their truck into the village of Jama'in, Israel Radio reported. Settlers and residents said the two Israelis, from the Jewish settlement of Tapuach, had gone to the village, located near Nablus, to sell fuel.

According to Palestinian sources, two masked men were seen fleeing the area following the shooting.

The report said that although the Israeli army order barring Israeli civilians from entering Palestinian-controlled areas does not apply to Jama'in, which is under Israeli security control, Israeli civilians are strongly recommended to avoid densely populated Palestinian areas.

Suicide bomb wounds seven

Seven Israelis were wounded in a suicide bombing in Jerusalem on Tuesday. Most of the injuries were light. The blast occurred around 1 p.m., when the bomber entered the Yemenite Felafel Stand on a busy downtown street and blew himself up, Jerusalem Police Chief Mickey Levy said.

Report: Arafat betrayed Oslo

Documents signed by Yasser Arafat prove that he was undermining the Oslo accords five years ago, according to the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot.

The report was based on documents Israel confiscated from Palestinian Authority offices during military operations earlier this year.

After being invited to view the documents — so many that they are being housed in a military hangar — the paper reported that, like other previously released memos, they proved that Arafat lied repeatedly when he said he had no connection to terrorists and could not stop their attacks. The documents show that "beginning in 1997, Arafat and his cohorts began to willfully and systematically create — in gross violation of the agreements they signed with Israel — a series of militias, shadow armies that are seemingly unconnected to the Palestinian Authority."

The documents make it clear "in an unequivocal fashion that even when it was clear to senior P.A. officials that members of their security services were involved in terror, not only did they take no action against them, but they continued to finance them."

Tough U.S. stance at United Nations changes the rules, Israel backers say

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — A U.S. statement that it will only accept U.N. resolutions on the Middle East that include denunciations of Palestinian terrorism has changed the rules of the game, Israel and American Jewish groups say.

In a statement last Friday, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte, said the United States would only seriously consider Security Council resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that condemn terrorism and incitement; explicitly denounce Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aksa Brigade; call for all parties to pursue a negotiated settlement; and recognize that Israeli withdrawal to pre-intifada lines is "connected" to the improvement of the security situation.

A U.S. official said Negroponte's statement is "not a new policy," but indeed it marks the first time the U.S. has explicitly set such conditions.

And it puts the Arab countries in the spotlight, said Ariel Milo, spokesman for the Israel Mission to the United Nations in New York.

"If they decide not to condemn the Palestinian terrorism, then any resolution they come up with will be a nonstarter," Milo said. "The onus is on them to see if they're serious."

Negroponte's statement came as Syria proposed a draft resolution condemning Israel for its attack last week in Gaza, which killed Hamas' military leader but also killed 14 civilians.

Since the outbreak of the intifada in September 2000, the 15-member Security Council, the only U.N. body with binding authority, has seen a barrage of Palestinian-sponsored resolutions against Israel.

"This is an attempt to eliminate one-sided Security Council resolutions," a U.S. official said.

"We are constantly here at the council dealing with a proliferation of resolutions" on the Middle East "every time that there is a development that isn't to the liking of" some council members, the official said.

"That kind of activity takes away from the diplomatic efforts we're engaging in on the ground in the region."

"Frankly," he said, the Middle East crisis is "not going to be solved here in New York."

As one of the council's five permanent members — the 10 nonpermanent members are drawn on a rotating basis from the U.N.'s five geographical regions — the United States has veto power.

It has used the authority to block two anti-Israel resolutions because they did not condemn Palestinian terror or incitement to violence.

Since September, 2000, the council has passed five resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

They primarily call on Israel to withdraw from Palestinian cities or urge an investigation into Israel's military operation in the Jenin refugee camp, with no specific mention of Palestinian-sponsored violence or terrorism.

However, two U.S.-sponsored resolutions this year specifically called for a "cessation of all acts of violence, including all acts of terror."

Another expresses "concern at the further deterioration of the situation, including the recent suicide bombings in Israel" — though it doesn't condemn it outright.

Since the outbreak of the intifada, Arab countries have called three emergency sessions of the General Assembly, where no country has veto power and resolutions are

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israeli couple stabbed in home

An Israeli husband and wife were wounded when a Palestinian infiltrated their home in a West Bank settlement Monday night.

A terrorist armed with two knives entered the couple's home in the settlement of Itamar around 3 a.m. and attacked the husband and wife in their bedroom.

The couple awoke and fought off the assailant.

The husband sustained moderate injuries and the wife was lightly hurt. Security forces arrived at the house and killed the terrorist. The attack was the third infiltration of Itamar in recent months.

In June, a mother, three of her children and a member of the settlement's security response team were killed in an infiltration.

In an earlier attack in May, three students at the settlement's yeshiva were killed.

Guard mistakenly fires at Israeli

A security guard at a mall in Ashkelon shot and seriously injured an Israeli on Tuesday after suspecting the man was a terrorist. The security guard, who recently started working at the mall, shot 11 bullets at the Israeli, according to Israel's Army Radio.

Israel's Cabinet OKs 2003 budget

Israel's Cabinet passed the Finance Ministry's proposed 2003 budget. Following Tuesday's 14-12 vote, the budget will be presented to the Knesset after it returns from its summer recess.

Einstein exhibit canceled

Israel canceled an exhibit on Albert Einstein that was slated to open in September in China. Israel made the move after Chinese officials demanded that all references to his Jewishness and support for a Jewish state be removed from the exhibit, a spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Beijing said Tuesday.



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symbolic. One anti-Israel resolution passed in each of the emergency sessions in addition to the 19 anti-Israel resolutions passed each year in the General Assembly.

For at least the last decade, Israel has been the object of more condemnations at the United Nations than any other country, according to an Israeli source.

But the current deliberation within the Arab bloc on whether to amend the Syrian resolution could indicate that the American stance is bearing fruit.

The Arab group is not inclined to push for a resolution that would fail, one European diplomat said.

The diplomat said it wasn't clear yet if council members believed Negroponte's statement was a "solid marker for the future and for any future resolution," or whether it merely was intended to show that the United States was strongly opposed to the Syrian resolution.

But U.S. officials insisted that the conditions were firm.

"We would not be willing to entertain a text unless those elements — and not one or two of them, but all of those elements — are included," a U.S. official said.

Israel and Jewish groups welcomed that commitment.

"At long last, there will be a sense of fair treatment and no double standards applied in the resolutions put forth by the U.N. pertaining to the Middle East," said Mortimer Zuckerman, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The United States "has finally demonstrated the courage to make it clear that from here on the kind of one-sided, unbalanced, biased attacks on Israel that have been endemic in that organization for decades now will not be tolerated," Zuckerman said.

Zuckerman believes the U.S. standards will pre-empt Arab efforts to blur the distinction between the "arsonist and the firefighter."

"Now the Arab militants who are seeking" a base "to delegitimize Israel through U.N. resolutions will not have the U.N. resolutions to fall back on," he said.

According to David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, Negroponte's "necessary" and "long overdue" statement is "a major development for integrity and principal" at the United Nations.

"Once again, the U.S. is the lone voice" that says "enough. We don't want to go along with this skewed, unbalanced process," Harris said.

The U.S. statement will help rebuild the Security Council's credibility by ensuring the passage of resolutions with which the Jewish state will comply, one Israeli official said.

But some U.N. insiders are frustrated that the United States is imposing requirements on a consensus issue.

"We all agreed that the action taken in Gaza was a) wrong and b) unhelpful," the European diplomat said.

"Privately, I think a lot of council members would tend to agree" that a resolution was unnecessary, given the strong statements from their governments condemning the attack.

Now, however, with both the Arab countries and the United States firmly split, the chances to reach consensus on the council look bleak, she said.

Negroponte's action came after comments indicating that he believed U.N. members were fatigued by what he called the "bevy of Palestinian-sponsored resolutions."

Speaking last week at the annual convention of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, Negroponte said: An "increasing number of countries" are "wary of supporting resolutions that are out of touch with the reality of the conflict — for example, a seemingly innocuous 'Peaceful resolution on the question of Palestine' that neither mentioned nor condemned Palestinian terrorism."

"My job," Negroponte said, is "conveying to the U.N. membership that the United States' unshakable commitment to Israel can help straighten a crooked course for everyone."

"Anti-Israel posturing, name-calling, and condemnations only distract from the important work of establishing a level of security in which Israel can have confidence and in which the Palestinian people can, with assistance from the world community, establish the democratic institutions necessary to address their political, economic and humanitarian needs and aspirations," he said. □

JEWISH WORLD

AJCongress blasts Chirac

The American Jewish Congress criticized the president of France for reportedly saying American Jewish organizations are under orders from Jerusalem to wage an anti-France campaign.

The AJCongress, which has been critical of France's limited response to a series of anti-Semitic attacks earlier this year, called Jacques Chirac's accusation "reminiscent of ancient anti-Semitic stereotypes of worldwide Jewish conspiracies."

The group said Chirac's comment Monday was "a smokescreen" to hide the reality that the previous French government took no action against hundreds of violent anti-Semitic acts.

Jewish paper site gets hacked

The Web site of the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent newspaper was hacked into with an anti-Israel message.

The site, www.jewishexponent.com, which went down last Friday, was back up late Friday through Monday.

On Monday, the site was taken down after it was linked to a pro-Palestinian newsletter.

In a message posted on the site, editor Jonathan Tobin wrote, "We are taking every measure to ensure the security of our site in the future and to bring to justice the criminal who committed this act."

Arrest in cemetery vandalism

Police arrested a suspect in the July 18 desecration of dozens of Jewish tombs in Rome's main cemetery.

The suspect was identified as Claudio Romani, 46, who worked as an unauthorized groundskeeper in the cemetery.

He was charged with extortion, contempt, desecration and damaging tombs. Five other people are under investigation for the crime.

"The apparent anti-Semitic nature" of the crime has been "proven wrong by the investigation," a spokesman for Italy's anti-terror police said Tuesday. According to investigators, Romani and his accomplices, who lost their jobs when a contract to clean the cemetery was outsourced, vandalized the Jewish tombs as part of a plan to intimidate cemetery management into allowing them to continue working.

Lithuania to transfer more Torahs

Lithuania is reportedly planning to turn over about 50 Torah scrolls to the Jewish people.

The transfer will take place soon, according to the Jerusalem Post, which cited Rabbi Abba Dunner, secretary-general of the Conference of European Rabbis. In January, Lithuania gave Jewish officials more than 300 scrolls.

Security checks will further delay the immigration of Russian refugees

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Hundreds of Russian Jewish refugees on their way to the United States are expected to be delayed by new American guidelines that will subject them to extra security reviews.

The new guidelines, which go into effect Aug. 1, will further prolong what has become an arduous immigration process in the wake of Sept. 11.

It will subject emigrants from Russia to the same restrictions that have affected hundreds of Jewish refugees from Iran.

Many of the Iranian Jews are stranded in Vienna, awaiting security clearance.

Refugees from Iran and Islamic countries in Africa have been subject to the extra reviews because they come from countries deemed by the U.S. State Department to support terrorist organizations or are suspected of doing so.

Now all males aged 18-65 from Russia will encounter the extra hurdle as well, which will also affect family members traveling with them.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society was told the new requirement for Russians was prompted by concerns that Russian nationals could be connected with terrorist and organized crime activities and there is potential for the transfer of dangerous technologies from Russia to the United States.

Russian Jewish refugees could expect delays for several months, according to Leonard Glickman, executive vice president of HIAS.

He also expressed concern that a significant delay in processing could torpedo the opportunity for some refugees to immigrate to the United States at all.

After being granted refugee status, individuals face a one-year deadline to travel.

If the new delay pushes a refugee past that deadline then he will lose his refugee status and the case is closed for good, Glickman said.

Jews from the former Soviet Union can gain refugee status under a U.S. law that allows officials to take into account the history of anti-Semitism when refugees assert they have been persecuted. Refugees are entitled to special benefits. Jews make up some 30 percent of refugees from the former Soviet Union.

The new security measures apply only to refugees from Russia, not other former Soviet countries.

Glickman and other officials from refugee agencies met recently with State Department, National Security Council and Domestic Policy Council officials to discuss various problems with the refugee programs.

The refugee system has been reeling ever since Sept. 11 when concerns about foreign nationals led to a moratorium on all refugee interviews and processing.

Even after the moratorium was lifted in December, it had already caused a considerable backlog that shows little sign of abating.

Refugee advocacy organizations are urging the Bush administration to address the backlog by allowing extra refugees in next year.

The ceiling for refugees in 2002 was set at 70,000, but because of all the problems in the system, organizations say there is no chance that the number will be met and perhaps only half that number will actually come to the United States. Refugee groups are urging the State Department to shift the savings to enable more refugees next year rather than shift the money into assistance programs, which is also an option.

The program in the former Soviet Union was actually one of the only programs that was continuing to operate, albeit in a modest way, according to Glickman.

"Now, we don't know what will happen," he said, because any new procedural change has resulted in additional delays.

"I'm not all that optimistic that this will be easily implemented," he added.

For the Iranian Jewish refugees stuck in Vienna, there are 141 long-pending security requests submitted in January that are still waiting for clearance.

With those refugees traveling with 191 family members, the total is 332 people still waiting to leave after seven months, according to HIAS. For the Russians, HIAS officials said they were able to grandfather in those refugees ready to travel in August, and apply the new security reviews to those leaving later. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Fearing catastrophe and criticism, Israel begins releasing P.A. money***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Despite continuing terrorist attacks, Israel is beginning to release frozen Palestinian tax funds to avert a humanitarian disaster in the Palestinian areas.

Given the Palestinian Authority's record of abysmal financial management — and rampant corruption — some Israelis are questioning the wisdom of the move.

For months, Israel unsuccessfully pressured the international community to stop funding the Palestinian Authority, arguing that the money was being used to fund terrorism or would free up other P.A. funds for that purpose. This week, however, Israel promised to release some \$15 million to the Palestinian Authority as a goodwill gesture and a means of improving conditions for the Palestinian population.

Facing severe international criticism for the July 23 assassination of the military leader of Hamas — in a bombing raid that also killed at least 14 Palestinian civilians — Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon waived his condition that a monitoring system with U.S. participation be put in place to ensure that released funds are used correctly.

The move came after the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Daniel Kurtzer, warned that the plight of Palestinian civilians was becoming catastrophic. After the Gaza debacle, it seemed Israel could ill afford international condemnation for reports showing, for example, a rise in malnutrition among the Palestinian population.

Yet the move also comes amid revelations, contained in official Palestinian documents seized during an Israeli invasion this spring, of the elaborate mechanisms that President Yasser Arafat and other officials used to divert money from the P.A. budget to terrorist groups leading the attack on Israel.

Among the ruses, according to translations of the seized documents, was a system under which terrorists were appointed as assistants to official Palestinian security forces so that their salaries and operational expenses could be paid from the budget.

In addition, according to reports in the Israeli media, the Palestinian Authority manipulated the dollar-to-shekel exchange rate on donor funds from abroad, siphoning off the difference — some 20 percent of the funds — as a sort of tax that could be hidden from auditors and used at Arafat's discretion.

According to the Oslo agreements, Israel has been the trustee of customs and value added tax from Palestinian purchases in Israel or on goods imported to the Palestinian Authority through Israel.

Shortly after the intifada began in September 2000, Israel froze those assets on two grounds: Given the de facto state of war, it argued, the Palestinians might use any transferred funds for terrorist activities. In addition, given the P.A.'s financial disorder and opacity, there was almost no way of guaranteeing that the money would go to the proper accounts.

This week, however, Ohad Marani, director general of Israel's Finance Ministry, met with new P.A. Finance Minister Salam Fayyad and promised to release an initial \$15 million.

Critics blame Israeli policies for strangling the Palestinian economy and, they allege, deliberately harming the civilian population.

According to preliminary results released last week from a study commissioned by the U.S. government's Agency for International Development, nearly one-third of young Palestinian children are chronically malnourished, more than four times the rate before the intifada began 22 months ago. Palestinians blame Israeli restrictions imposed during the intifada.

"It is time that people pay attention to the real crisis emerging," Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi said. "It's a type of collective punishment in terms of health that will have implications for generations."

Israel maintains that the restrictions it has imposed — such as roadblocks, curfews and revoking work permits — are necessary to stop terrorists from infiltrating Israel, and notes that the steps have been taken in the context of a war the Palestinians initiated.

And yet Sharon knows that the international community most likely will blame Israel, and not the Palestinian leadership, for the Palestinians' plight.

The socioeconomic situation in the territories has deteriorated considerably in the past month, due to the lengthy closures and curfews Israel has imposed. Israel is concerned about the social consequences of the economic stalemate, which include reports of famine among the poorer strata of Palestinian society.

Decisions such as releasing the tax money and allowing 12,000 Palestinian workers to enter Israel are attempts to alleviate the economic situation.

They also may be intended to alleviate political pressures from the Labor Party, whose members increasingly are calling to leave the unity government, arguing that Sharon is not exploring potential openings toward peace.

Other Israelis, however, fear that Sharon's decision is misguided, especially in the absence of effective oversight mechanisms for the money.

In a sharply worded editorial, the Jerusalem Post noted that just several weeks after Israel had criticized the European Union for continuing to fund Arafat despite the violence, "Israel itself now joins the list of those propping up his terrorist regime with a steady cash flow."

Fayyad, whom Arafat appointed under heavy international pressure to reform, has worked for the International Monetary Fund in the Palestinian territories and has a good reputation.

He already has taken several measures to ensure tighter control of the state budget: Israel has insisted that financial transfers go directly to a P.A. banking account for which Fayyad is the only signatory. Yet some Israeli analysts argue that Arafat has made certain accounts off-limits even to Fayyad, preserving the Palestinian leader's discretionary use of some funds.

Israel thus is faced with a quandary. The danger still exists that funds forwarded to legitimate causes, such as paying civil servants' salaries, could free up other moneys for terrorist activities or rewards to suicide bombers' families.

Yet continuing to freeze those assets also could prove damaging. Much of the shattered Palestinian economy depends on this money, which at one point made up some 70 percent of the monthly P.A. budget.

For example, the Palestinian Authority needs \$35 million a month for salaries alone, according to Israeli estimates, and \$58 million, according to the Palestinians. Much of the salary outlay is for the P.A.'s illegally large security services — including, as the seized P.A. documents make clear, payments to terrorists in the field. □