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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel lifting restrictions in Gaza

Israel agreed to begin lifting restrictions on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip due to a drop in violence.

The move was agreed upon in a security meeting Monday night between Israeli and Palestinian security officials, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The Israeli army also announced it would begin easing restrictions on Palestinians in the West Bank city of Bethlehem starting Wednesday.

The measures include letting Palestinian workers into Israel, lifting travel restrictions on teachers and permitting clergy to travel between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the paper said.

Rabbi: Violence corrupts Israel

Britain's chief rabbi said Israel has implemented policies that are "incompatible" with Jewish ideals.

In an interview published Tuesday in England's Guardian newspaper, Jonathan Sacks said the current stalemate with the Palestinians is "corrupting" Jewish culture in Israel, specifically mentioning recent reports of smiling Israeli soldiers posing for a photograph with the corpse of a slain Palestinian.

Sacks says he has long been convinced that Israel will have to give back all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but said the Palestinians have stymied Israel's efforts to do so.

Europe blasted on anti-Semitism

A human rights group criticized European governments for not doing enough to combat anti-Semitism.

The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights said in a report released Tuesday that European governments are not accurately reporting anti-Semitic violence and must immediately acknowledge the "extraordinary dangers" posed by the recent rise of anti-Semitic violence in Europe.

Officials in Europe need to develop systems to register and combat hate crimes, the committee's report said.

Because of the Labor Day holiday in the U.S., the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Sept. 2.

THE DEBATE ON CAMPUS

Pro-Israel students return to school geared up for next round of tension

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Alison Siegel thinks twice before speaking about Israel in public.

The co-president of her Hillel group at the University of Illinois at Urbana, Champaign, the 19-year-old said, "I'm not going to pretend that it doesn't make me a target."

In her world, a window hosting an Israeli flag led to BB gunshots, Palestinian activists erected a refugee camp in the campus "quad," anti-Israel editorials appear almost daily in the college paper and anywhere from five to 20 activists demonstrate against Israel in front of the student union each day.

The problem is that their message has a basic appeal — "if you're with us, you're for freedom; if you're against us, you're for oppression," she said.

Since the Palestinian uprising broke out nearly two years ago, college campuses have emerged as hotbeds of debate on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

The campuses have also recently drawn unprecedented attention from Jewish organizations, who see the institutions as a critical battleground for defending the Jewish state — and helping students enhance their understanding of Israel and their Jewishness. The traditionally liberal enclaves have handed a home to activists supporting Palestinians, often perceived as the victims in the conflict with Israel.

And in extreme cases, anti-Israel rhetoric has translated to intimidation, even violence, against Jewish students — like the harassment of students leaving Yom Kippur services at the University of California at Berkeley Hillel last year.

While anti-Israel activity dipped after Sept. 11 — many Americans empathized with the Jewish state after being battered by terrorism at home — it revived in the spring. Jewish students and professionals are expecting a continuation of such activity with the new school year, including a major campaign to divest from Israel and a campus tour by Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi slated for the fall.

But this year, Siegel and other like-minded students aim to reclaim the debate.

Siegel's focus is moving from a reactive stance to a proactive one, with program ideas such as cultural fairs and educating about Israel's accomplishments.

And like many other campus activists now returning to school, she has spent the summer preparing.

Siegel joined 400 students attending a pro-Israel advocacy workshop in Israel in May, which was sponsored by Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

She also met hundreds of Hillel leaders at a bucolic camp in Honesdale, Pa., last week for workshops on Israel and fostering Jewish life on campus.

Hillel is one of several Jewish groups that sponsored Israel advocacy programs for students over the summer.

And last month Hillel and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation launched a joint body, the Israel on Campus Coalition, to oversee coordinated efforts.

The level of concern was underscored at last week's annual Hillel leadership conference, where for the first time nearly every major Jewish organization was represented.

Jewish professionals say the crisis on the campuses is less about the strength of pro-Palestinian activists — the vocal minority causes serious trouble in only a few extreme cases. Indeed, a recent American Jewish Committee-sponsored poll showed

MIDEAST FOCUS

Construction threatens wall

The southern portion of the Western Wall is under threat of collapse due to illegal construction by Muslims, according to a committee of Israeli archaeologists and public figures.

In a letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the Committee for the Prevention of the Destruction of Antiquities said the wall has gradually shifted out from its original position as a result of massive illegal construction on the Temple Mount by the Wakf, or Muslim religious trust, Israel Radio reported.

A Wakf official denied that there had been any shift in the wall in the past 30 years.

In wake of the reports, Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert urged the government Tuesday to take immediate action to prevent the "historical and human disaster" that would happen if the portion of the wall collapsed.

Israeli Arabs to condemn terror

Israel's interior minister and Israeli Arab leaders are due to meet to condemn Israeli Arab involvement in terrorism.

Thursday's meeting was scheduled in the wake of Monday's announcement that Israeli police and the Shin Bet security service had arrested seven Israeli Arabs for alleged involvement in an Aug. 4 suicide bus bombing in which nine people were killed and some 50 wounded.

Aloni probed for Arafat visit

Israel's attorney general ordered a former Cabinet member investigated for visiting Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Shulamit Aloni, one of the founders of the left-wing Meretz Party, is suspected of entering Palestinian Authority territory without permission when she visited Arafat in Ramallah with two Israeli Arab members of Knesset.

that American students stand with Israel versus the Palestinians at a ratio of 4-1.

The main problem, the professionals say, is the Jewish students' ambivalence and lack of knowledge about Israel.

Although there are outstanding examples of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic attacks on some campuses, "don't extrapolate," and say "every campus is on fire, every campus is under siege. It's just not true," said Richard Joel, president of Hillel.

"The enemy that we have to fight is not the Palestinians," Joel said. "It's the unbelievable ignorance of most Jewish young people to the beauty and centrality of Israel in their Jewish lives."

For young Jewish students on American campuses, it's often the first time they have had to defend Israel or their Jewishness, and they lack the education and experience to do so.

Even among those attending the Hillel gathering, many of whom were top campus leaders groomed by Jewish camps, day schools and youth groups, several felt confused about their own understanding of the Middle East conflict.

"Lots of people on campus who care a lot about Israel are conflicted and torn. I would go so far as to say in pain," said Erin Scharff, a 20-year-old student at Yale.

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis has in no way caused a "firestorm" on her campus, Scharff said. But she said that many students are "yearning" for a liberal voice in support of Israel.

Engaging Jewish students in such a perspective "needs to be a priority," she said at a seminar at last week's conference that focused on uniting diverse stances for Israel.

For Anna Chapman, a 21-year-old senior, the lack of a nuanced approach to Israel advocacy has kept her from getting involved with the pro-Israel group at New York University.

Most of the students are too hawkish, she said. So she sticks to her involvement with Kesher, the Reform student organization.

Indeed, many of the workshops at the conference sought to reclaim Israel as a liberal cause by linking it to other progressive issues, such as women's rights, gay rights or democracy. For its part, Hillel has tried to bring varied voices under its tent with its new motto: "Wherever we stand, we stand with Israel."

At the University of Michigan, the campus that developed that motto, Hillel students and staff are trying to put pluralism into practice.

The pro-Israel voice on campus is "as textured as the Jewish community," said Rabbi Shena Potter, assistant director of the school's Hillel.

She said Hillel is encouraging internal discussion on campus.

"If you really want to win the hearts and minds of the Jewish community and the community at large, you have to go beyond sound bytes," Potter said.

That's what 21-year old Beth Kalisch is demanding.

The material that Jewish organizations provide to students is too simplistic, said the Yale senior, who is vice president of education at her school's Hillel.

The Jewish community has "given us talking points and advocacy suggestions," she said, but she would like to see more guidance as well as a broader view of the different positions of Jewish groups on issues related to Israel.

For 19-year old Daniella Risman, a sophomore at Oberlin College and the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, there is a startling degree of misinformation about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Students are "making noise" before they're educated, she said.

"You need facts, and you need a deeper understanding," Risman said. "That's why I'm here."

Despite the focus on Israel, which consumed about half of the agenda at the six-day conference of Hillel leaders, students are eager to mix other elements of Jewish life into the mold. As for Siegel of the University of Illinois, she has Israel fatigue.

"I get sick of" the political debate, she said. "No one asked me if I wanted to be in a leadership position when things were so tough."

It "just so happened I went to college when it was going on. Whether or not that's fair," or "whether or not I wanted it," it's "mine to deal with," Siegel said, adding that she's "glad to do it."

Still, she said, "we want to play and have fun, too. We're still kids." □



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JEWISH WORLD

UJC extends Israel campaign

The North American Jewish federation system extended its emergency fund-raising campaign for Israel through 2003.

The United Jewish Communities cited the ongoing needs of Israelis "living in the face of terrorist threats and attacks." The campaign has raised \$312 million in pledges since it began last fall.

Switzerland rejects AMIA probe

Switzerland rejected a request to investigate claims that Argentina's former president took \$10 million in bribes to cover up Iran's alleged role in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center that killed 85 people and wounded dozens. Swiss officials dismissed the allegations against Carlos Menem as "vague."

The allegations were reinvigorated this summer when The New York Times published testimony from a former Iranian intelligence agent implicating Menem.

School reinstates Israel program

New York's state university system is reinstating its Israel study program. The announcement by the State University of New York's chancellor came after Gov. George Pataki reportedly objected to the suspension. One of Pataki's Democratic challengers for governor, Carl McCall, criticized Pataki over the weekend for allowing the program to be suspended.

Group stands by its award

B'nai B'rith said one of its lodges acted "appropriately" in making a controversial award to an African American soldier for his wartime service. The group's Berlin lodge gave Paul Parks an award in 2000 for "distinguished achievement and humanitarian spirit," and did not mention his claims that he helped liberate Dachau.

After an internal investigation, B'nai B'rith said Tuesday that no eyewitnesses could confirm that Parks was present at the liberation. "Servicemen who were there and say they saw no African-American soldiers may be absolutely correct, but that does not prove Parks was not present after liberation," the group said. Army records also call into question Parks' claim that he took part in the invasion of Normandy on D-Day.

Canadian survivors get pensions

Germany agreed to provide pensions to German-speaking Canadian Jews forced from their homes in Central and Eastern Europe during World War II.

The deal signed Tuesday will benefit a small number of Jews who were excluded from an earlier deal for Central European Jews because they spoke German.

The United States and Israel have similar deals with Germany.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

It's not Durban, but protests mar U.N. conference in South Africa

By Michael Belling

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — If pro-Israel activists hoped that the U.N. conference on sustainable development would pass without the anti-Israel attacks that characterized last year's U.N. summit against racism, they have been proven wrong.

On each of the conference's first two days, Palestinian supporters attempted to turn a parallel meeting of nongovernmental organizations in Johannesburg into a forum to slander Israel — for, among other things, allegedly torturing Palestinian children, stealing Palestinian land and poisoning Palestinian water.

Yet Israeli and Jewish activists seem better prepared this year than they were at the racism conference in Durban, South Africa, where they were shocked and overwhelmed by the vehemence of the anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic attacks.

The local representatives in the Jewish caucus, led by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the South African Zionist Federation, had prepared kits for Jewish organizations covering a wide range of issues, including answers to media distortions against Israel. Some 50 media kits have been distributed.

In addition, pro-Israel activists are fighting back more vigorously than last year. On Monday, some 50 students shouted down the wife of jailed Palestinian militia leader Marwan Barghouti when she accused Israel of torturing her husband and tried to compare him to Nelson Mandela. The pro-Israel activists wore T-shirts urging pro-Palestinian activists to "Stop hijacking the summit" for their partisan purposes.

They also burst frequently into peace songs in various languages, including Arabic.

Embarrassed by its poor handling of the Durban summit, the South African government has sought to dampen Palestinian attempts to obscure the conference's environmental objectives through anti-Zionist attacks. South Africa's foreign affairs minister, Nkosazana Zuma, warned that illegal protests would not be tolerated at this year's conference, which runs through Sept. 4.

Indeed, when pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli demonstrators squared off Monday over the Barghouti allegations, police intervened within minutes. Mark Sofer, an Israeli Foreign Ministry official, told JTA that the prompt police response seemed to bear out predictions that organizers would not allow this summit to be "Durbanized."

The Palestinian Solidarity Committee of South Africa is planning demonstrations throughout the two-week summit. It will continue activities across South Africa through Sept. 28, the two-year anniversary of the intifada.

Tensions flared again on Tuesday, when a scuffle broke out between Palestinian supporters and young Jews, mostly Israelis, taking part in the nongovernmental section of the conference some 15 miles from the main center. The Jewish group, largely students, held Israeli flags aloft during a presentation by Israeli representatives on solar energy. In addition, a South African man held a South African flag.

Palestinian supporters tried to remove the flags by force. Police again quickly broke up the incident. One of the Palestinian supporters, a black South African, told a local news station that he felt the South African flag, which symbolized the blacks' struggle against apartheid and the transition to democracy, had no place alongside a "racist flag."

Earlier, a delegation of several dozen Palestinians held a demonstration in which they accused the Jewish National Fund of using state land to maintain an apartheid regime.

The Jewish Agency for Israel said in a statement that a group of some 30 to 50 Palestinian militants were attempting to disrupt the summit.

The Palestinian booth at the summit has no environmental information, but much material attacking Israel. The Palestinians say they are too busy defending themselves from Israeli actions to worry about the environment.

Palestinians at the conference are trying to gather thousands of signatures on a petition calling on Israel to free Barghouti, and calling on the South African government to close its embassy in Tel Aviv and freeze ties with Israel. The petition also urges support for the Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Al-Aksa Brigade terrorist groups, the Post reported. □

Just one week after inception, cease-fire plan appears shaky

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Reports of the death of a gradual Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire plan may be premature.

A lot of evidence surfaced this week that the initial skepticism that greeted the "Gaza/Bethlehem First" plan was justified.

But there were also facts to buttress the optimistic view that the plan might reduce nearly two years of violence.

Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer insisted this week that the plan was not being put into deep freeze, despite a decision to hold off a possible Israeli army withdrawal from Hebron at least until after the High Holidays, which begin in early September.

Meetings on ways to progress with the cease-fire plan will still be held this week, the Defense Minister's Office said Sunday.

But in adopting the army's recommendation not to pull troops from Hebron for the time being, Ben-Eliezer cited security warnings and concern that terrorist groups there might exploit the holiday period to launch attacks.

Comments from the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, publicly confirmed the army's point of view — and the unlikelihood of the cease-fire plan actually working.

Addressing a conference of rabbis Sunday, Ya'alon said a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be seen as submission to terrorism. He added that the Palestinian Authority's adoption of terrorism as a tactic reflects its refusal to accept Israel's existence.

Israel must decisively defeat the intifada so the Palestinians don't conclude that terrorism pays, Ya'alon said.

Ben-Eliezer also noted that Israeli troops could withdraw only if it was clear that the Palestinian security forces taking responsibility for maintaining order were capable of doing so.

Israeli security officials gave a negative review of Palestinian efforts to halt terror attacks in the Gaza Strip in the week since the accord was signed, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

Israel has been waiting for evidence that the Palestinians are serious about stopping terrorism in Gaza, where the Palestinian Authority security apparatus is largely intact. Israeli military officials said P.A. security organs have yet to take serious steps to crack down on Palestinian terrorist groups, Ha'aretz reported.

For his part, Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said the Israelis are stalling.

"What I can describe the situation to be is nonmovement, as if the consistent position of the Israeli government is to keep the status quo," Erekat was quoted as saying.

But not all the news was negative.

Israel agreed to begin lifting restrictions on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip due to a drop in violence. The move was agreed upon in a security meeting Monday night between Israeli and Palestinian security officials, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The Israeli army also announced it would begin easing restrictions on Palestinians in the West Bank city of Bethlehem starting Wednesday.

The measures include letting Palestinian workers into Israel, lifting travel restrictions on teachers and permitting clergy to travel between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the paper said.

In Bethlehem, Palestinian security forces are showing good intentions, according to Ha'aretz. But the Palestinian security apparatus in the West Bank faces a formidable task of rebuilding physical structures, personnel and morale.

Palestinians say it will take them time to rebuild their security forces before they can take effective measures on the ground.

Israeli skeptics say that is the Palestinians' way of signaling that they will continue to allow terror attacks, while disclaiming responsibility.

In the meantime, the Palestinian Authority's interior minister, Gen. Abdel Razek Yehiyeh, called on Palestinian militias to rethink their strategy of armed struggle. He urged them to abide by P.A. decisions and the rule of law, and called on Palestinian factions to renew a dialogue toward formulating a united strategy.

But the militant groups, ranging from the fundamentalist Hamas and Islamic Jihad to the Al-Aksa Brigade of P.A. President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, rejected any cease-fire and urged continued warfare against Israel.

Earlier, the "Intifada leadership council" issued a statement in the West Bank calling on the Palestinian Authority to cease security contacts with Israel, including the cease-fire plan.

Marwan Barghouti, head of Fatah in the West Bank, told a Kuwaiti newspaper that he opposes agreements with Israel unless it ends its "occupation, recognizes an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital" and accepts the "Right of Return" for millions of Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

Currently in an Israeli jail, Barghouti is slated to go on trial next month for allegedly masterminding terrorist attacks that killed scores of Israelis.

Violence — and Israel's anti-terror operations — continued this week, albeit at a slightly slower pace.

Four armed Palestinians were killed in weekend clashes with Israeli troops. Two died while attempting to infiltrate an Israeli settlement in the Gaza Strip last Friday night, while the other two died in a firefight with Israelis soldiers patrolling the West Bank city of Jenin on Saturday.

Israeli troops continued arrest operations throughout the West Bank. Among those detained was another Palestinian allegedly connected to the Jerusalem-based Hamas cell captured a week ago that is blamed for at least eight terrorist attacks, including the July 31 Hebrew University bombing.

On Monday, Israel arrested local Hamas leader Jamal Abu Haji during a raid in the Jenin refugee camp. In Tulkarm, troops demolished the home of a Palestinian suspected of involvement in terrorist attacks that killed eight people.

Seven Israeli Arabs have been arrested on charges that they assisted in an Aug. 4 suicide bombing that killed nine people and wounded 50. According to information released for publication Monday, seven members of a Galilee clan were arrested several weeks ago and have confessed to allegations regarding the attack in northern Israel.

Israeli army plans to demolish the eastern Jerusalem homes of two suicide bombers were delayed Sunday when the terrorists' families appealed to the military prosecutor in the West Bank.

In the Dec. 1 attack, the two bombers blew themselves up among Saturday night revelers on Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall, killing 11 people and wounding more than 180.

Whether the "Gaza/Bethlehem First" plan has any chance of preventing such attacks in the future remains anybody's guess. □