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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

P.A.: Extend cease-fire

The Palestinian Authority said it is trying to convince terrorist groups to extend a cease-fire with Israel indefinitely. Hamas and Islamic Jihad have declared a three-month truce, while P.A. President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement announced a six-month halt to attacks.

The announcement by the P.A.'s information minister, Nabil Amr, came as P.A. Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas said he would meet with President Bush in Washington later this month. The White House did not confirm the report.

U.S. suspects Hezbollah in attack

The State Department says it suspects Hezbollah was responsible for the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Wednesday that the United States supports the Argentine investigation into the attack and the indictment of five Iranian government officials. The ninth anniversary of the bombing of the AMIA Cultural Center, which killed 85 people, is Friday.

Israel: Saudis funding Hamas

At least half of Hamas' funding comes from Saudi Arabia, according to an Israeli assessment. Dore Gold, a former Israeli ambassador to the U.N. and a researcher of terrorist financing, said Tuesday that the amounts funneled to Hamas are growing despite President Bush's plea to the Saudis to stop aid to Palestinian terrorist groups.

At a roundtable in Washington attended by several members of Congress, Gold outlined documents — discovered by Israeli troops in Palestinian offices during a West Bank sweep last year — that prove the connection.

Irish journalist leaves Israel

An Irish journalist who was mistaken for an IRA bomb expert allegedly helping Palestinian terrorists left Israel.

The French news agency quoted an Israeli official as saying John Morgan had cooperated fully with the investigation. The official was quoted as saying that Morgan, a pro-Palestinian activist, had been conducting political activities after entering Israel on a tourist visa, Israel Radio reported.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Support for activist group shows debate over role of Jews in France

By Philip Carmel

PARIS (JTA) — A recent meeting between a French Jewish lobbying group and an American Jewish organization highlights competing visions over how to deal with anti-Semitism and attitudes toward Israel in France.

The Union of French Jewish Employers and Professionals, known by its French acronym UPJF, met leaders from the American Jewish Congress earlier this month in New York.

Set up in 1997, the UPJF has chosen to remain apart from the CRIF umbrella organization of French Jewry, which groups some 60 Jewish organizations representing most Jewish religious, political and cultural groups. UPJF officials say the group has some 1,000 dues-paying members.

Neil Goldstein, the AJCongress' executive director, said the group reached out to the UPJF precisely because CRIF and other established groups do not appear willing — or able — to lobby effectively on issues of concern to the Jewish community, such as anti-Semitism and support for Israel.

"CRIF is not equipped to handle this issue. The response we keep getting from CRIF is a very subdued one," Goldstein said. "We were looking for a very activist group to act in the same way that American groups have acted since World War II, and the UPJF is leading the effort to make that change."

CRIF President Roger Cukierman rejected accusations that his group has not been active enough.

CRIF has "always defended the community against anti-Semitism and was uncompromising in its support for Israel," he said.

Cukierman said he was not concerned by the fact that the AJCongress had gone around French Jewry's organized communal leadership, adding that the AJCongress "is not the most important" of the many American Jewish organizations.

In addition, he said, the UPJF is "not so important as to pose a problem."

"They have a certain freedom because they don't have to act for the whole Jewish community," Cukierman said. "What cannot be denied, though, is that all the major Jewish organizations are part of CRIF."

The UPJF's initial purpose was to engage the Jewish business community and its resources in social welfare projects in the Jewish community, but the group has taken a much more political role since the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada in September 2000.

Earlier this year, for example, UPJF sent a delegation to visit the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, an organization that UPJF executive member Yves Kamami told JTA he would like to emulate in France.

"The role of CRIF is too official and because of its constitution, it is unable to exert pressure on the government," Kamami said.

"CRIF can't do the job of AIPAC, and a lobbying organization has never existed in France."

Kamami, a former president of B'nai B'rith in France, said CRIF acted as if a "too visibly pro-Israel line risked anti-Semitism in France"

Kamami conceded that CRIF had changed under Cukierman, a man he said was "closer to the view of the community" than his predecessors in espousing a more "centrist" position vis-a-vis Israel. Still, he said, "If we don't do anything about anti-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel: P.A. didn't help rescue

The Palestinian Authority had no part in the rescue of a kidnapped Israeli taxi driver, Israeli officials said.

P.A. Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas personally pledged cooperation in the efforts to locate and release Eiyahu Gurel, but a senior Israeli army officer said Wednesday that the rescue operation was conducted solely by Israeli forces.

Israeli officials differ over whether the motive for the kidnapping was criminal or terrorist; Gurel himself — who, unbeknownst to his captors, understands Arabic — said they talked of using him as a bargaining chip for the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Sharon holds talks in Norway

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon held talks with his Norwegian counterpart. Sharon on Wednesday stopped in Modle, the hometown of Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, on his way back to Israel after a three-day visit to London.

The two discussed Middle East peace efforts. About 500 protesters demonstrated against Sharon.

Kids want prisoners released

Palestinian children participated in a Hamas demonstration demanding the release of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

During Wednesday's protest in the Gaza Strip, the children carried photographs of relatives jailed in Israel.

The Palestinian Authority's minister for prisoner affairs said this week that Israel and the Palestinians had reached a stalemate on the release of prisoners, and that international intervention is needed. Israel has agreed to release some 350 prisoners, but has ruled out releasing any prisoners who killed Israelis or are members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Israel disinformation, nobody will do anything about it."

The UPJF's contacts with the AJCongress come against the background of recent tension between the congress and the organized French community.

Last year, the AJCongress suggested either boycotting the Cannes Film Festival or using it as a platform to oppose French anti-Semitism. The suggestion angered French officials — and elements of the organized Jewish community, who considered the move too provocative.

Goldstein, however, said CRIF's line — that it can effect change better by befriending the French government than by challenging it — has been too conciliatory.

"They should be friends," Goldstein agreed. "But friends shouldn't just like you, they should respect you. And they respect you if you have clout."

The UPJF has devoted much effort to lobbying against anti-Israel disinformation and demonstrating a strong stance against the rising tide of anti-Semitism in France, says Helene Keller-Lind, a journalist from the leading Jewish weekly Actualite Juive.

One of UPJF's members, Pierre Rehov, has made a number of films exposing how the Palestinian Authority skews media coverage of the intifada.

Alain Goldmann, president of the Paris-region branch of CRIF, described the UPJF as "quite a recently formed organization" that had not asked to join CRIF.

"At the beginning of the intifada a lot of people wanted to do a lot of things," Goldmann said. "By being free of official Jewish organizations, it's a lot easier for them to talk. They are not bound by being part of an official Jewish organization, they can do what they want."

The implication was that its freedom allows the UPJF to take on projects that more established community organs might not — but that it also could lead some in the community to view the UPJF as loose cannons.

UPJF is one of the backers of the Bureau for Vigilance Against anti-Semitism, an organization set up by former police commissioner Samy Gozlan. The bureau virtually mirrors the official CRIF security group, the Jewish Community Protection Service, or SPCJ.

A recent attack on a Jewish school in Paris serves to illustrate the point.

Both Gozlan and Goldmann spoke to the press after the event. Gozlan claimed the attack had been motivated by anti-Semitism, while Goldmann, following the official CRIF line of waiting for the police investigation, said it could just as well have been an attempted burglary. □

Swiss Holocaust denier working for Muslim jihad as well, he tells JTA

By Fredy Rom

BERN, Switzerland (JTA) — A Swiss Holocaust denier took a job as a liaison between Islamic organizations and a European Neo-Nazi group, he has revealed to JTA.

"A few years ago, my friends in the Iran regime motivated me to function as go-between with the international Revisionist Szene and the Islamic groups in Europe," Ahmed Huber told JTA.

Huber, a former journalist who converted to Islam and changed his first name from Albert to Ahmed, travels regularly to Germany to give lectures in the German extremist party NPD on Holocaust denial and the Islamic Jihad against Israel and the Jews.

"I am very happy that the right-wing world in Europe more and more understands that the Holocaust was a big fraud and the European neo-Nazis should join Islamic organizations to fight Israel, the Jews and America," he told JTA.

Huber, 76, was just recently put on U.N. and E.U. lists of individuals involved in terrorism, and whose assets should therefore be frozen.

"I am not surprised that the United States, the Europeans and the U.N. put me on this list because all these organizations are controlled by the American-Jewish-Israeli terrorists," Huber said.

But Huber told JTA that he can access his bank accounts freely.

A spokeswoman for the Ministry of Justice in Bern told JTA that Huber is still under criminal investigation. □



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JEWISH WORLD

New Jersey supporting terror?

The state of New Jersey is allowing taxpayer dollars to fund Palestinian terrorism, a Jewish group says.

Amcha-The Coalition for Jewish Concerns says it will rally at the New Jersey state house in Trenton on Thursday to demand that Gov. James McGreevey stop Rutgers University, which is state-funded, from hosting an Oct. 10 summit of the pro-Palestinian International Solidarity Movement.

In a recent e-mail, an organizer of the conference said that she supports Palestinian violence against Israel.

"Would the governor allow the KKK the use of publicly funded institutions?" asked Joshua Chadajo, Amcha's executive director.

Rutgers officials told The Associated Press they have received 230 letters from Jewish activists nationwide and from the regional Anti-Defamation League protesting the conference, but the event will be held in the name of free speech.

California hate crimes down

The number of hate crimes reported in California last year declined.

But hate crimes against Jews in 2002 remained constant — there were 175 in 2002, as compared with 176 in 2001.

Group: Far-right, Jews linked

There are links between the French far-right and Jewish extremists, a leading French anti-racism organization says.

The Movement Against Racism and for Friendship Between People published a 170-page report Wednesday that details widespread Internet links between "the classic extreme-right and extremists who claim to be Jewish."

The report says that more than 450,000 messages were exchanged via the sites over a two-year period, including "racial insults, death threats and calls to attack Muslim places of worship."

Students go to Latin America

Some 50 college students arrived in Buenos Aires on Tuesday to volunteer with the Jewish communities of Argentina and Uruguay.

The goal of the month-long, student-inspired mission, comprised mostly of Americans, is to "express solidarity" with Jews who have been hit hard by the economic and political crises in the two South American countries, said Shaanan Meyerstein, the Columbia University sophomore who organized the trip.

The students plan to volunteer in medical and communal facilities, assist the elderly, work with students and help repair synagogues.

Leading British rabbi under fire for backing some curbs on refugees

By Andrew Morris

LONDON (JTA) — Sources close to Britain's Orthodox chief rabbi are defending him against accusations that he reneged on previous commitments to asylum rights in the United Kingdom by supporting controversial steps to limit refugee immigration.

The statement comes after a Sunday Telegraph article earlier this month claimed that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks had "undergone a change of heart" over the right of asylum seekers to find safe haven in Britain.

The article, based on an interview Sacks gave to the paper, quoted him as arguing that Britain was "besieged" by asylum seekers and that measures had to be taken to stop the influx.

"The present system — beset by delays, humiliations, hardships and human traffickers — cannot continue," Sacks reportedly told the newspaper.

He went on to suggest the possible establishment of U.N.-administered "regional protection zones."

Under the proposals — also favored by the Prime Minister Tony Blair — asylum seekers arriving at British ports would be registered and then returned to temporary transit camps near their homelands, where their asylum applications would be vetted.

The issue is part of an ongoing national debate, and comments from high-profile figures such as Sacks rarely go unnoticed.

Sacks reportedly told the paper that although Britain has a proud history of accepting refugees — including Jews — "asylum cannot be granted to all who seek it. As the philosopher Michael Walzer puts it, affluent and free countries are, like elite universities, besieged by applicants and cannot admit them all."

In previous speeches, Sacks has highlighted the imperative of a just asylum system.

Speaking in 2001, Sacks said, "Asylum continues to be a deeply controversial issue. But I still can't help feeling that the great nations are those who welcome strangers, that provide a refuge to people fleeing from persecution."

Sources close to the chief rabbi's office told JTA that Sacks' recent comments were "entirely consistent with the stance which the chief rabbi has always taken in speaking out forcefully on behalf of asylum seekers."

But the proposals, as reported in the article, have raised eyebrows in the Jewish community. Edie Friedman, director of the London-based Jewish Council for Racial Equality, called Sacks' comments "very worrying."

"As Jews, we have been fortunate to have been given the fundamental right to apply for asylum," Friedman told JTA. "It is important we are not seen as saying that right applies to us, but not to future generations."

Friedman also said that even if Sacks didn't intend to join the anti-asylum lobby, his arguments could be construed as doing so.

Refugee groups have complained that right-wing tabloid stories, which claim Britain is being overrun by bogus asylum seekers, have led to a climate of mistrust and attacks on refugees. JCORE believes the asylum issue should be debated further, but it is incumbent on Jewish groups to stand up for refugee rights, Friedman said.

The transit camp proposal has been criticized by Amnesty International, which says they may be in breach of international law because they are likely to involve arbitrary detention.

Other communal figures also conveyed their concern about the implications of the chief rabbi's remarks. Rabbi Mark Goldsmith, chair-elect of the Union of Progressive and Liberal Synagogues' Rabbinic Conference, expressed unease over the proposed regional protection zones. "I would worry about the zones absolving countries of their responsibility to be open. A society founded on fairness and justice must welcome refugees," he told the London Jewish Chronicle.

According to the Sunday Telegraph, when Sacks was asked how he might respond to possible criticism about his comments on immigration, he seemed to take it in stride.

"Every Jewish leader since Moses has always been criticized," he reportedly said. "Vigorous debate has always been part of Jewish life." □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

With fate of 'road map' in balance, Arafat and Abbas make up for now

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas have pulled back from the brink of their power struggle, lest it endanger the "road map" peace plan.

Last weekend Arafat, the Palestinian Authority president, went so far as to call Abbas, the P.A. prime minister, a traitor.

Abbas "betrays the interests of the Palestinian people," Arafat reportedly said during a meeting with U.N. envoy Terje Roed-Larsen. "He behaves like a new recruit who doesn't know what he is doing."

On Monday, however, the two reached a cease-fire of sorts with the mediation of senior Palestinian and Egyptian officials that led to a formula for dividing power.

Abbas promised to raise with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon the question of restrictions on Arafat's freedom to travel from his Ramallah headquarters. In addition, Arafat succeeded in making Abbas' security minister, Mohammed Dahlan, who has pledged to take a tough line on terrorist groups, subordinate to a security oversight committee that is packed with Arafat loyalists.

Senior Arafat adviser Saeb Erekat said that a Palestinian leadership council, which includes PLO heads and is controlled by Arafat, would continue to have the final say over negotiations with Israel, underscoring that Abbas is not a free agent in his political dealings, Ha'aretz reported.

Contrary to the expectations of Israel and the United States, Arafat has been acting from a position of power.

Judging from a recent poll by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion, Arafat enjoys solid support among the Palestinian public. Sixty-four percent viewed him favorably, while Abbas received support from only 41 percent of respondents.

Three weeks after Palestinian terrorist groups declared a temporary cease-fire on attacks against Israel, Abbas still has not convinced the Palestinian public that ending hostilities will serve their interests better than continuing the violence. Worse yet, his relations with Arafat have never been so bad during their four decades of partnership at the helm of the PLO.

The good news is that Abbas is putting up a fight. Israeli observers perceive Abbas' offer last week to resign from the Central Committee of Fatah — Arafat's mainstream PLO faction — not as a sign of weakness but as a maneuver in the circuitous struggle to replace Arafat as Palestinian leader.

Abbas may not enjoy the full support of his people, but he has the United States, European Union, Egypt, Jordan and Israel behind him.

He has met openly with Sharon in Jerusalem; Dahlan meets regularly with Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz; and his representatives met last week with Israel's justice minister, Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, at his office in "occupied" eastern Jerusalem.

The ultimate proof that Abbas means business is Arafat's determination to confront him. Arafat knows a potential threat when he sees one: The man who has been written off so many times is again fighting for his political life, and he will do everything in his power to belittle Abbas.

That's why Sharon, ahead of his visit to Europe this week,

relaunched his campaign against Arafat, saying he was undermining Abbas and sabotaging progress toward peace.

The Bush administration has refused to meet with Arafat, considering him irredeemably tied to terrorism. The momentum to Abbas' appointment began in June 2002 when President Bush set the replacement of Arafat as a condition for eventual Palestinian statehood.

Sharon has asked European leaders to stop meeting with Arafat, arguing that such contact reinforces Arafat's standing and prevents Abbas from establishing his own power base. Most European leaders have refused, however, saying Arafat was popularly elected and therefore is legitimate.

On Sunday, Sharon was asked at the weekly Cabinet session why he did not exile Arafat and dismantle his Ramallah headquarters. Sharon replied that the issue would not be discussed at the Cabinet — implying that it was not altogether irrelevant.

Arafat appointed Abbas, his longtime No. 2, as premier last April, following heavy pressure by the United States and European Union. Since then, however, both Arafat and Abbas have consistently said that Arafat remains the supreme Palestinian leader, and Abbas consults with him on every decision of substance.

But tension between the two has increased as the road map progresses. The tension burst into the open last week when Arafat and his allies accused Abbas of gaining little from Israel in exchange for the terror groups' cease-fire announcement.

Arafat's circle spread charges that Abbas and Dahlan were too soft on Israel, particularly on the issue of releasing Palestinian prisoners. Israel is not required to release prisoners under the road map, but believes the move might strengthen Abbas' popularity at home.

So far Israel has released only 280 prisoners, but none "with blood on their hands" — that is, who were involved in terror attacks — or who are members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad, the main partners to the cease-fire.

Dahlan told Israeli officials that Israel must release many more of the roughly 5,800 prisoners in Israeli jails, regardless of their record or political identity, if it wants to help Abbas and the road map. It's not just a matter of negotiating tactics: With so many Palestinian families affected, the Palestinian public regards a massive release of prisoners as a precondition of progress with Israel.

Many Israelis, however, believe that releasing prisoners who took part in terror attacks would suggest that such tactics are as legitimate as other means of struggle.

Still, in an attempt to strengthen Abbas, Israeli government sources leaked to the press that Israel would release an additional 300 prisoners, including some from Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Decisions are likely to be taken before Sharon's scheduled visit to Washington at the end of the month.

Abbas thus is fighting on two fronts: He fights for more flexibility on the Israeli front, while on the home front he fights for more power.

His main foes, the loyal supporters of Arafat, are concentrated in the Central Committee of Fatah. Last week Abbas challenged Fatah to come up with a better government policy, saying he would resign as prime minister if it could.

Dahlan, meanwhile, challenged the very authority of Arafat's friends, calling for the first elections to the Fatah Central Committee in 13 years. □