

IN THE NEWS
23 Palestinians die in Gaza Strip

Israeli strikes reportedly killed 23 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday.

A senior Hamas official, 11 suspected terrorists, and a mother and her five children were among those killed in Gaza, according to Ha'aretz. Some of those were killed when Israel's air force bombed the Gaza City hideout of Mohammed Deif, chief of Hamas' armed wing, wounding him.

Israel is engaged in an ongoing mission to free kidnapped Cpl. Gilad Shalit and stop Palestinian rocket attacks into southern Israel.

Jewish community unites for Israel

U.S. Jewish groups called on the international community to condemn Hezbollah's attack on Israel.

"The American Jewish community is being mobilized to support Israel's right to self-defense, including measures taken to end the more than 1,000 rockets fired from Gaza, the repeated missile and other attacks across the Lebanese border, and all other acts of terror," the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations said in a statement Wednesday. Other groups issuing statements included Hadassah; the Reform movement; the Jewish Council for Public Affairs; and the Anti-Defamation League.

British Jewish official arrested

A British Jewish official who is Prime Minister Tony Blair's unofficial Mideast envoy was arrested in connection with a fund-raising scandal.

Lord Michael Levy was released on bail Wednesday. Levy's arrest came after he allegedly told Sir Gulam Noon, an entrepreneur who was nominated for a peerage, that Noon did not need to disclose a major loan he had given the Labor Party.

WORLD REPORT

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Hezbollah kills eight, seizes two, opening second front against Israel

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Hezbollah has opened up a second front against Israel, raising the prospect of a regional war that could draw in Lebanon and Syria.

Under cover of a massive artillery barrage against northern Israel on Wednesday morning, Hezbollah militiamen killed eight Israeli soldiers and seized two others. Four residents of the Western Galilee were wounded.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, preoccupied with a military sweep of the Gaza Strip aimed at recovering a soldier abducted by Palestinian gunmen June 25, spoke of the Hezbollah raid as an unprecedented act of aggression.

"The murderous attack this morning was not a terror attack but an act of war," he told reporters. "The Lebanese government, of which Hezbollah is a part, is trying to shake regional stability. Lebanon is responsible and Lebanon will bear the consequences of its actions."

Three soldiers were killed and the two were seized while on border patrol. Israeli forces were quick to respond, as artillery units and warplanes shelled bridges in southern Lebanon that could be used to smuggle the captive soldiers northward.

On the ground, armored columns rolled across the border and engaged in running battles with Hezbollah gunmen. At least two Lebanese were killed. An Israeli tank hit a mine, killing four other Israeli soldiers; the eighth died of wounds sustained while trying to rescue his friends from the burning tank.

It was the biggest incursion since Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000, dismantling its security zone there.

Analysts predicted a two-pronged Israeli

response, including strikes against Hezbollah troops and leaders as well as slowly escalating attacks on Lebanese infrastructure to convince the government to finally implement U.N. Security Council resolutions ordering it to disarm Hezbollah.

Complicating matters, however, are the fact that Hezbollah has some 10,000 rockets trained on northern Israel, and the danger that any escalation could get out of hand and spill over to Syria and even Iran, Hezbollah's two main sponsors.

With the Israeli military mobilizing thousands of reserve troops, and facing serious security challenges on the Palestinian front, experts predicted a spectacular offensive in Lebanon aimed as much at restoring Israel's deterrent image as at returning the two soldiers.

"Israel's nerves are already on edge. This is going to convince a great deal of people that something drastic needs to be done to re-establish some kind of credibility," said Mark Heller of Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies.

Late Wednesday, The Associated Press, quoting Lebanese security officials, reported that Israeli warplanes and gunboats struck a Palestinian terrorist camp 10 miles south of Beirut.

Gerald Steinberg, head of the Program on Conflict Management at Bar-Ilan University, said Israel had a major military response in store.

"This is a major escalation and Israel will respond by escalating. This is not going to be a localized incident," he said.

"The international community is powerless because they have acted weakly and allowed

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Hezbollah to stay armed."

"The question is whether this will now escalate into Syria," Steinberg added.

Damascus did little to quell Israel's ire. Syria's foreign minister, Farouk Shara, said the Hezbollah raid, like Palestinian attacks, were "provoked" by Israeli "occupation."

Hezbollah, for its part, was quick to propose a diplomatic solution of sorts to the crisis it had caused. Lebanon's energy minister, Mohammed Fneish, the only Hezbollah member of the country's Cabinet, said his militia aimed to secure the release of Arab security prisoners from Israeli jails.

Israeli officials had no immediate comment on the proposal.

Olmert has ruled out Palestinian demands for the release of hundreds of prisoners before any information is offered on Cpl. Gilad Shalit, who was snatched from an army base in Israel close to Gaza.

Analysts say such a deal could put cracks in the U.S.-led diplomatic embargo against the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

But Israel already has dealt with Hezbollah, albeit through German mediators. In 2004, Israel freed more than 400 Lebanese, Palestinian and other terrorists from its jails in return for a kidnapped Israeli businessman and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers killed in a border clash.

Israeli public pressure for similar negotiations to retrieve Wednesday's captives is likely to be heavy, given evidence that they were taken alive. One television report said government officials had voiced interest in renewing German mediation.

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Demonstrators say, 'Free Gilad Now'

By RACHEL SILVERMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — With Israeli and international efforts continuing to free a 19-year-old soldier captured in a Palestinian raid and held hostage in Gaza, Jews around the world are sending the message, "Free Gilad Now."

In New York, Washington, Ottawa and Santiago, Chile, thousands of protesters called on the Palestinians and Syria — which hosts some of the most violent Palestinian terrorist groups — to release Cpl. Gilad Shalit.

The largest rally Monday was in New York City, with several hundred people gathering to wave signs and fists outside Syria's mission to the United Nations.

In Washington, about 300 people stood in front of the Syrian Embassy, chanting slogans like "Two, four, six, eight, Syria is a terrorist state," and "Tell Assad: Free Gilad."

In London, a delegation delivered a letter requesting Shalit's return to the Syrian ambassador, who read the note and invited the group in.

The events, sponsored by the Jewish Agency for Israel and the World Zionist Organization, also included community meetings in Paris and Johannesburg, as well as the initiation of "Free Gilad" activities in Australia and Buenos Aires.

Jewish Agency spokesman Michael Jankelowitz said the rallies provided "another way for world Jewry to show its solidarity with Israel when the chips are down.

"It sends a clear message to everybody that Israel is not alone," he said. The protests "signal to Damascus that everyone knows who is behind this kidnapping."

Speakers in New York underscored that point.

"Our message is that terrorists protected by Syria are holding onto one of our boys... and we're going to tell them: Stop the terror now!" said Rabbi Michael Miller, executive vice president and CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.

Sheldon Silver, speaker of the New York State Assembly, also directed blame toward the Syrians.

"We talk about Hamas, we talk about Islamic Jihad, we talk about Hezbollah," he said. "Syria pulls the strings that control all of them."

The rallies were not just tough talk, however: Many speakers urged compassion for the Shalit family.

The Rev. Michael Faulkner, a pastor at Harlem's New Horizon Church, led congregants in a prayer for Shalit's safe return.

"I cannot imagine as a father the tremendous upheaval in the family," Faulkner said. "This man was just doing his duty."

A statement released by the Zionist Federation of Australia echoed that empathy.

"We can only imagine the horrors that he is enduring, and the agony his parents and family are suffering," federation president Philip Chester said of Shalit.

New York City Council Member James Gennaro told the crowd, "As a Catholic, I'm here to tell you that it's not just Jews getting together around the world, it's everyone getting together around the world."

Indeed, non-Jewish leaders in London like Roy Thurley, chairman of Christian Friends of Israel, joined Jews in approaching the Syrian ambassador.

Mobilization for Shalit is expected to continue in various ways.

In Australia, the federation has begun distributing blue ribbons as a visual reminder of Shalit's captivity. In Toronto, B'nai Brith Canada is planning a solidarity rally and vigil Friday at the Israeli consulate.

Shalit holds dual Israeli and French citizenship, and French officials are continuing their efforts to secure his release through diplomatic channels.

Publisher Mortimer Zuckerman, a former chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, vowed to continue the fight.

"We have to organize as a community and do whatever we can," he told New Yorkers sweating under the mid-day sun. "This is just one moment in what is going to be a long war."

'We can only imagine the agony his parents and family are suffering.'

Philip Chester

President, Zionist Federation of Australia

Mexican Jews track election challenge

By THERESA BRAINE

MEXICO CITY (JTA) — Mexico's Jewish community is keeping a low profile in the wake of contentious presidential elections, taking a wait-and-see attitude as the runner-up challenges the results by claiming electoral manipulation.

In line with the community's conservative tradition, the bulk of Mexico's approximately 35,000 Jewish voters are believed to have cast their ballots July 2 for Felipe Calderon of the incumbent National Action Party. Others are believed to have voted for Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of the Democratic Revolutionary Party, who finished second by a narrow margin and is challenging the results.

Of primary importance to the Jewish community is stability and the freedom to go about its business in a climate free of discrimination.

"What interests us is a continuation of the lack of anti-Semitism and racism," said Ari Konik, an environmental and political activist in Mexico City. "A peace of mind in which we can continue working, studying."

Results announced July 5 showed Calderon defeating Lopez Obrador by about 200,000 of some 43 million votes cast. But Mexicans are waiting to see what happens as the federal electoral tribunal reviews a challenge from Lopez Obrador, who filed a 900-page complaint alleging balloting irregularities and computer tampering.

"It's a very interesting election. There's no doubt that it's not over yet, and there are going to be many political consequences. But I cannot think of one that is related to the Jewish community," political analyst Leo Zuckerman said. "The Jewish community is as divided as the rest of the Mexican electorate."

If there was anything specially at stake for Mexican Jews, it was the "liberty that we have had in Mexico," Konik said. "The people voted for whomever they felt would defend their interests."

Those interests tend to fall more along economic than ethnic lines, Zuckerman pointed out. Mexico's Jewish community, small but wealthy, is mainly middle- and upper-class. The Jewish poor are not poor by Mexican standards, and are helped out by the larger community.

"In terms of tolerance, that was not

an issue. All of the candidates respect the constitution, and they are not a threat to the freedom of religion here in Mexico," Zuckerman said.

Some Jews voted along class lines, fearing the similarity Calderon's camp sought to depict between Lopez Obrador and Venezuela's radical president, Hugo Chavez, Konik said. They also may have favored continuing the rule of the National Action Party, which had only six years in office following 70 years of uninterrupted rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party.

Some in the business community were unsettled by the prospect of a left-winger like Lopez Obrador taking over, "so maybe the threat was more [to Jews] as an economic class than as a religious group," he said.

Konik estimated that about 60 percent of Jewish voters probably chose Calderon, 30 percent voted for Lopez Obrador and 10 percent for other parties. Both main candidates met with the commu-

nity before the election.

With the electoral tribunal considering Lopez Obrador's appeal, the Jewish community's Central Committee urged conciliation and cooperation to heal a polarized nation.

The tribunal has until Aug. 31 to make a decision and until Sept. 6 to announce it and ratify the election, naming a final, unchallengeable winner.

"Once the results are known, and regardless of whoever wins, a reconciliation process must be initiated between the different political forces, including civil

society, to create a true common front that permits us to face the great challenges confronting our country, challenges that require a united citizenry in order

for us to move forward," the committee said in a July 4 release.

"The Mexican Jewish community pledges its absolute support to our country and is ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with those who are declared elected as public officials." ■

Some Jews voted along class lines, fearing similarities between Lopez Obrador and Hugo Chavez.

U.K. Jews stress community security

LONDON (JTA) — As Britain marked the one-year anniversary last Friday of London terrorist attacks that killed 52 people, including at least three Jews, officials with British Jewry's main defense organization talked with JTA about how they help protect the community.

Britain's Community Security Trust dates back to the 1930s, shortly after the Nazis came to power in Germany.

Today the trust has four offices and 54 staff members. It's a registered charity completely funded by donations from the Jewish community, and its services are provided free of charge.

The trust sees terrorism and anti-Semitic attacks as the principal threats to the British Jewish community.

As the anniversary of the July 7, 2005, attacks approached, Mark Gardner, press spokesman for the trust, told JTA that British Jewry "is as safe as it can reasonably be," yet he acknowledged that community

members might feel particularly threatened as both British citizens and Jews.

"We know that those who would wish to emulate the 7/7 attacks also harbor a murderous hatred of Jews," he said.

The trust's working ethos is that the Jewish community is responsible for its own security. Gardner asserts that the organization "has the widest reach of any U.K. Jewish communal group" and works in partnership with all sectors of the Jewish community and relevant British authorities, including local police and Scotland Yard. The trust frequently offers advice on directives to local police on how to deal with hate crimes, victim support and community liaison.

The trust points to specific steps to keep Britain's Jewish community safer that might be applicable in other countries.

During the High Holidays, for example, members of the trust accompany police on patrols of Jewish neighborhoods, especially in North London and North Manchester. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Jewish flight attendant survives Russian crash

A Jewish flight attendant who is credited with saving a number of lives in a plane crash last week is recovering in a Moscow hospital.

Viktoria Zilberstein opened the emergency hatch in the rear of the aircraft and let a number of passengers out in the July 9 crash, Russian emergency officials said.

One of Russia's two chief rabbis, Berel Lazar, visited Zilberstein on Wednesday in a Moscow hospital.

At least 137 people died when the Russian Airbus veered off a runway, slammed into a concrete wall and burst into flames while landing in the Siberian city of Irkutsk.

There were more than 200 people on board the plane, and 63 survived.

The federation said it would send Zilberstein to Israel to undergo psychological treatment after she is released from the hospital.

Zilberstein, whose condition is satisfactory, said she appreciates the attention she is getting from the local Jewish community in Irkutsk.

Doctors say she may leave the hospital within a week.

Slovenian leader tours Holocaust museum

Slovenia's prime minister toured the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Janez Jansa, in Washington this week on his first state visit, requested the tour, museum staff said.

He included the ambassador, his foreign minister and top military staff on Sunday's visit and lit a candle at the Auschwitz memorial.

Most of the 1,500-strong prewar Jewish community in the tiny European nation died at Auschwitz.

NORTH AMERICA

Court stays out of Satmar dispute

A New York appeals court upheld a ruling that the secular courts have no role to play in a Chasidic succession dispute.

The court refused to get involved in a dispute between two brothers over who should lead the Satmar community in New York.

The decision appears to benefit Zalman Lieb Teitelbaum, the younger of the brothers, who was named by his father, Moses Teitelbaum, to head the group.

Moses Teitelbaum died in April. Zalman's older brother, Aaron, has been challenging the decision.

The decision to head the estimated 120,000-member group also carries authority over millions of dollars of real estate, including a matzah factory.

The Satmars oppose the State of Israel because they believe Jews should not have political sovereignty until the Messiah comes.

Orthodox fight shutdown of 'Shabbas house'

A coalition of Orthodox Jewish groups cited federal law in seeking to keep open a residence for Jews visiting sick relatives.

The National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs filed an amicus brief with the New York District Court in the case of Bikur Cholim vs. Village of Suffern, N.Y. Suffern wants to shut down what has become known as the "Shabbas house" for zoning reasons.

Shabbat-observant Jews use the house as a residence while visiting relatives receiving treatment at the Good Samaritan Hospital across the street.

In the brief filed last week, the Jewish groups argued that closing the house would violate the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act.

Faith bloggers to meet

Dozens of Jewish bloggers will meet with interfaith peers at the first annual Progressive Faith Blog Conference.

The weekend conference, co-sponsored by Jewish Funds for Justice, bills itself as a chance for bloggers of all faiths to discuss the intersection of religion and politics, the roots of various faith traditions and ways to spark online religious dialogue.

The conference is being held in Montclair, N.J., from Friday to Sunday.

Washington team goes kosher

Glatt kosher snacks will soon be sold at Washington Nationals baseball games.

The Washington Jewish Week reported that the stand will open for the team's July 23 game against the Chicago Cubs and will sell all-beef hot dogs, spicy Italian sausages, soft pretzels, peanuts and bottled drinks.

Kosher Sports, the company running the stand, is certified by Star-K, and the stand will have a full-time mashgiach, or kashrut supervisor, the paper reported.

Similar stands are available at several U.S. ballparks.

MIDDLE EAST

Israel eyes laser for Gaza rockets

Israel is in talks to buy a U.S.-made laser to shoot down Palestinian rockets.

Security sources said Tuesday that Defense Minister Amir Peretz, under pressure to stem rocket salvos from the Gaza Strip, has voiced interest in the Skyguard system designed by Northrop Grumman. The Skyguard is a more mobile and cost-effective version of the Nautilus, a laser missile-killer that was developed by Israel's Defense Ministry and Northrop Grumman since the late 1990s but shelved out of budgetary concerns.

While the Skyguard uses a laser to heat incoming rockets, blowing them up in mid-air, another system that has drawn Israeli interest is the Phalanx heavy machine gun.

Developed by Raytheon, the Phalanx automatically locks on to incoming shells and shreds them with 20-millimeter bullets.

The system is undergoing field trials with U.S. forces in Iraq and there is no word on when it might be exported.

Israeli high-techs have strong quarter

Israeli high-technology companies increased their venture capital support by more than 60 percent over the first quarter.

The firms raised more than \$500 million in the second quarter of 2006, the first time that the Israeli private sector has broken the half-billion dollar mark since 2000.

Leading Jewish educator dies

Seymour Fox, a pillar of Jewish education in Israel and abroad, died this week at age 77.

Born to Polish immigrants in Chicago, Fox excelled academically, taking degrees in Judaism, medicine and education, as well as rabbinical ordination.

After the 1967 Six-Day War, he moved to Israel to chair the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's education faculty.

Fox, known in Israel by his Hebrew name, Shlomo, also consulted on Jewish education abroad, with stints on the Harvard faculty. He left a wife and three sons.