DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

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ARABS AND ISRAEL STILL JOCKEYING OVER WHEN TO RECONVENE PEACE TALKS

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 5 (JTA) -- While maintaining publicly that it will not set a new date for peace talks between Israel and three separate Arab delegations, the Bush administration is working behind the scenes to get the various parties to resume the bilateral negotiations begun in Madrid last month.

Israel, which did not show up Wednesday for the scheduled resumption of the talks, has said its delegates will turn up Monday. But the Palestinians have rejected that date, since it is the fourth anniversary of their intifada, or uprising.

That left the prospect that Monday could turn into a repeat of Wednesday, only this time with the empty chairs belonging to Syria, Lebanon and the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

The Arab delegations each met separately Thursday with Edward Djerejian, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs. They reportedly requested that the United States set a new starting date, so they would not be in the position of agreeing to Israel's timetable.

But State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said the United States would not do that. "There will be no new co-sponsor proposal," she said.

The U.S. position seemed to be designed to pressure the Arabs to deal directly with Israel on the issue of when to resume the negotiations. There were reports that informal Arab-Israeli talks on that subject could take place as early as Friday.

Benjamin Netanyahu, a deputy minister in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, complained here Wednesday that Israeli officials have repeatedly tried to contact the Arab delegations to discuss the timing of the direct talks, but "they have not picked up the phone."

A 'Public Relations Disaster'?

Netanyahu told American Jewish organizational leaders in New York on Thursday that there now "seemed to be a reciprocal agreement" between the United States and Israel to "lower the decibel" level of public statements, in the interest of getting the talks back on track.

According to Rabbi Joseph Sternstein, chairman of the American Zionist Youth Foundation, Netanyahu cited statements by U.S. officials emphasizing Israel's decision to show up at the peace talks later rather than never and their use of "rather pallid terms" to describe Israel's absence Wednesday.

Netanyahu appeared at a private meeting of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, in order to "defuse what he anticipated to be great concern, perhaps even anger, over the public relations disaster" Israel suffered by not showing up at the talks on time, said Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress.

There is "no question" that Israel "suffered a public relations defeat," said Siegman. "They helped reinforce a developing image in the American media and the international media that they are being dragged to the peace conference," he said.

Siegman questioned whether "that defeat was necessary" to "make the point that the Arab parties must deal directly with them. I am not at all persuaded that they needed to incur this loss."

"There is a wide consensus in the Jewish community that as important as that point is, it could have been made without incurring the kind of damage," Siegman added.

But Sternstein said that "even though there may have been temporary diminution in public relations, it was more important to make the political lesson very clear."

"I don't think the damage is what many thought" it would be, said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents. If and when the talks resume and they proceed well, "that will be the lasting impression," he said.

Morris Amitay, treasurer of Washington Political Action Committee, one of the largest pro-Israel PACs, praised the Israeli move as "badly needed to put a stop to the United States trying to dictate a peace settlement."

He said that with the resignation of White House Chief of Staff John Sununu and the Florida rape trial of William Kennedy Smith, both of which have made big headlines in American newspapers, Israel's failure to show up "was a back page story, and it was really no story anyway, because people knew ahead of time that the Israelis weren't going to come."

Some Jewish organizational leaders would not take a public stand on Israel's decision to delay showing up in Washington.

David Harris, executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee, said, "I don't know if it's worthwhile to second-guess" the decision at a time of "very delicate negotiating efforts."

But he added that the delay in reconvening the talks will likely end up being only a "minor blip on the screen."

NEW WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF HAS HAD GOOD RELATIONS WITH JEWS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Dec. 5 (JTA) -- Although President Bush's new chief of staff, Samuel Skinner, does not have a public record on issues of Jewish concern, he is known to have had good relations with the Jewish community in Illinois, where he had practiced law.

As expected, Bush named his 53-year-old secretary of transportation Thursday to replace John Sununu. Skinner is a close friend and a frequent golf partner of the president's.

While the chief of staff deals mainly with domestic issues, he also has a great deal to say on who sees the president.

Unlike Sununu, who was openly pro-Arab, Skinner does not have a public record on Israel. But he visited Israel in August 1990, partly to study the security system at Ben-Gurion Airport.

Skinner served 10 years in the office of the U.S. Attorney in Chicago, where he was known as the "hammer" for his tough courtroom style, principally against crooked politicians.

Skinner, who supported Bush for president in his unsuccessful 1980 campaign and then managed Bush's successful Illinois primary campaign in 1988, was rewarded with a Cabinet post at the start of the Bush administration. He has been considered one of Bush's most successful appointments.

Unlike the conservative Sununu, Skinner is considered a moderate Republican.

Bush made the announcement at a White House news conference in which he also named the four top aides for his 1992 re-election campaign. However, he is not expected to officially declare his candidacy until January.

The four are Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher, who will be general chairman; Republican pollster Robert Teeter, as chairman and chief political strategist; businessman and longtime Republican operative Fred Malek, as campaign manager; and Charles Black, another longtime GOP operative, as senior adviser.

Malek had to leave Bush's 1988 campaign after it was revealed that, while working in the Nixon White House, he had carried out an order to determine how many Jews were involved in compiling economic statistics in the Labor Department.

Since then, Malek has made a special effort to cement his relations with the Jewish community and has appeared at Jewish organizational events.

SETTLERS WILL BE ALLOWED TO STAY FOR NOW AT NEW WEST BANK OUTPOST

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 5 (JTA) -- Pressure by one of the religious parties in Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's coalition government apparently has forced the Defense Ministry to back away from its decision to remove civilians from a settlement established in the West Bank on Monday.

But there were signs of conflict between the ministry and the Israel Defense Force high command over the issue.

Defense Minister Moshe Arens said Tuesday that the settlement, called Rachelim, would be a Nahal paramilitary outpost for the time being.

But 15 settlers who ensconced themselves in three mobile homes refused to leave. Heavy pressure exerted by the National Religious Party on Shamir and Arens appeared to have won them the right to stay.

Arens told the NRP Knesset faction Thursday he would gladly allow a few settlers to remain on the site while he decided its status "within a few days."

But the IDF chief of staff, Gen. Ehud Barak, sent a different message. In a radio interview Thursday, he said if the settlers refuse to move out voluntarily, "we will help them."

Barak denied that he had differences with Arens over how to handle the matter.

The settlement was approved by the Inner Cabinet on Nov. 27 and was named for Rachel Druck, one of two Israelis killed in an Oct. 28 bus ambush at the site south of Nablus known as the Tapuah junction.

But no announcement was made until the first mobile homes were hauled there Monday, which led most Israelis to believe the settlement was a spontaneous response by enraged Jews to the death of Zvi Klein, a settler from Ofra who was fatally wounded driving through the Palestinian town of El-Bireh on Sunday evening.

SECURITY COUNCIL DECRIES UNIFIL DEATH

By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, Dec. 5 (JTA) -- The U.N. Security Council issued a statement Wednesday expressing regret at the death in Lebanon of Cpl. Michael McCarthy, an Irish soldier stationed as part of the U.N. peacekeeping force there.

McCarthy was killed Nov. 15 in a clash with the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army, when he and fellow soldiers from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon were mistaken for infiltrators.

One SLA soldier was also killed in the episode, and a second UNIFIL soldier wounded.

Members of the Irish patrol later admitted that they were in the wrong place, having been ordered by a recently arrived commander to patrol a sector normally out of bounds to UNIFIL.

The Security Council statement, which offered "deep-felt sympathy and condolences to the Irish people and the bereaved family," also expressed concern over increased tension in the region patrolled by the U.N. troops.

"It is unacceptable that the safety of members of a United Nations peacekeeping operation is endangered," said the statement, which was issued by Security Council President Yuli Vorontsov of the Soviet Union.

The council statement, which unlike a resolution is non-binding, called for restraint from all parties concerned.

The Irish government has been critical of Israeli military activity in southern Lebanon. Members of the Irish contingent of UNIFIL have been caught in the crossfire numerous times in the past.

MANDELA INVITED TO VISIT ISRAEL

By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, Dec. 5 (JTA) -- Nelson Mandela has been invited to visit Israel, but the former South African political prisoner apparently has not decided whether to accept.

Mandela, who heads the African National Congress, told a news conference here Tuesday, following an address to the U.N. General Assembly, that he is "processing" the invitation, which he had received during a recent meeting with the Israeli ambassador to South Africa.

The African National Congress has long caused consternation among Jewish groups for its close relationship with the Palestine Liberation Organization and Yasir Arafat, who spoke out for Mandela during his 27-year imprisonment.

South African Jews, however, tend to play down these concerns. Last week the executive director of South Africa's Board of Jewish Deputies, Seymour Kopelowitz, said that the ANC's position on Israel does not worry him.

He said the ANC, which is expected to emerge as the largest party in what he views as an inevitable shift to majority rule in South Africa, has given the Jewish community assurances that its educational, welfare and communal activities will be allowed to continue.

Addressing questions about his views on Zionism and Israel during the news conference, Mandela refused to distance himself from the PLO, saying, "The enemies of Israel are not our enemies."

But he reaffirmed that the ANC recognizes Israel's existence, though not its right to occupy "land belonging to other communities."

ISRAELI TOURISTS ATTACKED BY SKINHEADS NEAR BERLIN

By David Kantor

BONN, Dec. 5 (JTA) -- For the first time since the beginning of the current wave of violence by neo-Nazis in Germany, two Israeli tourists have been attacked by neo-Nazi Skinheads.

The two Israelis, who became engaged in a scuffle with the Skinheads who taunted them, were promptly released by police after the fracas, which took place in a supermarket last Friday.

The Skinheads, both of whom have criminal records and are known to be associated with extremist groups, were detained in custody for 24 hours. They face charges of insulting and attacking foreigners, a police spokesman in Potsdam said.

The incident was the first physical assault by neo-Nazis on Israelis or specifically on Jews. But it sent shock waves through the German Jewish community and among Jews abroad.

Although Jews in Germany have been spared such attacks until now, dozens of instances of Jewish cemetery desecrations have been recorded this year in the south German state of Baden-Wurtemberg alone.

Few of the vandals have been caught and none has been brought to trial. Local politicians tend to shrug off the incidents as youthful mischief.

But right-wing thugs have attacked foreigners with impunity this year, to the profound embarrassment of the Bonn government. Their targets mainly have been guest laborers or asylum-seeking refugees from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe.

The two young Israelis were shopping at a market called Kaufhalle Spar when the Skinheads, recognizing foreigners in their midst, shouted at them, "Pigs, get out of Germany."

The Israelis retorted, "Again the Nazis," and a violent clash erupted with shopping carts.

The only party hurt was an innocent bystander, a 5-year-old boy, who was slightly injured by one of the carts.

Proposal On Asylum-Seekers

Witnesses said it was unclear whether the neo-Nazis knew the tourists were Israelis or attacked them simply because they were speaking a foreign language.

The police, who took the attackers and attacked alike into custody, released the Israelis with profuse apologies when they identified themselves.

On the same day, police in the southern German town of Emmendingen arrested eight members of the neo-Nazi National Front. Most are between 16 and 17 years old.

They are accused of severely damaging a refugee hostel in the village of Kaiserstuhl and daubing the walls with swastikas.

The new parliamentary chairman of the combined parliamentary group of Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union deputies in the Bundestag has proposed that asylum-seekers who enter Germany from what are deemed "safe countries" should in the future be deported or not permitted to enter Germany at all.

Wolfgang Schaeuble told the daily Stuttgarter Zeitung last week that Germany's governing coalition has agreed that an asylum-seeker who enters from France, for example, could be refused permission to enter Germany and returned to France.

CANADIAN JUDGE CHASTISED FOR DELAY IN DENATURALIZING NAZI COLLABORATOR

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, Dec. 5 (JTA) -- The Canadian judge who delayed for 29 months the denaturalization of Nazi collaborator Jacob Luitjens has been reprimanded by the Canadian Judicial Council, the body of senior judges that investigates complaints against federally appointed judges.

No disciplinary action is planned, however, against Justice Frank Collier of the Federal Court of Canada.

The council's Judicial Conduct Committee decided to discontinue its investigation because Collier finally released his decision, after a complaint about tardiness was lodged by Sol Littman of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Canadian office.

Collier presided over the 11 weeks of hearings in Vancouver, British Columbia, in the landmark war crimes case, which stretched out intermittently from Sept. 26, 1988, to May 11, 1989.

The court heard from more than 50 witnesses and received more than 200 documents. A commission was in the Netherlands twice, from Oct. 21 to 26 and Nov. 29 to Dec. 1, 1988, to get testimonies from 16 elderly Dutch who were unable to travel to Canada to testify.

Evidence was presented that the retired University of British Columbia botany instructor, 72, unlawfully gained admission to Canada for permanent residence in 1961 and obtained Canadian citizenship 10 years later by false representation and by concealing material circumstances.

More than two years after the trial ended, Collier said in a July 26 conference call with federal prosecutor Peter Kremer and John Campbell, the lawyer for Luitjens, that a decision could be expected by the first week of September.

To the frustration of Justice Department war crimes prosecutors and the anger of the Jewish community, no verdict was rendered as the deadline passed.

Ruling Issued In October

On Oct. 11, after a 29-month holdup in the verdict of the precedent-setting case, Littman complained to the council, saying that judicial indecision brought the administration of justice into disrepute and could result in charges being dismissed.

On Oct. 23, Collier finally brought down his ruling, noting that Luitjens had lied about his past by failing to tell immigration officials he had been convicted in absentia by a Dutch tribunal in 1948 of aiding and abetting the enemy in time of war and had been sentenced to life imprisonment.

On Nov. 7, Luitjens was stripped of his citizenship, paving the way for him to be deported or extradited to the Netherlands.

Luitjens was a former member of the Dutch Nazi party and the Landwacht, a paramilitary unit which assisted the Gestapo in rounding up Jews and resistance fighters in occupied Holland. He operated in the Groningen and Drenthe provinces in northeastern Holland.

He surrendered to Allied troops in 1945 rather than face the wrath of his own countrymen but escaped from a military prison in 1946. He lived in Germany until 1948, and sailed for South America in May 1948 using the name Gerhard Harder.

Luitjens lived in Paraguay for 13 years before immigrating to Canada in 1961.

OFFICIALS BLAME UNEMPLOYMENT FOR DECLINE IN SOVIET ALIYAH

By Yehonathan Tommer

JERUSALEM, Dec. 5 (JTA) -- Officials at Israel's Absorption Ministry are blaming unemployment for the recent decline in Soviet aliyah.

A total of 8,090 immigrants arrived from the Soviet Union in November. That was 1,755 fewer than in October, continuing a decline that began last June when aliyah reached 20,473, its monthly high for the year.

An additional 3,344 Soviet Jews immigrated to the United States, according to figures provided by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in New York.

The latest figures for Soviet immigrants to Israel brought to 134,646 the number of Soviet olim who arrived here in the first 11 months of this year. Clearly, the 1991 total will not match last year's record of 181,759.

Pessimism was rampant last month, mainly because of seemingly bleak prospects in the job market.

Deputy Labor Minister Menahem Porush estimated present unemployment in Israel at 145,000 and predicted it would exceed 200,000 next year. The Finance Ministry said there were 90,000 jobless last month.

But the figures do not necessarily speak for themselves, according to Sever Plotzker, economics editor of the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, who believes the unemployment crisis has been overblown.

Plotzker pointed out that during 18 months of Soviet aliyah, 140,000 persons joined Israel's labor force, of whom 100,000 were new immigrants.

In that period, the business sector created 90,000 jobs and the public and service sectors 30,000. Of those 120,000 new jobs, fully half were filled by new immigrants.

Plotzker pointed out that unemployment among veteran Israelis declined from 160,000 in 1990 to 150,000 in 1991, reducing the annual rate from 9.6 to 9 percent.

Those who remain unemployed are hard-core victims of the recession of the 1980s, the hardest hit being women.

About 60,000 women were unemployed prior to the latest wave of Soviet aliyah. In the last quarter, their numbers jumped to 85,000, including 15,000 to 20,000 mainly older women olim.

Reports Of Poverty Exaggerated

Jewish Agency officials believe that deteriorating conditions in the Soviet Union will trigger a new wave, bringing in more than 20,000 immigrants a month.

For now, the biggest headache is the estimated 40,000 jobless Soviet olim.

An overwhelming proportion of them are engineers, scientists and performing artists. Their plight, known to relatives and friends back home, is convincing many potential olim to postpone their departure.

"The influx of such large numbers of professionals has distorted the per capita ratio between locally trained personnel and the number of jobs available for them in the existing Israeli labor market," explained Grace Moussia, director of employment services at the Soviet Jewry Zionist Forum.

"If, for example, Israeli engineers constituted 3 percent of the labor force, this ratio has shot up to 40 percent since the Soviet influx," she said.

But she played down recurrent Israeli media stories of abysmal poverty among olim.

"These are probably isolated cases of people with a history of family and personal problems in the Soviet Union. The vast majority of new olim are keeping afloat, but their difficult situation is worsening," Moussia said.

CHRISTIAN ANTI-SEMITISM CONDEMNED DURING SYNOD OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Dec. 4 (JTA) -- The assembled Catholic bishops of Europe heard a ringing condemnation of the persecution of Jews by Christians at the opening of a special two-week synod convened at the Vatican on Nov. 28.

The speaker, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, denounced anti-Semitism of which, he said, the Holocaust was the "terrible apex," a "gigantic crime" that contained the "perversion of European humanism" and the "denial of the brotherhood of man."

Ruini, a key official at the synod, extolled Jewish culture as "a constituent element in the development of European civilization."

It was not known whether Ruini's remarks were written before or after the European Jewish Congress asked the synod to "respect and affirm the principle of religious and cultural pluralism that without a doubt constitutes a fundamental principle of modern Europe."

The EJC made its request in a letter delivered a week earlier to Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini of Milan, president of the European Episcopal Conference.

The letter expressed Jewish concerns and reservations about parts of the synod's preparatory document.

The synod was called to assess the state of religion and its future in post-Communist Europe. Jews were troubled by its stress on the "evangelization of Europe," meaning an outreach to bring Christianity throughout the continent.

IN ISRAEL, WATER STILL WANTING EVEN AFTER TORRENTIAL RAINFALL

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 5 (JTA) -- Three days of record rainfall brought temporary relief from the water shortage but was far from enough to erase the ravages of chronic drought in recent years, experts said Thursday.

Ten years of rainstorms of equal intensity would be required to wipe out the deficit of Israel's "water bank," according to Water Commissioner Dan Zaflasky and Yaniv Naftali, a spokesman for the Agriculture Ministry.

They pointed out that while the recent downpour increased by 9 inches the level of Lake Kinneret, the country's largest natural reservoir, they would not feel secure until the level rises by 10 feet.

Israelis continued to clean up the damage done by 72 hours of incessant rain, hail and lightning. But they have still not found the bodies of two soldiers, missing after their truck was caught in a flash flood in the Greater Tel Aviv area Tuesday.

The Israel Defense Force identified them as Sgt. Maj. Nathan Russo, 38, of Kfar Sava and Cpl. Amir Shaki, 19, of Ramat Gan.