



## IN THE NEWS

## Bike bomber wounds 3 soldiers

A Palestinian suicide bomber on a bicycle wounded three Israeli soldiers.

The terrorist struck Tuesday morning at the Habla checkpoint near the West Bank city of Kalkilya.

One of the three soldiers, who were sitting in a military jeep when the bomb went off, was moderately wounded while the other two were hospitalized in good condition.

## Israel approves settler compensation

Israel approved compensation for settlers to be evacuated under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's "disengagement plan."

The Security Cabinet on Tuesday voted 9-1 to approve a range of proposals governing evacuation and compensation of settlers under the disengagement initiative.

The relocation packages are for families from the Gaza Strip and four West Bank settlements who move voluntarily before the 2005 deadline for withdrawal from the territories.

## Candidates send High Holiday greetings

President Bush and his presidential opponent, Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), issued Rosh Hashanah messages to the Jewish community.

"As you share in the traditional festivities of this special time of year, you renew your commitment to acts of compassion, and to the cause of freedom around the world," President Bush said in his message, released Tuesday.

"Together, all of us are helping to build a world filled with the blessings of family, health, and peace."

Kerry used the occasion to stress his support for Israel.

"Particularly in uncertain times like these we must reaffirm and indeed strengthen our special relationship with Israel, our most steadfast friend and ally in the region," Kerry said. "Israel's cause must be America's cause."

# WORLD REPORT

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## Israel braces for difficult term as U.N. General Assembly begins

By RACHEL POMERANCE

**N**EW YORK (JTA) — If recent events are any indication of what's to come at the 2004 U.N. General Assembly, Israel had better brace itself.

With the three-month session officially starting Tuesday, Israel advocates are preparing for the traditional batch of some 20 anti-Israel resolutions — in addition to several new ones.

Despite the fact that the United Nations this summer hosted its first ever large-scale event to address growing worldwide anti-Semitism, observers say little has come of it.

Instead, pro-Israel advocates say they are particularly worried about the Palestinians' aim to capitalize on the July opinion of the International Court of Justice at The Hague, which advised Israel to dismantle the parts of its security barrier that cut into Palestinian-populated territory and compensate Palestinians impeded by it.

Israel and American Jewish groups are lobbying U.N. member countries to prevent the issue from reaching or gaining passage at the U.N. Security Council, the only U.N. body with the power to impose sanctions.

Israel's backers are urging members of the General Assembly, a body of 191 countries, to resist the usual habit of trouncing en masse on the Jewish state.

In addition, Jewish groups hope that a resolution condemning anti-Semitism that was withdrawn last year due to lack of support will be reintroduced.

While this year's session was opening Tuesday, with an address by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the general debate be-

gins Sept. 21, with world leaders, including U.S. and Israeli officials, slated to address the assembly next week.

Jewish observers say it's hard to predict what might transpire during the coming session.

According to Amy Goldstein, director of U.N. affairs for B'nai B'rith International, it could turn into either one of the worst sessions or one of the best.

She said, "It could stand out as one of the worst sessions in the U.N. for Israel if the Palestinians decide to try to isolate Israel in the international community even further by seeking to continue this charade of a parallel with South Africa, or it could be a landmark year for the Jewish people with the passage of a stand-alone resolution condemning anti-Semitism as called for by the U.N. secretary-general, Kofi Annan,"

at the U.N. conference on anti-Semitism this summer.

Two events this summer indicate that the Palestinians are hoping for the former, and could be especially aggressive in pursuing their aims.

At a meeting of the Palestine committee of the United Nations, the Palestinian U.N. representative, Nasser Al-Kidwa, underscored what he called the centrality of the Hague opinion.

Jewish officials said Al-Kidwa called it the most important U.N. resolution since the 1947 U.N. partition plan, which begot the Jewish state.

The Palestinian campaign for the International Court to rule on the issue led to lukewarm passage of a General Assembly

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### BEHIND THE HEADLINES

## ■ Israel gears up for tough General Assembly

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resolution requesting it. Ultimately, however, it led to much stronger passage, with a vote of 150 to 6, with 10 abstentions, of a resolution demanding Israel's compliance with the opinion.

This session, the Palestinians are expected to continue the effort, by calling on the General Assembly again to demand compliance by Israel and asking the U.N. Security Council to impose sanctions on Israel.

Meanwhile, an August meeting in South Africa of the Non-Aligned Movement — a group of 115 developing countries — resulted in a resolution to boycott products from West Bank and Gaza settlements and block Jews who live there from travel in their countries.

A similar push could be made in the General Assembly, according to a U.N. diplomat who asked not to be identified.

And Palestinians may repeat their effort to limit Israel's U.N. credentials to its pre-1967 borders, and give Palestinians the right to represent the West Bank, Gaza and eastern Jerusalem.

The United States is hoping to decrease the number of anti-Israel resolutions at the U.N. General Assembly, U.S. officials say.

The U.S. State Department, in fact, lists fair treatment of Israel at U.N. forums among its five foreign policy priorities at the United Nations.

But some Jewish officials say that growing anti-Americanism around the world may make that effort more challenging.

Israel advocates are mainly focused on preventing a resolution on Israel's security barrier from gaining nine affirmative votes at the 15-member U.N. Security Council. Such a scenario would require a veto from one of the five permanent members — and if it does, they are banking on the United States.

The United States has not made a public statement on what its position would be should the matter come to the Security Council, according to U.S. officials.

But the officials said they were taking the matter seriously.

"We will not only look at it closely, but act appropriately if necessary," he said.

It is not clear that European countries — who wrestled with their General Assembly vote demanding Israeli compliance with the ICJ opinion — would support a U.N. Security Council resolution on the issue.

"It's a difficult situation for the Europeans, and it also sets a precedent," said another U.N. official, referring to laws that could entangle the court in internal matters of national defense. "I think a lot of countries don't want to go there."

Furthermore, Israel is already rerouting its barrier in light of its own Supreme Court ruling, which said the path caused hardship to Palestinians.

Another priority of American Jewish groups is winning passage of a resolution condemning anti-Semitism in the wake of this summer's conference.

Ireland, which sponsored last year's failed version, may be sponsoring the resolution again this year, said a U.N. official.

The Irish mission to the United Nations did not return a call seeking comment.

Due to last year's failure, some groups are discussing a three-pronged approach — designating one resolution apiece to condemn bigotry against Muslims, Christians and Jews.

"It's obviously not the most desirable option," due to "pitfalls like two of them passing and the third failing," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Jewish groups are seeking the same

language used in a resolution passed at an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe conference on anti-Semitism in Berlin in the spring.

That conference declared "unambiguously that international developments or political issues, including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-Semitism."

They are discussing linking the resolution to a U.N. exhibit on the 60th anniversary of liberating the concentration camps, which falls next year, Hoenlein said.

But many predict that Arab countries, which thwarted last year's resolution, will try to water down this one into a universal resolution blasting bigotry of all forms.

Annan, at the anti-Semitism conference in July, called on his U.N. human rights monitors to do a better job reporting anti-Semitic incidents, including unfair treatment of Israel.

But five days later, each of the U.N.'s 35 special human rights monitors signed a statement condemning Israel — the first joint statement against a specific country, said Eve Epstein, vice president of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, a New York-based think tank.

Still, Jewish officials say there is room for optimism.

For one, Palestinian leaders recently received substantial criticism at the U.N. Security Council in a report from U.N. Middle East envoy Terje Roed-Larson, who blasted them for failing to bring about order in the Palestinian Authority.

At the same time, Israel has won plaudits by Annan for its Gaza disengagement plan, which calls for an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and some settlements in the West Bank.

At the end of the day, much of the action will hinge on the facts on the ground, say observers.

"If there were movement on the disengagement plan in Israel, that could be seen as an effort toward peace" and might "change the tenor at the U.N. to being less combative toward Israel," said Shelley Klein, director of advocacy for Hadassah: The Women's Zionist Organization of America.

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### JTA WORLD REPORT

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# Russian Jews worry about Putin proposals

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — Many Russian Jews are worried that Russian President Vladimir Putin's authoritarian measures to crack down on terrorism may be *deja vu* all over again.

On Monday, Putin announced plans for a major overhaul of Russia's electoral system, including elimination of popular elections for regional governors and a shift in the way Russians elect their Parliament — a measure likely to increase Putin's already formidable power.

In his remarks to Cabinet members and regional governors, which were televised, Putin also called for the creation of a central, powerful antiterror agency.

But some are wondering whether the Russian president's desire for a state more capable of fighting terror may turn Russia away from the democratic achievements of the last decade and revert back to the Communist or czarist eras.

“The big question now is whether a balance will be kept between counterterrorist measures and the observance of human rights,” said Alexander Brod, director of the Moscow Bureau on Human Rights, which is affiliated with the Washington-based Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union.

Among the measures being proposed in the wake of the Sept. 3 tragedy at a school in Beslan in southern Russia, in which terrorists killed more than 300 people, are some that may ultimately limit the freedom of movement for Russians within their own country.

In addition, Brod and other Jewish and human rights activists noted that the outbreak of terror in Russia has been followed by increased activity on the part of fringe nationalist and anti-Semitic groups.

The largest rally against terrorism, held near the Kremlin days after the siege in Beslan, was marred by the visible presence of anti-Semitic slogans and groups known for chauvinism against Chechens and other minorities, including Jews.

Several anti-Semitic attacks, including the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in Siberia, were reported in the days following the recent spate of terrorism.

“Terror seeks to split the society along ethnic lines, which ultimately sows the seeds of anti-Semitism,” said Rabbi Zinovy Kogan, leader of the Congress of Jewish

Religious Organizations and Communities of Russia.

Some ordinary Jews focused on Putin's changes in a nation that has never been known as a haven for democracy.

“What is being proposed now will ultimately deal a severe blow to democracy in Russia,” said Alexei Pruzhansky, a mathematician from Moscow.

He was referring to Putin's proposal to do away with popularly elected regional governors and parliamentary deputies. Currently, one-half of the 450-seat lower house, the Duma, is elected in a direct popular vote.

If approved by the Kremlin-controlled Parliament, Putin's proposition would have all members of Parliament elected from party slates — a move that will further sideline opposition to the Kremlin.

At least one Russian Jewish official voiced his full support for whatever actions the Russian authorities take in their war on terrorism.

“Helplessness. That's the word to describe what makes so many people nervous today,” Yevgeny Satanovsky, the president of the Russian Jewish Congress, told JTA. “Those who should have prevented the attack from happening failed to do this.”

Satanovsky told a Russian Jewish Congress conference on Monday, “Those who committed this barbarian act in Beslan are the same people who blow up buses in Israel, synagogues in Turkey, community centers in Argentina.”

For its part, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia was willing to comment only on the new order for appointing governors instead of electing them in a public election, not on Putin's general treatment of the post-Beslan situation.

“As a Jewish community organization we refrain from commenting on general political developments in the country,” said Borukh Gorin, a spokesman for the group. “At the same time, we must acknowledge that President Putin's administration has taken a strong stand against any form of anti-Semitism, particularly from government officials. We hope and believe that this strong stand against any form of xenophobia and anti-Semitism will be a prerequisite for the appointment of the new governors.”

But not everyone supports Putin's moves.

“I have a feeling that the state is using Beslan as a pretext to introduce nearly unlimited presidential authority,” Pruzhansky said.

Critics say this measure will eventually turn the Russian Parliament into a pawn of the president.

In addition to these sensational electoral proposals, Putin ordered a crackdown on extremist organizations.

Jewish leaders said they hope the definition of extremist organizations will include those radical groups that have made

anti-Semitic propaganda the core of their activities.

In addition to the political concerns, some Russian Jews are worried about the tone of societal discourse following the Beslan attack.

“I cannot say I'm alarmed too much yet, but I understand where this can lead,” said Noson Vershubsky, a rabbi from the southern Russian city of Voronezh.

“The nearly unanimous popular support that accompanies almost everything that the authorities propose these days creates a feeling of *deja vu*, as if this is taking place some 20 to 40 years ago,” said Vershubsky, who served a prison sentence for his religious activism during Soviet days.

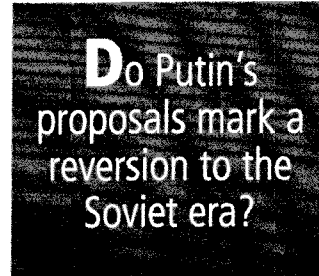
Studying Hebrew and Torah were among the activities prohibited during much of the Soviet Union's 70-year existence.

Those Jews who still have memories of the Soviet-era KGB say they understand why many people have uneasy feelings when it comes to the issue of bringing special agencies to the forefront of the fight against terror.

“Those who have lived much of their lives in the Soviet Union know how the KGB operate, when all its strength was targeted against their own citizens,” said Adolph Shayevich, one of Russia's two chief rabbis.

“Our special organizations yet need to win a broad popular support, so that people can see they are fighting against terror, and not against those who tell jokes about our president,” Shayevich said.

(JTA Foreign Editor Peter Ephross in New York contributed to this report.)



# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDEAST

### Sharon's life threatened

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon received death threats over his plan to withdraw Israelis from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

Israeli police said Tuesday they were investigating threatening calls received at the Jerusalem office that is coordinating the plan to withdraw settlers from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But the Shin Bet said there was no further specific intelligence warning of an assassination plot against the prime minister, whose security has been boosted in recent months.

### Jihad terrorist killed

Israeli commandos killed a Palestinian terrorist in the West Bank. The Islamic Jihad fugitive was shot in a clash Tuesday with special forces in Nur a-Shams refugee camp in Tulkarm.

An accomplice barricaded himself in a home, prompting Israeli forces to demolish the building when he refused to emerge. The second terrorist's condition was not immediately known.

### Rabbi: I'd lead anti-Sharon ceremony

An Israeli rabbi said he would be willing to hold a mystical ceremony supposed to lead to the death of Ariel Sharon.

Yosef Dayan, from the West Bank settlement of Pesagot, said this week that if asked he would hold a "pula denura" ceremony against the Israeli prime minister, who is planning to withdraw Israeli soldiers and settlers from the Gaza Strip and four West Bank settlements next year.

Dayan held a similar ceremony before the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

### Porn welfare protest

An Israeli woman went online with a striptease protest against Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policies.

The short film, "Etched on the Body," showing Vicki Knafo stripping and having political slogans scrawled on her flesh, was offered on a leading Israeli pornography Web site this week.

Knafo, a 44-year-old mother of two, leaped to nationwide fame last year by marching from the southern town of Mitzpe Ramon to Jerusalem to draw attention to the plight of Israel's poor.

"This is for Bibi and all those others, who ignored our messages. Now they have them on my body," Knafo said in a media interview, referring to Netanyahu.

According to media reports, one of the slogans in the film is "Screwed by the Establishment" — written across Knafo's rear end.

## NORTH AMERICA

### GOP senators focusing on anti-Semitism

Republican senators are speaking out against the rise of international anti-Semitism.

Five GOP senators will speak for 10 minutes each on the subject Tuesday and Wednesday, during the U.S. Senate's morning business.

Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.), who coordinated the speeches and distributed binders to his caucus on the rise of anti-Semitism, said the program is timed for Rosh Hashanah.

"It's important for us to take that time as a point of reflection for the Jewish community and as a point of reflection for this country," Santorum said Monday.

### Group backs benefits for gay couples

The American Jewish Committee voted to endorse giving legal benefits to gay and lesbian couples who enter into civil unions. The group's Board of Governors made the decision Monday.

The AJCommittee already has stated its opposition to a proposed U.S. constitutional amendment restricting marriage to heterosexual couples. Orthodox groups back the proposed amendment.

## WORLD

### Iranian won't play in Israel

An Iranian player pulled out of a soccer game against Maccabi Tel Aviv.

Officially, Vahid Hashemian, who plays for Bayern Munich, pulled out of his German team's game against Maccabi Tel Aviv in Israel on Rosh Hashanah because of an injury.

But an Iranian official had warned of consequences for athletes who travel to Israel.

The move comes after an Iranian athlete was rewarded for not competing against an Israeli athlete during the recent Olympic Games in Athens.

### British Jewish group gets new man

British Jewry's central group appointed a new director general. Jon Benjamin, currently chief executive of British ORT, will succeed Neville Nagler at the Board of Deputies of British Jewry.

The appointment was announced Monday at the plenary meeting of the board, which represents the U.K.'s 300,000 Jews.

Nagler, who has held the post for more than 13 years and is widely acknowledged as British Jewry's central spokesman in consultations with the government, has announced he will step down later this year.

### Righteous Gentile still righteous

Israel's High Court rejected a petition to strip a Ukrainian man of his title of Righteous Gentile.

The court said Tuesday that it was not the right place to determine whether Stefan Wrzeczuk deserved the accolade, given by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial to those who helped save Jews during the Holocaust.

Survivors say Wrzeczuk lied when he claimed that he helped his mother lead Jews out of the Ludmir Ghetto to the protection of partisans in the surrounding forests. Wrzeczuk currently lives in Israel.

### Bible meets Rembrandt

An exhibit that fuses biblical stories with portraits by Rembrandt is up on the Web.

"Scripture Envisioned: The Bible Through the Eyes of Rembrandt" is available at JewishHistory.com.

"Rembrandt's biblical scenes are not merely an exercise in historical painting, they contain his own passion and intensity as well as a remarkable degree of his innovative biblical interpretation," writes the Bible scholar Bryna Jocheved Levy, who provided commentary for the exhibit.

### Jewish photographers out of Madonna's retreat

Jewish photographers were asked to stay away from Madonna's spiritual retreat in Israel during Rosh Hashanah.

Organizers of the Kabbalah Center said Jewish photographers would not be allowed to photograph the retreat because they don't want to encourage Jews to break Shabbat, Agence France-Press reported.

Madonna has become increasingly interested in Jewish mysticism in recent years, and now reportedly goes by the name Esther and observes Shabbat.