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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

2 Israelis killed in Kfar Saba blast

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In another development Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government survived three no-confidence votes in the Knesset.

The motions, filed by opposition parties, were defeated after the right-wing National Union-Israeli Our Home bloc did not support them.

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The bloc's leader, legislator Avigdor Lieberman, has demanded as a condition for joining the government that Sharon form a narrow right-wing government after any new elections. [Page 3]

Israel helps U.S. prepare for war?

Israel reportedly is helping the United States prepare for a possible war with Iraq.

According to U.S. defense officials cited by USA Today, Israel is helping train U.S. soldiers and marines for urban warfare and is allowing the United States to place combat supplies in Israel.

In addition, the newspaper reports, Israeli commandos conducted secret reconnaissance missions to locate Scud missile sites hidden in the western Iraqi desert.

Report: Investigation at ICHEIC

A top professional serving with an international Holocaust restitution commission reportedly was investigated for misappropriating commission funds for personal use.

Neal Sher, former chief of staff in the Washington office of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, resigned last summer after he was investigated by the commission for alleged "unauthorized reimbursements of his ICHEIC travel expenses," according to an internal commission document obtained by the Forward.

Sher resigned in June and paid "full and immediate restitution," the document said.

The Forward has not yet established whether the allegations are true.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

As NATO meeting approaches, light shines on handling of Jewish issues

By Adam B. Ellick

NEW YORK (JTA) — Later this month, seven nations will clear a crucial hurdle toward full membership in NATO.

But as they embrace a military alliance that seemed unimaginable during the Soviet era, these nations — Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — will remain under close scrutiny to ensure they follow through on promises regarding "value issues," including how they handle Jewish affairs.

Jewish leaders are divided on how the nations will behave after they are formally invited to join the military alliance during the Prague Summit on Nov. 21.

NATO demands that candidate countries establish high standards in treating their ethnic and religious minorities, and membership is not a foregone conclusion for the seven aspirant nations.

Though invitations will be extended in Prague, nothing will be final for another 18 months.

During that time, the legislatures of all 19 NATO members states — including the U.S. Senate — must approve the additions.

During the past decade, Jewish leaders and the U.S. State Department have used NATO membership to encourage the aspirants to confront their Holocaust history. That includes politically sensitive issues like local collaboration with the Nazis, property restitution, Holocaust education and commemoration and the prosecution of war criminals.

"There will be a greater effort to keep these countries" moving on such issues "than ever in the past," said Bruce Jackson, executive director of the U.S. Committee on NATO, a nonprofit group that tracks value issues among aspirant nations.

"The pressure to make good on reforms will be pronounced," he said. "They're young, fragile democracies, and there's a feeling we have to encourage them to continue the reforms they have promised."

Jackson regards the handling of the 1999 NATO entrants — the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary — as a mistake. World leaders failed to anticipate a slowdown in reforms after the three joined NATO, he says.

In Hungary in particular, he said, leaders were surprised when politicians there reverted to nationalist themes in elections and tolerated anti-Semitic remarks by far-right leaders.

Meanwhile, the seven latest aspirants have taken a number of steps in advance of the Prague Summit:

- Estonia declared a national Holocaust Day in its public schools after two years of stalling;
- Slovakia ended six years of negotiations by agreeing to establish a \$19 million restitution fund for its Jewish community;
- Lithuania ended years of controversy in January by giving some 300 prewar Torah scrolls to Jewish officials for distribution to communities around the world. It also established a commission to address the long-ignored issue of property restitution; and
- After years of international pressure, Romania finally removed remnants, such as statues and street names, of its revered fascist leader Marshall Antonescu.

"We have seen some very real progress. There is no doubt things are happening because of the run-up to the Prague Summit," said Rabbi Andrew Baker, international

MIDEAST FOCUS

Islamic party wins in Turkey

A new party with Islamic roots won a landslide victory in Turkish elections Sunday.

After declaring victory, the leader of the Justice and Development Party pledged to maintain the nation's pro-Western, secular stance. The Justice Party has its roots in Turkey's Islamist movement, but it has denied that it has a religious agenda.

One in five Israelis poor

One out of five Israelis lives in poverty, according to a new report.

According to Israel's National Insurance Institute, which presented its annual poverty report Monday, some 1.17 million Israelis, or 34 percent of Israeli families, live in poverty, an increase of more than 32 percent from 2001 totals. Of them, 537,000 are children, an increase of 50,000 since last year.

Lawmakers want series canceled

U.S. lawmakers sent a letter Monday urging Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to condemn an anti-Semitic television program. The Bush administration also has urged Egypt to review the 40-part mini-series "Horseman Without a Horse," which is based in part on the notorious anti-Semitic forgery, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

On Monday, about 100 people protested in front of the Egyptian Embassy in Washington, charging that the program preaches hate toward Jews.

Israeli film wins in Tokyo

An Israeli film won first prize at the Tokyo Film Festival.

"Broken Wings," by director Nir Bergman, tells the story of a middle-class Israeli family as it comes to terms with the death of the father. The Tokyo festival is open to directors who have made fewer than three films.



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director of the American Jewish Committee. "But without question, the full attention of these countries might not be with us after Prague."

Daniel Mariaschin, executive vice president of B'nai Brith International, doesn't expect much to change after the summit.

"It isn't as if the clock stops on Nov. 21. For us, this period goes on through ratification," he said. "It gives us the time we need to resolve major outstanding issues."

Outstanding Jewish-related issues include communal and private property restitution in Romania and the implementation of Lithuania's communal property legislation.

There also are concerns about Estonia's ability to address the issue of local collaboration in the Holocaust.

Eastern European leaders acknowledge the importance of Jewish issues, but decisions are largely unpopular with local populations, most of whom — due to Soviet propaganda — were never educated about their nations' Holocaust history.

Jewish officials consider the Baltic states failures when it comes to the prosecution of local war criminals, not one of whom has served jail time since the post-Communist nations regained independence in 1991.

At a Holocaust conference in the Balkans last month, Efraim Zuroff, director of the Jerusalem office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, warned that once Baltic and Balkan nations are admitted to NATO, their motivation to prosecute war criminals likely would disappear.

"Once these countries are in NATO, I fear that their willingness to cooperate on Jewish issues might be severely reduced," Zuroff said this week.

A "very intelligent case can be made for extending the transition period," he added.

Despite such concerns, the center does not actively oppose NATO enlargement. But the Israel-based Association of Lithuanian Jews, which closely follows events in the Baltics, is a staunch opponent.

"When Lithuania gets in NATO, they won't care anymore. They are the biggest anti-Semites," said Joseph Melamed, chairman of the association and a survivor of the Kovno Ghetto who witnessed Lithuanians kill thousands of Jews before the Nazis arrived.

"I think the conditions to get into NATO should be very strong. But the Americans want the Lithuanians in NATO whether we like it or not," he said. "After NATO, everything will stop. NATO is not a school. They aren't teaching anything."

Melamed acknowledges that the atmosphere in Lithuania has improved recently. But he also knows the Lithuanian public often erupts with blatant anti-Semitism after controversial, Jewish-related news stories.

He also questions the sincerity of public officials, saying, "They know public relations is one of the most important things."

Melamed justifies his accusations by pointing to the much-publicized return of Torah scrolls, all of which were looted from prewar synagogues in Lithuania.

The Lithuanian government returned many scrolls in January but still hasn't parted with dozens of others, which officials have declared part of Lithuania's "national heritage."

Giedrius Cekuolis, Lithuania's chief negotiator for NATO entry, insists that the nation's actions on Jewish issues are sincere.

Lithuania is not acting on human rights and Holocaust issues for NATO, he said: "We are doing them for ourselves." □

Israeli minister to visit Ethiopia

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's interior minister plans to visit Ethiopia to study the plight of Falash Mura seeking to immigrate to Israel.

Some 22,000 members of the community are awaiting permission to move to Israel, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The Falash Mura's ancestors converted from Judaism to Christianity in the 19th century. Most of the Falash Mura say they have returned to Judaism.

Yishai plans to accelerate the processing of those prospective immigrants whose ties to Judaism have been confirmed by rabbis trained to deal with the issue, according to the paper. □

JEWISH WORLD

Anti-Semitism at Berlin ceremony

Protesters shouted anti-Semitic slurs during a street-naming ceremony in Berlin.

During the Oct. 30 ceremony at which a street was renamed Judenstrasse, protesters shouted, "Jews out" and "You crucified Jesus."

The shouts interrupted the speech of Alexander Brenner, leader of Berlin's Jewish community, who told the demonstrators, "Whether you like it or not, you have placed yourself alongside the Nazis." The street originally had been named Judenstrasse, but Nazi officials changed its name in 1938.

JDL leader in suicide try

A leader of the Jewish Defense League, jailed for allegedly conspiring to bomb a mosque and an Arab American representative's office in Los Angeles, tried to commit suicide.

Irv Rubin, who was arrested in December 2001, tried to slit his throat and jumped over a rail onto a cement floor as he was being brought to court Monday, his lawyer said. There were conflicting reports on whether Rubin survived the attempt.

Emissaries to the world unite

More than 1,500 Lubavitch emissaries convened for their annual conference in Brooklyn this weekend. The four-day gathering consisted of workshops and lectures to inspire the international gathering of emissaries, who hailed from places as far-flung as Nepal and Azerbaijan.

Conference director Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky called this the "year of the college campus" in a Sunday night speech, referring to an initiative to open Chabad houses on 20 campuses in the next few years.

British Jews urged to buy Israeli

The Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Northern Ireland launched a campaign to buy Israeli products. In addition, the federation is encouraging members to buy Israeli products in supermarkets and to report whenever they see Israeli products stocked on supermarket shelves, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel.

E-store halts 'Protocol' sales

Brazil's largest e-commerce company has stopped selling copies of a notorious anti-Semitic tract. Officials at Submarino decided to halt sales of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" after Brazilian Jewish activists sent protests to the Internet store via e-mail.

"The Protocols" were first penned in the 1890s to expose a purported Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world. The tract, which has been translated into various languages and published around the world, has led directly to the killing of Jews.

Sharon fends off no-confidence vote as Palestinian suicide bomber kills 2

By JTA staff

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's government has a new set of difficulties.

Along with the ongoing war against Palestinian terrorism, the government faces a new domestic challenge that could well end in early elections.

The twin dilemmas were apparent Monday, when a Palestinian suicide bomber struck as the Knesset was debating three no-confidence votes, all of which ended unsuccessfully, in the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

At least two Israelis were killed and 32 injured when the suicide bomber struck at a shopping center in the Tel Aviv suburb of Kfar Saba.

Two infants were among those wounded after the bomber set off his explosives at an electronics store in the shopping mall.

Located near the West Bank city of Kalkilya, Kfar Saba has been the target of numerous Palestinian terror attacks.

Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the latest attack.

The victims' identities were not immediately available. Police believe one of those killed was a security guard who prevented the bomber from entering the store.

The issue of how to deal with Palestinian terror has come to the forefront as Sharon negotiates to hold his government together after the Labor Party resigned from the national unity government last week.

Labor's resignation left Sharon with a minority of 55 seats in the 120-member Knesset.

Just the same, Sharon's government survived the no-confidence motions in the Knesset.

Filed by opposition parties, the motions were defeated after the right-wing National Union-Israel Our Home bloc did not support them.

Sharon has been courting the bloc as a possible coalition partner. The bloc's leader, legislator Avigdor Lieberman, has demanded as a condition for joining the government that Sharon form a narrow right-wing government after any new elections.

The bloc also wants the government to cancel Israel's commitment to the Oslo accords and declare the Palestinian Authority a terrorist entity.

The no-confidence motions were followed by a 69-39 vote approving Sharon's appointment of former Israeli army chief Shaul Mofaz as defense minister.

Earlier Monday, Sharon rejected Benjamin Netanyahu's call for early elections as a condition for joining the Sharon government as foreign minister.

Addressing Likud Party officials, Sharon praised Netanyahu's agreement in principle to join the government, but described the demand for new elections as irresponsible, Israel Radio reported.

Netanyahu also demanded that Israel send Arafat into exile and declare its opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state.

Meanwhile, there were several violent incidents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Two Palestinians, one of them identified as a senior Hamas activist, were killed when their car exploded Monday in Nablus.

Israeli officials had no immediate comment on the blast, which Palestinian sources blamed on Israel. A Palestinian official said the car appeared to have been booby-trapped and the bomb set off by remote control.

In other violence, five Palestinians were killed by Israeli soldiers in three separate incidents in the Gaza Strip on Sunday.

In another development, Amnesty International accused the Israeli army of war crimes in Jenin and Nablus during its anti-terrorist campaign last spring.

In a report issued Monday, the human rights group cited unlawful killings, use of civilians as human shields and the prevention of medical and humanitarian aid from reaching Palestinian civilians.

The Israeli army said in a statement that its actions came in self-defense following Palestinian terror attacks on Israeli civilians. The army said it took all necessary care in fighting a terrorist infrastructure that had deliberately established itself in the heart of a civilian population. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Critics of Middle East coverage keep the heat on their local papers

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — For Peter Hebert, 43, boycotting The Washington Post last summer was like kicking his daily coffee habit.

"I've been reading the Post since I was 16. It's like asking me to give up Starbucks in the morning," said the Germantown, Md., mortgage lender.

But in recent years, especially since the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising in September 2000, Hebert grew convinced the paper's reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was skewed by a bias that portrayed "Israel as the aggressor and the Palestinians as freedom fighters."

In June, Hebert helped lead a weeklong boycott of the Post. Activists estimated that 1,000 people cancelled their subscriptions. The paper says just 400 of its approximate 800,000 readers dropped out.

Though the boycott admittedly inflicted only "a little pain" on the Post, Hebert said, it sent a "loud signal" of what he terms deep dissatisfaction in the community with the Post's Mideast coverage and prodded Post columnists to tackle the debate in print.

Now the anti-Post campaign, along with a handful of similar boycotts or protests that targeted major dailies, CNN and National Public Radio, is turning into a media war of attrition over coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Nationally we are at a different stage, with the media at least recognizing how sensitive a subject this is," said Michael Kotzin, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago. "We see the media as the battleground, not the enemy."

In Washington, Hebert is leading an effort to transform the Post boycott Web site, eyeonthePost.org, from a subscription-cancellation vehicle into a kind of media monitor that offers daily analysis of Post stories and a searchable database so users can track the Post's coverage back to the collapse of the Oslo peace accords.

"Boycott may have been seen as a dirty word," he said. "We need to make this long term. We're going to pursue the Post, and we hope for a meaningful dialogue."

EyeonthePost.org already links to such onetime boycott efforts as Join the Boycott, which was aimed at the Los Angeles Times. David Frankenthal, the Los Angeles attorney and teacher behind that group, said "thousands" of people boycotted the Times for one day in April in an unrelated e-mail-based protest that buoyed his group and underscored similar efforts elsewhere.

Unlike the Washington group, Frankenthal still hopes to apply economic pressure on the Times by getting subscribers to cancel and convincing major retail stores to reconsider advertising.

At the same time, the site includes analysis of the Times' alleged anti-Israel slant, calls for a six-month "commitment to fair and balanced reporting" and runs polls to measure attitudes about the paper. Like other media critics, Frankenthal is troubled by the "moral equivalence" the Times purportedly has drawn between Palestinian terror attacks and Israeli counter-terror operations.

"The Times will cover the terrorist attacks in Israel, but then they'll run lengthy stories about the frustrations that led to the suicide bombings," he said. That gives terrorists a platform."

Los Angeles Times and Washington Post representatives did

not return calls for comment. Several boycott groups say newspapers apply a double standard in the language they use to cover terrorism.

In Philadelphia, for example, the Zionist Organization of America, which led a boycott fight against the Philadelphia Inquirer that culminated in a July rally at the newspaper's headquarters, maintains the Inquirer is guilty of "bad journalism" when it comes to reporting on Israel, said Steve Feldman, executive director of the Greater Philadelphia District of the ZOA.

Like many media activists, Feldman said the Inquirer does not hesitate to use the word "terrorism" when referring to the Sept. 11 attacks or the recent Bali bombing linked to Al-Qaida.

But "when someone kills Jews in Israel, they're labeled as Palestinian activists or militants," he said.

Even the Inquirer's ombudsman, Lillian Swanson, said it is difficult to explain the paper's approach to stories on terrorism.

It's "a slippery slope when you try to decide who is a terrorist," she added. "I don't want to split hairs or parse words."

So far the Inquirer boycott effort has generated 700 cancellations, according to the paper, though Feldman puts the number at double that.

Meanwhile, the ZOA is entering what called "phase two" of its media watch.

Feldman wouldn't provide details, but predicted more "out-reach" to advertisers and non-Jewish groups.

In New York, meanwhile, a group that took aim at The New York Times this summer, called "NYTimesprotest.org," is running newspaper ads urging the Pulitzer Prize committee to award the Times a prize for "biased reporting."

In September, the ads ran domestically in the New York Post, New York Sun, Washington Times and Wall Street Journal, while in Israel they ran in the Jerusalem Post and Ma'ariv, said the group's spokesman, Fred Ehrman.

The group continues to seek subscription boycotts, he said, and is asking Jewish organizations to place obituaries in Jewish publications rather than in the Times.

Like other critics, Ehrman complains of generally unfair treatment of Israel in the Times, though he singled out Jerusalem-based correspondent Joel Greenberg as particularly "odious."

Ehrman pointed to an Oct. 21 story about Palestinians who fled their town because of violence by nearby Jewish settlers. Greenberg only once mentions Palestinian violence against the settlers, and far into the story.

A Times spokesman, Toby Usnik, did not refute that specific complaint, nor address the group's overall claims of bias. But he said the Times was well aware of the criticism.

In Chicago, Kotzin said Jewish officials continue to meet with Chicago Tribune officials and journalists to foster good relations and voice Jewish concerns about Mideast coverage.

Meanwhile, Ed Lasky, a stock trader who is active in a group called Citizens Against Terror, which has been critical of the Tribune's Israel coverage, said that in coming weeks the group will launch a Web site called "The Tribune Watch" to track the Tribune's reporting.

The Tribune's Public Editor, Don Wycliff, retorted that the charge of bias "is absurd." Wycliff, however, said he understood complaints about photos that seemed anti-Israel.

"If you're always shooting from behind Israeli lines at kids throwing rocks, that's what photos will show," he said. "You must take care to show the other side." □