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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Suicide attack in Tel Aviv

A suicide bomber killed five Israelis and wounded more than 50 in central Tel Aviv on Thursday. Many of the wounded were reported in critical condition.

The bomb ripped the bus apart as it was traveling along Allenby Street near the city's Great Synagogue.

Police said the bus driver died trying to stop the attack, adding that he probably saved many lives.

Israel isolates Arafat

Israel's Cabinet decided to isolate Yasser Arafat once again in his Ramallah compound.

The decision was reached Thursday at an emergency meeting called by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to discuss Israel's response to this week's surge in Palestinian terror, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. The Cabinet decided not to expel Arafat, but did demand the handover of 20 suspected terrorists holed up with the Palestinian Authority president in his compound.

The isolation decision was immediately put into effect, with Israeli tanks reinstating a blockade of the compound that had been lifted in May.

During the operation, Israeli troops shot and wounded a wanted Palestinian terrorist, who later died of his wounds.

U.S. pledges to protect Israel

Bush administration officials told Jewish leaders Wednesday that protecting Israel would be a key concern in U.S. plans for any attack on Iraq.

Members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations met with Under Secretary of Defense Doug Feith and Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, and were assured that protecting Israel was a "priority concern," said Malcolm Hoenlein, the conference's executive vice chairman. The Jewish leaders also met with 30 U.S. senators to discuss numerous issues, including \$200 million in aid to Israel now pending in Congress, a water dispute with Lebanon and legislation calling for sanctions against Syria and the Palestinians.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Sept. 23.

NEWS ANALYSIS

At two-year mark, intifada shows Israel can be unexpectedly resilient

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli society has been bruised and brutalized by two years of Palestinian terror and violence, but as the intifada enters its third year it has brought the Palestinians no political gain whatsoever.

On the contrary, there is far less on the table for the Palestinians than when they launched their campaign of terror in late September 2000.

Now, with the Palestinians' cities in ruin, their leader isolated and Palestinian public figures increasingly admitting that the intifada has been disastrous for their cause, Israeli politicians are beginning to believe that the end of the onslaught is in sight.

When the intifada began during Rosh Hashanah two years ago, Israel had just made an unprecedentedly generous offer at the Camp David summit, offering to withdraw from virtually all the territories conquered in the 1967 Six-Day War, share Jerusalem with a Palestinian state and seek creative solutions for control of the Temple Mount.

Though the Camp David offer granted the Palestinians almost all their ostensible demands, Palestinian leaders believed that violence would quickly pry from Israel a few last crumbs — without the Palestinians being forced to make any concessions of their own or declare an end to their conflict with Israel.

According to Israeli military officials, the Palestinians' model was Lebanon.

The ragged Israeli withdrawal in May 2000 led many Arabs to conclude that sustained violence and even moderate casualties would lead Israel to beat a similarly chaotic retreat from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah had compared Israeli society to a spider web, brittle and easily destroyed. True, he argued, Israel had a strong army and a sophisticated industrial base, but Israelis over the years had become weak and pampered.

In Lebanon, the killing of some two dozen Israeli soldiers each year, far from the home front, had provoked a popular movement that forced Israel to withdraw unilaterally from its security zone. That experience, according to Nasrallah's theory, proved that Israeli society could no longer stomach civilian or battlefield losses, and that Israelis had lost their will to fight.

Palestinian leaders, from Arafat down to militia commanders in the field, eagerly adopted the spider web theory and tried to apply it to the intifada — except that events on the ground disproved it.

What they hadn't counted on is that Israelis would react differently when the battle was not on some distant border but in the heart of their capital or in the cities of their densely populated coastal plain.

Israelis grieved over their losses and changed their lifestyles, but even after two years of unremitting violence, they show no signs of folding.

On the contrary, Israel has proven it can not just take a hit, but can hit back hard.

As for their will to fight, more Israeli reservists turned up for this spring's Operation Protective Wall — the Israel Defense Force's first major counteroffensive into Palestinian territory after 18 months of fighting — than had been summoned.

The army's new chief of staff, Lt. Gen Moshe Ya'alon, says the staying power of Israeli society will determine the outcome of the conflict.

Unlike the Palestinians, who Ya'alon believes wish to annihilate Israel, Israel does

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arrests in Jerusalem murder

Police arrested three suspects in the slaying of an Israeli whose charred body was found Wednesday in eastern Jerusalem.

The three admitted to killing 67-year-old Ma'aleh Adumim resident David Buhbut, but said it was over a monetary dispute, Israel Radio reported. Police are still investigating a possible terrorist motive.

Ministers seek dual tracks

Two Israeli legislators in Washington this week are urging the United States to stabilize the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before attacking Iraq. The two left-wing Knesset members on the trip, organized by Americans for Peace Now, say that a U.S. attack on Iraq could unite the Palestinians and the Arab world against Israel and that it is important for the Bush administration to exert more influence over the reform process in the Palestinian Authority.

Iraq says U.S. acting for Israel

Iraq's foreign minister said the United States is moving toward attacking Iraq "on behalf of Zionism."

Speaking at the U.N. General Assembly on Thursday, Najji Sabri said the United States is "making up problems with Iraq" in order to prevent the United Nations from taking action against what he described as Israel's nuclear weapons capability.

Would-be bomber arrested

Israeli security forces arrested a suspected would-be suicide bomber near Nablus on Wednesday night.

Also that night, Israeli bulldozers tore down the eastern Jerusalem homes of two Hamas members who carried out a double suicide bombing in Jerusalem last December that killed 11 people and wounded dozens. The families had appealed the demolition orders to the High Court, which rejected the motions this week.



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not seek to destroy the Palestinians. Victory for Israel, therefore, means forcing the Palestinians to realize that terror will get them nowhere, Ya'alon said in a recent interview with the Ha'aretz newspaper.

Israeli society must show no signs of cracking and Israeli politicians must offer no concessions under threat of violence, he says — or there will be no end to Palestinian terror designed to force Israeli concessions.

As the intifada enters its third year, 612 Israelis have been killed, including 427 civilians. Of those, 250 were killed in suicide bombings, including 227 civilians.

More than 4,500 have been wounded, more than 3,200 of them civilians.

While the Palestinians have suffered more casualties, more than 1,500 have died, the percentage of civilian victims on the Israeli side is far higher — a reflection of the fact that Israel has striven to avoid harming Palestinian civilians, while the Palestinians have made civilians their primary targets.

But despite the Israeli resolve, the intifada has had a devastating impact on the Israeli psyche and on Israeli public opinion. It even has affected core notions of the meaning and purpose of the Jewish state.

One central strand of Zionism, associated mainly with the right-of-center Likud Party, stresses the prevalence of anti-Semitism and the resulting need for a place of Jewish refuge and self-defense. Another, associated mainly with the left-of-center Labor Party, focuses on Zionism's role in normalizing the Jewish people and integrating them into the Middle East.

The ruthlessness of the intifada has strengthened the more pessimistic Likud view. If elections were held today, opinion polls show, Likud would crush Labor by a ratio of almost 2-1.

The indiscriminate murder of innocents also has led to a hardening of Israeli attitudes toward Palestinians and a readiness to accept countermeasures that may impinge on Palestinian civil rights.

Those measures include destroying the houses of terrorists' relatives or deporting relatives who aid terrorists from their homes to other Palestinian-ruled areas.

And the impact of the violence on Israeli opinion has been enormous.

According to a recent poll in the Israeli daily Ma'ariv, 79 percent of Israelis say the Oslo peace agreements are no longer valid, and that Israel should adopt a different path to accommodation with the Palestinians.

Most Israelis see Arafat as the evil force behind the intifada, and 81 percent are convinced he does not want peace with Israel under any circumstances.

Yet 45 percent of Israelis still believe that the Palestinian people as a whole, under different leadership, would be ready for a peace agreement with Israel. But that is a far cry from the heady days of Oslo, when more than 80 percent of Israelis believed in peace with the Palestinians.

In addition, the terror has changed the way Israelis go about their daily lives. During waves of violence, people don't travel unless they have to, so places of entertainment, restaurants and shopping malls suffer — even though more than 100,000 Israelis work as security guards in public places.

Such lifestyle changes, and the fact that the violence has driven away tourists and investors, have hurt the Israeli economy, creating unprecedentedly high unemployment and wreaking havoc among small businesses.

Yet with Israeli military and administrative responses to the terror — closing borders to Palestinian workers, imposing curfews on Palestinian areas and mounting counterterrorism operations in all the West Bank cities — it is the Palestinians who are suffering most from their offensive.

Their economy, their cities, their government and their daily lives all lie in ruins. Since Operation Protective Wall this spring, the IDF has devastated the terrorist organizations.

Voices on the Palestinian side increasingly are calling the intifada a disaster and urging their leaders to turn to nonviolent means of opposing Israel.

Though they have succeeded in dominating such international forums as last year's U.N. World Conference Against Racism, the Palestinians have failed to mobilize the international community to intercede and force Israeli concessions. □

(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)

JEWISH WORLD

Papon release sparks outcry

France's justice minister said he is seeking legal grounds to overturn the surprise release of Nazi-era war criminal Maurice Papon. Dominique Perben said Thursday he was taking the step because of the outcry caused by the release. A day earlier, a French appeals court ruled that Papon, 92, was too old and sick to serve out his 10-year sentence. Papon began serving the sentence in October 1999 after he was found guilty of helping deport 1,560 Jews to Nazi death camps during World War II.

At dawn Thursday, a dozen protesters banged pots and pans at Papon's house outside Paris, where he spent his first night of freedom. Swastikas and "SS" were scrawled on the outside walls of his house. Other protests were planned in Paris and Bordeaux.

Germany to pay insurance claims

Germany agreed to pay some \$100 million to cover unpaid Holocaust-era insurance claims. In a deal reached Wednesday with the International Commission on Holocaust-Era Insurance Claims, Germany also agreed to pay roughly \$174 million for a humanitarian fund.

The settlement, reached after two years of difficult negotiations, also calls for German insurers to publish lists of policies that were taken out by Jews before and during the Holocaust. Israel Singer, president of the Claims Conference, which played a key role in the negotiations, called the agreement a "victory for a measure of justice, albeit late."

BBC Israel coverage protested

Some 7,500 people signed a statement protesting what they described as the BBC's "hostile" coverage of Israel.

According to the petition organizers, the BBC repeatedly broadcasts reports that portray the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a one-sided and misleading manner. Representatives of British Jewry and the Israeli community in London presented the statement Wednesday to the BBC's director general.

AJ Committee report blasts U.N.

The United Nations spent most of its time last year adopting anti-Israel resolutions when it should have dealt with the war on terrorism, according to a new report.

This was the central conclusion of "One-Sided: The Continuing Campaign Against Israel at the United Nations," the American Jewish Committee's annual report examining the treatment of Israel at the U.N. General Assembly and the Geneva-based U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The report, which includes a detailed country-by-country voting record on Israel, is available at www.ajc.org.

Who's on first? Palestinians fight over position of U.S. representative

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Hanna Siniora thinks he is going to be the next representative of the PLO in Washington.

Just don't tell that to Hassan Abdel Rahman, who has held the post for more than 10 years.

Siniora, a Palestinian Christian who came to Washington this week to meet with State Department officials and other influentials, says he was appointed by Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and will replace Rahman on Oct. 1.

The only problem is that nobody has told Rahman or the State Department.

Rahman said last week that "there is no appointment, period" and that he will remain the PLO's representative in Washington for the foreseeable future.

Asked about Siniora's assertion that the change would take place in October, Rahman said, "That is seriously not true."

"I am here in my official capacity as the representative of the PLO until Chairman Arafat decides otherwise," Rahman told JTA.

The diplomatic spat is the latest embarrassment for the Palestinians in the United States. In April, their mission was evicted from its Washington office for failing to pay rent.

Rahman, a frequent guest on U.S. news shows, has worked mostly via cell phone since then.

"I work at the pleasure of the president," he said, referring to Arafat. "If he feels I can serve here, fine. If he feels I can serve somewhere else, that is very normal."

The confusion may hamper the Palestinians' efforts to improve their image in the United States.

The American and Israeli governments essentially have dismissed Arafat as a terrorist and, last week, members of the Palestinian Cabinet were forced to resign en masse to avoid a no-confidence vote from the Palestinian legislature.

Public opinion polls continue to show that Americans take Israel's side over the Palestinians.

In addition, American Jews are mounting a massive publicity campaign to improve Israel's image in the United States and shore up American support.

Rather than responding in kind, however, the Palestinians are struggling over who will represent them in Washington.

Within diplomatic circles, Rahman has been perceived as largely inept at getting the Palestinians' message across.

"He's not been regarded as the most effective of representatives," one Bush administration official said.

In recent years the PLO increasingly has utilized Edward Abington, the former U.S. consul general in eastern Jerusalem, to push its interests.

"It tells a lot," the administration official said of Abington's growing role. "They feel they needed somebody to act as a go-between, someone to act as interpreter for Rahman."

State Department officials said they have received no notice of a change in PLO representative. While the position is not ambassadorial level and does not require a formal presentation of credentials to the State Department, a spokesperson said it has not received even a diplomatic notice, which is required.

When Siniora met last week with David Hale, director of the State Department's office of Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs, he did so not as the PLO representative but as a "significant Palestinian civil leader," the spokesperson said.

Siniora is the publisher of The Jerusalem Times, an English-language weekly, and head of the Palestinian Chamber of Commerce in Ramallah. The Washington posting would be his first political position.

In Washington for a series of meetings and to find a place to move to last week, Siniora spoke to JTA as if the position were already his.

"The change came from the president himself," he said. □

SUKKOT FEATURE

Getting etrogim ready for holiday is far more than a two-week affair

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In a quiet orchard just off a busy four-lane highway, Yossi Ludmir runs his family's etrog empire.

Dressed in a white shirt, black pants and a black yarmulke, a cell phone in one hand and a lit cigarette in the other, Ludmir doesn't look like the typical farmer.

But the quirky requirements of the citron crop create a different kind of planter.

Four generations of Ludmirs have tended etrog groves since arriving in the Mideast in 1820. They now own 74 acres of etrog orchards and pack the fruit at a warehouse in Bnei Brak, the mostly fervently Orthodox city outside Tel Aviv.

The Ludmir's Central Israel Etrog Co. controls 70 percent of the citron, or etrog, market in Israel. The company exports around 100,000 etrogim to the United States each Sukkot. The etrog is one of the "four species" that are at the core of Sukkot observances.

The citron, myrtle, willow and lulav, or palm fronds, make up the four species that are shaken in six directions and blessed during the eight-day Sukkot holiday, which this year starts at sundown on Sept. 20.

"It's a routine, it's a living," shrugged Ludmir, who also dabbles in real estate. "But it appeals to me."

On a sunny day in September, under an azure blue sky, the thin, thorny branches of the etrog trees are laden with the lime-colored fruit, shaded by the tree's glossy green leaves.

In a clearing in the center of the orchard, the fruits that have already been picked are placed in foam-padded cartons with oval indentations to cushion each etrog. Orchard workers sit around a long foam table, filling the air with a citrusy scent as they gently rinse, dry and pack the citrons in pockets of pink foam webbing.

The etrogim were once cushioned with long strips of hairlike flax from Turkey. The foam, which is cheaper, comes from a kibbutz factory in northern Israel.

The cartons of citrons are then sent to Israel's Agriculture Ministry, which checks the fruit for any sign of disease. A religious supervisor then conducts an inspection, making sure each etrog is considered kosher for ritual use.

The entire process — growing, harvesting, packing and selling — takes place from April through September or October, depending on the dates of Sukkot.

This year, the etrog growers are expecting a bit of a shortage.

With the weather staying cold in Israel until early June, and the High Holidays falling earlier than usual this year, there was a shorter etrog growth period.

"People think it's a two-week business," said Ya'akov Charlap, who owns Charlap Etrogs with his twin brother, Chaim.

He sells the etrogim from his warehouse in the New York city borough of Queens, and his brother grows them on a 7.4-acre orchard outside Hadera.

"Pretty much the entire year is involved," said Charlap, who has been in business for 20 years. "You start calling potential clients in June."

Anyone who has ever shelled out \$50 for a lulav-and-etrog set knows that etrog cultivation, harvesting and selling is much more

than just a business. Most of Israel's citrus orchards are located in the 28-mile coastal stretch from Hadera to Gadera. The palm fronds for the lulav can be found near Sinai, in what is now Egypt, while myrtle are generally grown on farms up north. Willow branches can be gathered most anywhere, even in people's backyards.

Part of the mitzvah of buying an etrog is finding the perfect citron, oval in shape, with the pitom, or stem, intact, and bearing a skin without blemishes.

An etrog can be priced from \$12 to \$100, depending on the size, surface and color of the fruit.

"It's a mitzvah to have the best etrog," Ludmir said.

Etrog prices have often raised protests regarding a global etrog cartel, given the small number of growers and wholesalers in the business. But prices haven't gone up much in the last 10 years, Charlap said.

It is an expensive business to maintain. Etrog trees can only be used for five to six years, and then have to be replanted in order to bear fruit. There are also the Jewish laws of shmita to contend with. The laws require that fields lie fallow every seven years.

Each etrog starts out as a small, white flower, whose bud blossoms in April and becomes a hard, green citron about three months later. When picked off the tree, the citron bears more of a resemblance to a green lime than a yellow lemon, with only its bumpy skin distinguishing it from the other citrus fruits.

Israelis are used to buying green etrogim, while those living outside Israel have grown accustomed to yellow citrons, which have had time to fully ripen while in transit overseas.

The slim, wiry citron trees also grow thorns, which have to be kept away from the etrog, since it must be unblemished and free of any imperfections in order to satisfy the strict requirements of the Sukkot ritual.

There are those who don't even like to rely on the etrog selection available to them in the outdoor markets set up before Sukkot in Israeli cities.

At Ludmir's orchard, a minivan of fervently Orthodox men arrived on a recent sunny morning in early September to pick their own etrogim. Sitting on overturned packing cases, they peered through magnifying glasses at a dozen citrons, poking with toothpicks at questionable spots on the thick-skinned fruits, looking for just the right one.

Something like the tradition of cutting down one's own Christmas tree. "It's a little different!" laughed Ludmir, shaking his head at the comparison.

The word etrog is Aramaic, which means delightful. The English equivalent, citron, is derived from the Greek word "kedros" — hadar in Hebrew — which means citrus.

Kedros was Latinized as cedrus, which evolved into citrus, and then citron.

In Second Temple times, the etrog was the only known citrus fruit, according to Eliezer Goldschmidt, a horticulture professor at Hebrew University.

As such, it was the only choice for the Sukkot ritual, as the Talmud states that every Jew should take the fruit of the hadar tree.

Most citrus species arrived in the Middle East from China and India, with the citron first, followed by the lemon and other citrus species. The etrog is still grown in Morocco and Italy, and there are those who prefer the Italian Yonaver species of etrog to the typical Israeli etrog. □