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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Last five Iranian Jews released

Iran has released the final five of 13 Iranian Jews arrested on charges of spying for Israel.

Unlike three other Jews set free last week, this quintet has not been pardoned, American advocates say. The five seem to have been released on furlough for an indefinite period of time, raising concerns that the men have been left in legal limbo and are vulnerable to being rearrested at the whim of Iranian authorities.

All of the Iranian Jews who were arrested in 1999 on charges of spying for Israel are now out of jail.

Sharon accepts U.S. plan

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he accepts the basic principles presented in a U.S. peace plan, but not a total settlement freeze.

Speaking Monday before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Sharon said an exception needed to be made for natural settlement growth, Israel Radio reported.

Among other things, the plan calls for Israel to dismantle illegal outposts and halt military operations in Palestinian-controlled areas.

The Palestinians are required to name a prime minister, unify their various security forces and reinstate security cooperation with Israel.

The phased plan also would put international supervisors in the region to determine compliance, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

U.S. diplomat killed in Amman

An American diplomat was gunned down Monday outside his home in Amman, Jordan.

The diplomat was identified as Lawrence Foley, a senior administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The killing came at a time of rising anti-American sentiment in the region because of perceived U.S. bias toward Israel and President Bush's campaign for a possible war on Iraq. No group has claimed responsibility for the slaying.

U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said U.S. officials "don't quite know enough yet" to call the killing a terrorist attack. Boucher said security has been upgraded at diplomats' homes as well as at U.S. embassies and consulates around the world.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Ad on campus 'intimidation' ends up fueling debate on Mideast activism

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jason Benkendorf is stumped. The political science major can't understand why American University's president hasn't joined more than 300 other university presidents in signing a statement against intimidation of Jewish students on campus.

So Benkendorf, a junior who is president of A.U.'s Students for Israel, joined with the president of the campus' Jewish Student Association in writing a letter to President Benjamin Ladner.

They sent Ladner the American Jewish Committee-sponsored statement, along with an editorial in its defense by the AJCommittee's anti-Semitism expert, Kenneth Stern, who authored the ad.

The entire campus community is looking to Ladner "for leadership at this time," said Benkendorf, who said he may turn to influential community leaders to "help get the president's ear."

Ladner's office did not respond to requests for comment.

The statement first appeared Oct. 7 with 312 signatures as a full-page ad in The New York Times. Last week, it ran in the Forward with an additional eight signatures.

The statement was crafted in response to anti-Semitic incidents on college campuses as Mideast activism has escalated in tandem with the Palestinian intifada.

The statement is escalating the campus Mideast debate, fanning discussion in student newspapers and fueling claims from Palestinian supporters that their opponents are using allegations of anti-Semitism in an attempt to silence them.

It also is pulling college presidents into an issue that until now has been the domain of competing campus groups and the communal organizations that have backed them.

The statement says the signers will "sustain an intimidation-free campus" where "debates are conducted without threats, taunts or intimidation."

In the fourth of six paragraphs, the ad notes that "students who are Jewish or supporters of Israel's right to exist — Zionists — have received death threats or threats of violence. Property connected to Jewish organizations has been defaced or destroyed," and libelous information has been circulated that creates an attitude of intimidation.

"These practices and others, directed against any person, group or cause, will not be tolerated on campuses," the ad says.

A number of university presidents who refused to sign cited the paragraph on anti-Semitic intimidation, saying the ad is too narrowly focused.

Several Jewish professionals privately agreed in interviews with JTA that the ad places too much emphasis on the plight of Jewish students.

Stern said the ad cites anti-Semitic incidents in order to give context and because of the number of incidents "where the line between heated debate and thuggery and intimidation certainly has been crossed." While the ad specifies that it "clearly applies to all students," why "aren't death threats against Jews by themselves insufficient to call for an intimidation-free campus?" he asked.

The statement continues to collect signatures and is slated to appear in campus newspapers in the future. It's the latest in a series of recent events that have raised the profile of Mideast activism on campus.

First, Harvard University President Lawrence Summers warned in a Sept. 17 speech that some of the anti-Israel activity veered into anti-Semitism. Then a national pro-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Funerals held for attack victims

Funerals were held Monday for three Israelis killed a day earlier in a suicide attack in the West Bank settlement of Ariel.

The three victims were identified as First Sgt. Amihud Hassid, 31, of Tapuach; Maj. Tamir Massad, 41, of Moshav Ben Shemen; and Lt. Matan Zagron, 22, of Itamar.

Rights worker sentenced to death

A Palestinian court handed down a death sentence to a Palestinian who works for the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem.

The court ruled Monday that Khaidar Ghanem had supplied Israel with information that led to the killing of Palestinian terrorists. Ghanem, a former field worker in the Gaza Strip for B'Tselem, said at a news conference after his arrest in July that he had cooperated with Israeli intelligence services since 1996.

Palestinians fire rocket at Israel

A rocket fired by Palestinians from the Gaza Strip landed in an Israeli town Monday, but caused no injuries or damage.

The rocket landed near a construction site in Sderot, located in the Negev. One man, a Romanian worker, was treated for shock. In another incident, Palestinians fired a mortar shell at an Israeli settlement in the southern Gaza Strip. Again, there were no injuries or damage.

Report: Trench to circle cities

Israel's army reportedly is digging trenches around Jenin and Nablus.

An Israeli colonel who heads an engineering team was quoted by the weekly army magazine *Bamachaneh* as saying the trenches are designed to keep Palestinians from driving explosives-laden vehicles from the two cities into Israel.



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Palestinian conference, held at the University of Michigan earlier this month, spawned headlines and counter-rallies.

The conference also spurred the university's president, Mary Sue Coleman, to reject calls to divest the university's holdings in companies that do business with Israel.

The AJCommittee statement also has prompted presidents to speak out on the issue — especially those who have refused to sign.

On Oct. 18, University of Pennsylvania President Judith Rodin issued a letter explaining why she opposes calls for divestment but still has refused to sign the ad.

"Divestiture is an extreme measure to be adopted rarely, and only under the most unusual circumstances," she wrote. "Certainly, many countries involved in the current Middle East dispute have been aggressors, and calls for divestment against them have been notably absent."

In addition, Rodin noted, the school should remain "unbiased and non-partisan in the pursuit of knowledge," while divestment runs counter to the University of Pennsylvania's long-held position that investment decisions are best guided by the University's fiduciary responsibilities." Yet, she added, "I and many other current presidents refused to add our names to the statement because we felt the ad was unbalanced — particularly after a year in which Arab and Muslim students on Penn's campus have been subjected to at least as much harassment and intimidation as Jewish students."

Stern, in contrast, said there have been few attacks against Muslim students.

The AJCommittee does not plan to broaden the statement.

The AJCommittee has not sought out Jewish students or alumni to lobby presidents, but several, like A.U.'s Benkenorf, have taken matters into their own hands.

When Daniel Spector, president of Georgetown University's Jewish Student Association, read in his campus newspaper that President John DeGioia had refused sign the statement because he thought it was too narrow, Spector decided to try to change his mind. Spector, a junior, is soliciting information on anti-Semitic incidents from his fellow students, which he said he will bundle together and bring to DeGioia this week, hoping to convince him to sign.

The AJCommittee statement is a response to "a growing trend against Israel in the academic community in the United States, in particular," Spector said. "The urgency of this letter cannot be understated."

But not all such requests are successful. UCLA Chancellor Albert Carnesale issued a general statement on Oct. 11 urging tolerance and "rational discourse" on controversial international issues, but refused a request from the director of UCLA's Hillel to sign the AJCommittee ad, according to Avishai Shruga, the Hillel's Israel intern and vice president of Bruins for Israel.

There are no plans to press him further, Shruga said.

According to Max Benavidez, senior counsel for UCLA's Office of Media Relations, the AJCommittee statement "could give the impression that UCLA is less concerned with the safety and well-being of all members of the UCLA community."

But Shruga said Carnesale is missing a chance to be proactive in tackling the problem of anti-Semitism. "Just because UCLA hasn't seen the same incidents as other colleges doesn't mean it won't see it in the future," he said.

Still, many Jewish activists, at places like UCLA and Georgetown, echoed a key point Stern made: University presidents who didn't sign on to the statement are not unfriendly to Jewish students nor would they hesitate to respond to attacks against them.

But the statement represents a "philosophical hurdle" for them, Stern said.

They are glued to an "even-handedness" in the conflict, where they cannot decry anti-Semitism without, in the same breath, berating anti-Muslim behavior. □

Israel holds 175 alleged bombers

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel is holding 175 would-be suicide bombers in its jails, Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said. The total includes several women, he was quoted as saying Monday by Israel Radio.

Israeli security officials said the figure proves that Palestinians are relentless in trying to kill Israelis.

Most of the bombers were captured in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in Israeli raids based on intelligence information, the officials said. □

JEWISH WORLD

Church affirms interfaith ties

The Catholic Church is more committed than ever to improving relations with Jews, a top Vatican official said.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, the Vatican official in charge of relations with Jews, told an interfaith conference Monday that after 2,000 years of antagonism, Catholics and Jews may still disagree, but that they do so now as brothers.

Kasper spoke at a conference marking the 37th anniversary of the publication of *Nostra Aetate*, the landmark Vatican document that officially opened the door to Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

A Jewish scholar, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, told the conference that the Catholic Church was in an "almost impossible" position when it came to dealing with the Jews. "Basically, monotheistic religions cannot be tolerant," he said. "Can you speak about two truths?"

Brazil's Jews wary of new VP

Brazilian Jews are warily eyeing the nation's newly elected vice president.

The victory of leftist presidential candidate Luis Inacio Lula da Silva in Sunday's vote also swept his vice-presidential running mate, Jose Alencar, into office.

Alencar recently caused an uproar among Brazil's 120,000 Jews after he declared on national TV that the only solution to the Middle East conflict was for Israelis to pick up and leave the region.

Alencar later apologized, but many Jews consider the apology politically motivated and insincere.

Clinton blasts Arafat

Former President Clinton criticized Yasser Arafat for not compromising to reach a Mideast peace deal.

The Palestinian Authority president was unable to change his "habits of heart and mind" in order to reach an agreement with then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Clinton said Sunday in New York at a fund-raiser for American Friends of Rabin Medical Center.

"What Arafat did in walking away from Ehud Barak's offer at Taba was not the wave of the future. It was the last gasp" of the past, he said.

ZOA creates law center

The Zionist Organization of America has created a center to pursue action through the U.S. legal system on issues affecting Israel and the Jewish people.

The first project of the ZOA's New York-based Center for Law & Justice will be to seek help for the families of U.S. victims of Palestinian terrorism.

Along with filing friend-of-the-court briefs, the center plans to establish a network of legal practitioners and experts.

Israel's ex-ambassador in Argentina under investigation after TV charges

By Florencia Arbiser

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — In the small Argentine city of Tolhuin, a few wooden posts covered by broken white plastic swayed in the wind.

That image — aired over Argentine television in September — unleashed a controversy and investigations against the former Israeli ambassador in Argentina, Yitzhak Aviran.

The TV program "Punto Doc" presented research alleging that Aviran was involved in nefarious business dealings that benefitted a businessman close to him, Osvaldo Shvartzter, and perhaps the envoy himself.

At issue is some \$17 million in Argentine government money, granted for projects throughout the country in which the Israeli Embassy played an intermediary role.

The program suggested that the projects were never completed.

After a four-day visit to Argentina last week, a team from the Israeli Foreign Ministry said it had found no evidence of malfeasance but would continue to investigate.

Pinchas Avivi, Israel's deputy director general for Latin America and the Caribbean, said the projects in question were "done and well done."

The mission is taking documents back to Israel for analysis and will then make a statement. Until now, their questions have centered on the way in which the projects were conceived.

"We are not sure if the agreements signed by the embassy during Aviran's period have passed through all the legal requirements of international cooperation," Avivi said.

Back in Israel, the mission will check if the embassy's commercial and political departments performed their required role in these agreements.

The issue of international cooperation is at the heart of the matter, according to those involved with the TV show.

"It was odd to us to see that a foreign embassy was involved in these projects that use money from the national savings in the provinces. It is the only case we have known," the general producer of "Punto Doc," Fernando Lojo, told JTA.

For example, \$830,000 was granted to build a greenhouse in Tolhuin, but the only greenhouse found there — incomplete and abandoned — could never have cost that much, the report said.

In a telephone interview with JTA, Aviran denied any wrongdoing, and said the projects began after two cooperation agreements between Argentina and Israel.

"After a project done in Formosa province, other provinces asked for Israeli technological support," he said. "There was a lot of work done and many people were given job opportunities."

Aviran, who served as ambassador from 1993 to 2000, says he now works for an Israeli firm that does business in several countries, including Argentina.

Andrea Sklar, a former spokeswoman for the embassy under Aviran, said the television program that made the allegations against Aviran had an "anti-Semitic tint."

The program was titled "The Business of the Attacks," suggesting that money was given to silence complaints about unsolved bombings in Buenos Aires of the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA Jewish community center in 1992 and 1994, respectively. The two bombings together killed more than 100 people.

Israeli officials and Argentine Jewish officials deny such allegations.

Alfredo Neuburger, the spokesman for DAIA, the Jewish umbrella organization, told JTA that it is "disgraceful" to suppose that payoffs might have stopped the investigations into the bombings.

These are not the first allegations made against Shvartzter and Aviran.

In 1997, an Israeli Foreign Ministry team criticized Aviran for favoring Shvartzter, a businessman who was AMIA vice president between 1996 and 1999. But the team's report did not recommend sanctions against Aviran.

Aviran recently told the Forward newspaper that the accusations are part of a campaign to disgrace Carlos Menem, a former president who is running again in primary elections this week.

Aviran and Menem were close. □

Latest Palestinian terror attack follows U.S. efforts to revive talks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Israel and the Palestinians warily eye a new U.S. peace proposal, the cycle of violence continued this week with another suicide attack.

At least three Israelis were killed and 15 wounded in the attack Sunday at a gas station near the Israeli settlement of Ariel.

Three people were seriously wounded and the rest sustained light to moderate injuries, hospital officials said. All of the fatalities were army reservists.

On Monday, funerals were held for the three Israelis. They were identified as First Sgt. Amihud Hassid, 31, of Tapuach; Maj. Tamir Massad, 41, of Moshav Ben Shemen; and Lt. Matan Zagron, 22, of Itamar.

The Al-Aksa Brigade, the military wing of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Israel's army reportedly is digging trenches around Jenin and Nablus as part of efforts to prevent Palestinian terror.

An Israeli colonel who heads an engineering team was quoted by the weekly army magazine *Bamachaneh* as saying the trenches are designed to keep Palestinians from driving explosives-laden vehicles from the two cities into Israel.

Israel would not officially confirm the report, but the Palestinian governors of Nablus and Jenin said Sunday that ditches indeed are being dug around their cities.

Along with the continuing problem of how to deal with Palestinian terror, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon also is trying to cope with a coalition crisis over the country's 2003 budget.

The Labor Party has threatened to withdraw from the coalition if its demands for changes to the budget are not met.

Among its demands, Labor has demanded cuts in funds allocated for settlements.

Labor leader Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said Monday he doubts Sharon would accede to the demand. Sharon has told Ben-Eliezer that if Labor votes against the budget, he will fire the Labor ministers and ask President Moshe Katsav to call for new elections in 90 days, according to the *Jerusalem Post*.

But commentators speculated Monday that if Labor withdraws from the government, Sharon may be able to patch together a narrower coalition. Sharon on Monday told the Likud faction that he prefers a narrow majority over early elections.

On Sunday, Sharon said the Ariel attack underscores the need for unity among all members of the governing coalition.

At the start of Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting, Sharon said he would not tolerate any "political trickery" when it came to the budget, adding that a strong national unity government is needed now more than ever.

Sunday's attack occurred around noon. According to reports, the terrorist was spotted by a group of soldiers near a snack bar.

The troops ordered the man to raise his arms, and at least one person fired at him. The terrorist was hit, but still managed to detonate his explosives belt. According to some reports, the gunfire directed at him set off his explosives.

Then "a woman started shouting, 'Suicide bomber, suicide bomber,'" Yitzhak Zahavi, 27, a soldier who was lightly injured in the attack, told Israel Radio. "Three or four soldiers starting

yelling" at the terrorist "to stop. He lifted his arms and starting walking backward, then they tried to disarm him. They saw he had explosives and shot at him, twice. Then he blew up."

Another witness, Ilan Ben Yishai, was unloading his truck at a nearby store.

"People started shouting 'Kill him,' 'Don't kill him.' The struggle went on for about a minute and a half. There were about 20 soldiers. Everyone drew their guns, but no one knew whether to shoot or not. They tried to distance" the bomber, "but then one of the soldiers fired on him, one shot — and then there was the explosion," the Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot* quoted Ben Yishai as saying.

The attack followed an Oct. 21 suicide bombing of a bus in northern Israel that killed 14 people. The two suicide bombers who carried out the attack came from the Jenin area.

That attack prompted a large-scale Israeli incursion into Jenin last Friday.

By Sunday, troops had arrested some 40 Palestinian terror suspects, including one would-be suicide bomber.

In all, Israel has seized and is holding in its jails a total of 175 would-be suicide bombers, Ben-Eliezer said in remarks quoted by Israel Radio on Monday.

Four Palestinians were killed by Israeli soldiers in the West Bank on Sunday. One of them, a 15-year-old Palestinian boy, was killed in Jenin, according to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*. In Nablus, three Palestinians were killed and two soldiers were lightly wounded during an exchange of gunfire.

On Saturday, Cabinet Secretary Gideon Sa'ar said the Jenin operation, aimed at cracking down on the terrorist infrastructure in the city, would continue for as long as necessary.

During the operation, Israeli troops clamped a tight curfew on the West Bank city.

In another development, Israeli forces left Palestinian parts of Hebron last Friday, withdrawing troops and military vehicles.

In more violence this week, a rocket fired by Palestinians from the Gaza Strip landed in an Israeli town Monday, but caused no injuries or damage.

The rocket landed near a construction site in Sderot, located in the Negev. One man, a Romanian worker, was treated for shock.

In another incident, Palestinians fired a mortar shell at an Israeli settlement in the southern Gaza Strip. Again, there were no injuries or damage.

The latest violence came as Israel and the Palestinians weighed their response to the "road map" for a peace agreement presented by the U.S. assistant secretary of state, William Burns, in separate talks with both sides last week.

Both sides said they welcome the latest effort by the United States to renew political dialogue. At the same time, each side made clear it had reservations to the plan, which proposes a three-phase process that includes an interim Palestinian state by the end of 2003.

Sharon told Burns last week that the road map does not have a strong enough security element and does not place enough emphasis on ending terrorism and dismantling terrorist organizations.

On Monday, Sharon said he accepts the basic principles of the peace plan, but not a total settlement freeze.

Speaking before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Sharon said an exception needed to be made for natural settlement growth, Israel Radio reported. □