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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel releases prisoners

Israel released 339 Palestinian prisoners Wednesday in what was intended to be a goodwill gesture.

However, an adviser to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat denounced the move as a "joke" because many of the prisoners were slated to be released soon anyway.

For its part, Israel said none of the prisoners had been involved in deadly attacks against Israelis, and Israeli forces were on high alert for riots in prisons where Palestinians are still being held. [Page 4]

Bush: Fence an obstacle

The fence Israel is building in the West Bank is an obstacle to Middle East peace, President Bush reiterated. "We're talking to Israel about all aspects of the fence," Bush said Wednesday near his ranch in Crawford, Texas.

But Bush failed to comment on reports that the United States is considering reducing the \$9 billion in U.S. loan guarantees to match Israeli outlays on the security fence where it deviates from the pre-1967 border.

Bush added that he believes progress is being made toward implementing the "road map" for peace.

U.N. body blasts Israel

The chairwoman of a U.N. human rights body vilified Israel.

At the recent opening of the three-week session of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Geneva, Halima Warzazi of Morocco said Israel "sowed death, massive destruction, terror, despair, and perpetuated persecution and torture."

The Sub-Commission, which opened July 28, is a subgroup of the Commission on Human Rights.

It is comprised of 26 human rights experts from around the world and is considered a "think tank" for the commission, according to U.N. Watch. Warzazi also accused America of inflicting an "apocalypse" on the Iraqi people.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, Aug. 8.

Teaching Arabic to Israeli cops requires its own kind of policing

By Uriel Heilman

NETANYA, Israel (JTA) — About a dozen Israelis sit hunched over their desks in a picturesque beachfront setting, haltingly trying out their first sentences in Arabic.

"I live in Jerusalem and I work at the university," one says.

"My name is Shuka and I live with my family in Tel Aviv," says another.

They speak slowly, stringing together words they've learned in the first week of an intensive Arabic-language beginner's course.

A short distance away, another Arabic course for beginners is getting under way. The students in this class, however, are learning sentences of a different nature.

"Sit on this bench! You've got several options here and you'd better not make things difficult for us," one student reads from the text in his instructional booklet.

"These people are tied to drug-running," reads another, stumbling over the unfamiliar Arabic cadences.

The students in the second class are Israeli police officers, taking a special course for police working in Arab towns and neighborhoods in Israel.

The police course is one of many specialized Arabic courses at Ulpan Akiva, the Netanya-based institute for Hebrew language and culture.

Among the institute's other Arabic programs are language courses for Israel's navy, staff in the Prime Minister's Office, officials in the Interior Ministry and, of course, Israel's military intelligence services.

This summer's course is the institute's first for regular police.

"There are cops here from all over who have contact with the Arab community," one police officer in the class says. "We try to connect to the Arab mentality. There are things you can say to a Jew that are offensive to Arabs," he says — such as refusing to drink coffee with an Arab, which is considered an insult. "This course helps me with that.

"I won't leave here speaking fluent Arabic, but I'll have a foundation," the policeman says.

The officer, like most in the class, wouldn't disclose his name. Some of the police are members of special undercover units, and their identities require protection.

"The police are taught the appropriate vocabulary for their work — if it's a conversation at a checkpoint, if it's a greeting, if it's about customs and respecting the locals," says Salman Amer, director of the ulpan's Arabic language program.

Knowing the language is key to building positive relationships with Israel's Arabs, Amer says.

"When a police officer stops me and he doesn't know my language and just says, 'Open the trunk,' it can seem like an act of violence," Amer says. "But when you know how to speak politely and say, 'Good morning. Please let me look inside your trunk,' you treat a person like a human being."

Tensions between police and Israeli Arabs reached the breaking point in October 2000 when, just days after the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada, 12 Israeli Arabs were shot dead when Israeli police opened fire on rioters.

"In October 2000 a certain rupture took place," Amer says. "Until then, there had been no notion of community policing. Police realized after October 2000 that they can't just do security. Today in most of the big villages there is community policing. They help out with drug busts, prevent theft."

Most Arabs who teach the language to Jews aren't comfortable about publicizing

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arrests made in Jericho

Israel arrested 15 Palestinians during a raid in the West Bank city of Jericho.

The men arrested Tuesday night are believed to have been members of the Palestinian Authority security forces, according to Ha'aretz. Israeli raids into Jericho are rare because the city is not considered a haven for terrorists.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher criticized the raid, calling it a detriment to efforts to build goodwill.

Israel also announced Wednesday that its forces arrested an alleged suicide bomber and an accomplice last week near the West Bank city of Nablus.

Abbas trying to keep peace

Mahmoud Abbas is negotiating to keep the Palestinian cease-fire alive.

The Palestinian Authority prime minister is meeting with leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip in an attempt to maintain the five-week-long cease-fire and perhaps extend it beyond the planned three months.

Israel is concerned that an increasing number of violations of the cease-fire — a Kassam rocket was fired Tuesday night at a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip — indicate that the cease-fire is on the brink of collapse.

Temple Mount visit nixed

A group of extremist Israelis will not be allowed to visit Jerusalem's Temple Mount on Tisha B'Av, Israel's Supreme Court ruled.

The court accepted the government's argument that the visit by the Temple Mount Faithful on Thursday could incite violence and jeopardize peace efforts.

Earlier in the week, the court ruled against a visit to the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site, by a group of right-wing Israeli legislators.



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that fact. The ulpan's lone Arab Muslim teacher — who asked that his name not be used — says he asks his parents not to tell anybody in his village that he teaches here.

"When someone teaches Arabic for Jews, people right away think you're a traitor, or teaching the Mukhabarat," the teacher says, alluding to Israel's intelligence services. "It's not like that."

"Teaching is an honorable profession, but I prefer that people not know what I do," he says.

This past year, when the Muslim teacher helped organize a coexistence project in a school in his Arab village in northern Israel, many of his neighbors discovered from teachers that he works at Ulpan Akiva.

"Some people in my village started treating me differently, and it hurts me," he says.

The other two Arabic teachers on staff are Israeli Druse, both veterans of the Israel Defense Forces. Druse are native Arabic speakers, but don't consider themselves Arabs.

There used to be many Arabs at Ulpan Akiva, most of them Palestinians studying Hebrew. But that ended with the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada in September 2000.

"Ulpan Akiva's motto is, 'Language is a bridge to a relationship,'" says Esther Perron, the institute's executive director. "But the last group of Palestinians we had here left on the eve of Rosh Hashanah in 2000, and we haven't seen them since."

When Palestinians did come to the ulpan, they would mingle in the evenings with the scores of foreigners and Israelis on campus, some of whom lived on campus and some of whom stayed behind in the evenings to socialize with other students.

Conversations in English, Hebrew and Arabic would last late into the night.

"Everyone used to sit together at night and talk," the Arab Muslim teacher recalls. "But the political situation changed everything."

Nowadays, the only Arabs at the ulpan are at the front of the classroom, where the task of teaching is not always easy — especially when your students are unruly and armed.

"When you teach soldiers in intelligence units, they sit there and listen and do their homework diligently," says Saleh Dery, one of the Druse instructors. "But these cops need a break every 15 or 20 minutes. They don't have a very long attention span."

After lunch, the police — all of them male — sit on the front steps of the classroom building, smoking cigarettes and chatting loudly. Their pants hang low on their bottoms, exposing the handguns they wear on their hips.

Class was supposed to begin 15 minutes ago, but the police ignore Dery's entreaties to return to their desks until an administrator appears carrying an official attendance sheet. Then they trudge back to the classroom, where three of their colleagues are sprawled across several chairs, sleeping.

When class finally begins, the policemen practice reading a text about a drug-related arrest. There isn't much decorum in the classroom, and control shifts between the teacher and the gun-toting students.

"When I taught a class to the border police, I used to ask them to leave their weapons in the closet," the Arab Muslim teacher says.

Nevertheless, he says he generally is able to maintain a good rapport with his students.

"I feel like I'm an ambassador here for Israeli Arabs. Many students who learn here come with stereotypes, and when they see how their Arabic teacher treats them and teaches, they leave with a different feeling than when they came," the Arab Muslim teacher says. "This is good for both sides, for coexistence."

One police officer in the course, Ovadiya Brumi, works at a small police station in an Arab community in northern Israel. He says the police chose Ulpan Akiva because it is the only institution in the country that teaches spoken rather than literary Arabic.

The police learn the basics of the language, but their course focuses on practical usage. While the Arabic course for civilians starts with the present tense, the course for police begins with the imperative tense — or, as the teachers refer to it, the "occupation" tense — so "Open the door!" is taught before "I am opening the door."

The ulpan's director says there has been a recent rise in interest in Arabic courses, perhaps a sign of better times to come. But she is guarded in her optimism, and she's still waiting for the Arab students to return to the school.

"My heart says it will happen, but my head says it will take a few more years," Perron says. "The special atmosphere that we had — we really feel it is missing." □

JEWISH WORLD

Thou shalt not post

A U.S. judge ordered the chief justice of Alabama's Supreme Court to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments from the state judicial building within 15 days.

On Tuesday, the judge, who earlier ruled that the monument violates the constitutional separation of religion and state, lifted a stay he had placed on the removal. Justice Roy Moore, who had the monument erected in the building's rotunda, has said he will appeal to the Supreme Court.

Hillel hires search firm

Hillel has hired a search firm to find a replacement for longtime president Richard Joel.

The international Jewish campus organization hired Boston-based Isaacson Miller in mid-July because of its track record in educational and Jewish communal searches, said Susan Behrend Jerison, vice president for Hillel's governance and communications.

Hillel hired Israeli educator Avraham Infeld as interim director in May after Joel left to head Yeshiva University.

Tisha B'Av spurs vigil

Jews gathered in New York to commemorate victims of Palestinian terror.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the American Zionist Movement sponsored the annual vigil, which drew approximately 30 people, held the day before Tisha B'Av. Several New York officials and Jewish dignitaries read victims' biographies.

European Jewish papers scrap

France's leading Jewish newspaper accused its British counterpart of treason and anti-Zionism.

An article in last week's Actualite Juive criticized the London Jewish Chronicle for publishing an interview with British legislator Oona King, who recently compared Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Ned Temko, editor of the Chronicle, replied by saying, "Oona King is an MP, Jewish, and a prominent national political figure. In interviewing her after her widely reported comments regarding Gaza, we were doing what any responsible and serious newspaper does: asking questions which our readers would have wanted to ask."

JAFI, Israel cooperate in FSU

The Jewish Agency for Israel and the Israeli government will operate jointly schools in the former Soviet Union. The agreement announced this week affects 21,000 students in 223 schools, including 180 Sunday schools.

Families of missing teens in Israel pray for their speedy return to U.S.

By Uriel Heilman

NEW YORK (JTA) — As thousands of Skulener Chasidim prepared for Saturday night's celebration of the 44th anniversary of their rebbe's liberation from a Romanian prison, many had their hearts set on a different liberation.

The rebbe's grandson, Eliezer Zusia Klockhoft, 19, has been missing in Israel since Sunday, and his family and followers of the Skulener rebbe, Yisroel Avraham Portugal, were praying for Klockhoft's safe return.

"We're hoping every minute for very good news," said Portugal's chief aide, Rabbi Shimon Yisroel Fried. "He is a very loved person. Everybody should say Psalms for this boy, who has a Yiddish heart and is a genuine fellow."

A native of Borough Park, Brooklyn, Klockhoft is one of two teenagers with U.S. ties who disappeared in Israel in recent days. The other, 18-year-old Dana Bennet, a waitress from Tiberias whose family lives in San Francisco, has been missing since July 31.

Initial reports suggested that the disappearances could be cases of Palestinian terrorism. Police have warned for weeks that terrorists planned to kidnap Israelis, whom they would try to ransom for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

In recent weeks, two Israelis have been abducted. One, soldier Oleg Sheichat, was abducted in the Galilee and later found dead. The other, taxi driver Eliahu Gurel, was kidnapped, taken to Ramallah by his Palestinian captors and eventually liberated by Israel Defense Forces commandos.

Nevertheless, police now say the disappearances do not seem to be a coordinated wave of terrorist kidnappings. "There does not seem to be any link between the different cases," Israeli police spokesman Gil Kleiman said.

Investigators have expressed some doubt as to whether Klockhoft actually was kidnapped. Fried, however, said it is "definitely not" possible that the teenager simply ran away.

Speaking of Klockhoft and Bennet, U.S. State Department official Stuart Patt cautioned, "We don't know for a fact yet that these two individuals are victims of any terrorist act. All we know is that they're unaccounted for and have yet to be found."

"The embassy in Tel Aviv is working with local authorities to try to find out what has happened to them," added Patt, spokesman for the department's consular affairs bureau.

Klockhoft disappeared near Mount Meron, in northern Israel, during a visit with friends to the grave site of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

The group had planned the visit for the yahrzeit of kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as "The Ari."

Klockhoft was studying in a Jerusalem yeshiva for the second consecutive year.

Two days after the disappearance, Klockhoft's parents flew to Israel, where they have family and Chasidic supporters. They met with police on Wednesday night.

Klockhoft is one of 10 children. A family friend, Rabbi Hershel Weber of Brooklyn, said the family's emotional state is "not too good."

Meanwhile, the Skulener Chasidim are doing all they can to find the missing youth: Hundreds of Chasidic volunteers from Jerusalem, Haifa and Bnei Brak have been combing the countryside in search of the boy, Fried said.

He also said several U.S. congressmen and senators had contacted the rebbe, who lives in Brooklyn but is summering in the mountains of Swan Lake, N.Y., to offer their wishes for the youth's speedy return.

Raphael Bennet, the brother of the missing woman, joined in searches for his sister after arriving in Israel this week with his father, the Jerusalem Post reported.

"We have come to help in the searches, to be with the family, to give our support and also be supported," Raphael Bennet was quoted as saying.

Bennet's parents are divorced, and she has lived with her mother in Israel. Family members reportedly said she had planned to come to the United States in September to be with her father, Binyamin Ben-Yitzhak, and her brother. □

Release of prisoners earns Israel criticism, little apparent goodwill

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A release of prisoners that Israel intended as a goodwill gesture toward the Palestinians appears to have earned little goodwill.

A group of 334 security prisoners were released on Wednesday, several weeks after an initial group of about 200 were freed. Another 99 are scheduled to be released next week.

However, the Palestinian Authority limited acts of rejoicing to protest the “the insufficient number of released prisoners.”

Palestinian spokesmen echoed the criticism from P.A. President Yasser Arafat, who called the release an Israeli “propaganda measure.”

Israel came under intense Palestinian and American pressure to release prisoners.

Though the release is not part of the “road map” peace plan, Palestinian terrorist groups made the release a condition of their unilateral cease-fire, and the United States urged Israel to free a sizable number of prisoners in the belief that it would strengthen P.A. Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas.

Israeli officials debated the issue for weeks, ultimately deciding to release several hundred members of terrorist groups but not those directly involved in attacks that killed Israelis.

As has been the pattern with Israel’s releases of prisoners since the Oslo peace process first began in 1993, what was intended as a step to elicit Palestinian goodwill appeared to generate more animosity.

“We hope this is a trust-building move that will help promote the peace process,” said Arnon Perlman, an adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

But P.A. Cabinet minister Yasser Abed Rabbo did not appear to be impressed. “It is worthless and meaningless,” Abed Rabbo said. “It is a theatrical step to appease Washington.”

“If Israel intended the release of Palestinian prisoners as a goodwill measure, the result was just the opposite,” Palestinian parliamentary deputy Kadura Fares told Israeli television, according to the Ha’aretz newspaper.

To protest the list of prisoners to be released, Abbas canceled a meeting with Sharon planned for Wednesday.

Buses carrying prisoners left detention centers in the south and north of the country.

Relatives waited to greet them at four checkpoints in the West Bank and one in the Gaza Strip, settling for hugs and kisses instead of the traditional nationalist songs.

Samir, a man who served 20 months at the Ketziot detention camp in the Negev, said that he was happy to be out but that he and his friends demanded the release of all the estimated 5,800 Palestinian security prisoners.

As a condition of his release, Samir said he had signed a document promising not to engage in terrorism. However, attacks against Israelis are “fighting occupation,” and are not terrorism, he said. Another prisoner, Hamad al-Smaili, also said he would not abide by his promise of non-violence.

“I am a soldier of the Islamic Jihad and I will do whatever and be whatever the Islamic Jihad wishes,” he said after arriving in the Gaza Strip, according to Ha’aretz.

Not all were so uncompromising, however.

“I will go back to university to study. I did enough as a militant,” said Islamic Jihad member Amar Jaradat, 27. “I did my duty and now I have to look after myself and study law.”

The Palestinian deputy minister for prisoner affairs, Ziad Abu Ein, said that the Palestinian Authority intends to help the prisoners acclimate to civilian life by providing them with a monthly stipend and jobs in the Authority, the Jerusalem Post reported.

Abu Ein, who served prison time himself for sheltering Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti in his home last April, said that all the families of the Palestinian prisoners received a monthly stipend of about \$300 during the course of their incarceration, the report said.

A group of bereaved families, Israelis and Palestinians, demonstrated at a checkpoint near Tulkarm in favor of the release.

“The infrastructure of terrorism is the womb of the Palestinian woman, who will never agree to give birth to a child who will be submissive and will want to live under occupation,” said Ronni Hirschensohn, an Israeli who lost a son in a 1995 terrorist bombing. “One should start listening to the other side.”

At a checkpoint near Ramallah, bereaved families from the other side of the political spectrum demonstrated against the release.

Yehudit Dasberg, who lost her daughter and son-in-law in a terrorist attack seven years ago, said this was a day for “crying for generations.”

No sovereign country releases its outlaws and potential killers, and Israel’s action proves that it has capitulated to terrorism, she said. “Since when has it been our interest to strengthen Abu Mazen?” Dasberg asked, using Abbas’ nom de guerre.

One of the demonstrators was Dov Kalmanovitz, the first victim of the first intifada that began in 1987, who was badly burned in a terrorist attack near one of the checkpoints where the prisoners crossed over to P.A. areas.

A number of Kach activists tried to force their way into the Ofer Camp where prisoners were released. Police detained one of the activists, Itamar Ben-Gvir.

The Palestinians complained that many of the freed prisoners were scheduled to be released anyway within a few days. □

Latest kidnapping a hoax

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An alleged kidnapping in Israel turned out to be a hoax.

A soldier told authorities that several men tried to abduct him at a junction near Tiberias on Tuesday, sparking a major security alert.

It turned out that the soldier concocted a story to cover up his absence from an army base, according to the Jerusalem Post. □

Atkins, look out!

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli scientists have developed a low-calorie watermelon.

The new watermelon contains 20 percent to 40 percent fewer calories than the normal variety. To create the diet melon, researchers at Hebrew University in Jerusalem isolated a variety that contains fructose, but not sucrose or glucose. □