

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Intensive contacts between Palestinian and Israeli officials continued in an effort to resolve differences that would pave the way for a summit meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat. Meanwhile, Egypt reiterated its threat to cancel a regional economic summit, scheduled for November in Cairo, if Israel does not implement signed agreements with the Palestinians within three weeks. [Page 3]**

■ **Bob Dole criticized the Clinton administration's handling of Middle East policy and promised never to pressure Israel to give up the Golan Heights. The Republican presidential candidate made the remarks in an address to B'nai B'rith's conference in Washington.**

■ **Critics of Louis Farrakhan applauded the decision by the United States to prohibit the Nation of Islam leader from receiving more than \$1 billion from Libya. [Page 4]**

■ **A \$42 million bypass road linking southern Jerusalem to Jewish settlements in the Etzion bloc was inaugurated. The road comprises two tunnels and a long bridge. [Page 2]**

■ **Austria pledged \$30 million in development aid to the Palestinian Authority. The announcement was made by Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky, who was in Gaza and who said \$10 million would go toward housing projects and \$20 million would go toward projects in education, health care and professional training.**

■ **Volker Ruhe, German defense minister, arrived in Israel on a three-day visit as the guest of his Israeli counterpart, Yitzhak Mordechai. Ruhe was set to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and discuss cooperation in the battle against terror and efforts to locate and return missing Israeli servicemen.**

■ **An Egged bus driver was convicted of manslaughter in the deaths of eight passengers in an accident a year ago on the Jerusalem-Jericho highway. The judge said the driver was speeding on a sharp decline.**

Survey shows most U.S. Jews back Netanyahu's peace policy

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — A new survey shows that most American Jews have confidence in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his commitment to the peace process.

At the same time, the survey points to some skepticism, with only half saying that they believe that "things in the State of Israel" are "headed in the right direction" now.

More than half said they would have voted for then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Netanyahu's opponent in the last Israeli election, while more than half also said they approve of the election results.

These apparent contradictions, say observers, reflect the traditional respect American Jews accord the decisions of the Israeli electorate.

The survey of 1,260 Jews was released Tuesday by the Israel Policy Forum, an organization established in 1993 to promote the peace process then led by the Labor government.

The survey was conducted over a two-month period, with partial results released in July.

Conducted by Penn & Schoen Associates, the 74-question survey was designed to measure U.S. Jewish sentiment after the election of a new Israeli government.

It had a margin of error of 2.8 percent.

Respondents exhibited strong support — 81 percent — for the peace process and the conviction — 85 percent — that it would continue under Netanyahu, albeit at a slower rate.

Fully half indicated that they approve of this slower rate by saying that Netanyahu's Labor predecessors "gave up too much to the Arabs," while a majority said they support his stance that land on the Golan Heights should not be traded for peace with Syria.

Eighty-nine percent said they believe that Netanyahu will live up to all, most or some of the agreements made with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu repeatedly has pledged to honor the commitments already made under the Oslo accords if the Palestinians honor theirs.

For Jonathan Jacoby, IPF executive vice president, the poll shows that American Jews view Netanyahu as "more conservative" than his predecessor, but "not radically different. They view him as a moderate."

His support comes "largely because they believe he will continue the peace process, albeit at a slower rate, combined with a general tendency to support the government of Israel," he said.

"The high numbers are not for Likud policy," added Jacoby, who enjoys close personal ties to Labor Party figures, "but are an indication of their faith in the prime minister's ability to lead Israel in the direction that is best for Israel."

Five percent think Peres was re-elected

For Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, there was "nothing surprising" about the survey results.

American Jews "support the government of Israel," he said. "Netanyahu is the prime minister and has conveyed a message about being strong on security issues while living up to his commitment to pursuing the peace process."

Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, president of the Orthodox Union, also said the support for Netanyahu reflected the community's readiness to "honor democracy."

"They see Netanyahu as a strong figure and are willing to give him the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise," he added.

While 84 percent of respondents said they followed the elections closely or very closely, 5 percent said they did not know who won the election, while another 5 percent said they thought Labor Party head Shimon Peres was re-elected.

Fifty-six percent said they approved of the "results of the recent election," 31 percent said they disapproved and 14 percent said they did not know whether they approved or disapproved. Fifty-seven percent said they

would have cast their ballots for Peres and 32 percent for Netanyahu.

Of those who approved of the results, personal security for Israelis was cited as the top reason and of those who disapproved, concern about the peace process slowing down was the reason most cited.

On the contentious question of settlement policy, respondents were divided.

Forty-nine percent opposed building new Jewish settlements in the territories, while 41 supported it.

A full 59 percent of respondents said they believe that Netanyahu will "expand and establish new settlements."

Meanwhile, many of the survey's findings show solid support for the peace process:

- Eighty-one percent approved or strongly approved of "the peace process initiated by Yitzhak Rabin and continued by Shimon Peres."

- Eighty-seven percent supported continuing the pursuit of peace with the Syrians.

- Seventy percent supported the Oslo accords, the set of agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

- Sixty-seven percent said they wanted the United States to continue providing aid to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza.

But some of the other findings related to the peace process reflect a mixed view.

- Despite the endorsement of efforts to seek peace with the Syrian nation, 68 percent have an unfavorable opinion about Syrian President Hafez Assad and 68 percent do not believe "that Assad is committed to peace with Israel."

- While 54 percent oppose giving up all or part of the Golan Heights for peace, 48 percent said they do not think it is possible to achieve peace with Syria without giving up some or all of the Golan.

- While 51 percent believe that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is committed to peace with Israel, only 5 percent believe that he is doing "a lot" to prevent terror attacks.

Fully 59 percent think that he is doing "not much" or "nothing."

'Color answers'

At the same time, nearly two-thirds — 63 percent — support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, while they are almost evenly divided on the commitment to peace by average Palestinians.

Fully 47 percent of respondents believe that they are "committed to peace with Israel," while 42 percent do not believe this.

According to Jacoby, the numbers show a "recognition that it's in Israel's interests that the Palestinians succeed in creating their own entity, that Palestinians and Israelis need to solve their conflict by separating from each other."

For his part, Ganchrow was reluctant to draw such hard and fast conclusions.

Ganchrow said the questions might have been vague or otherwise worded in such a way as "to color answers."

"Were they asked whether they would favor continuing aid if the Palestinians were not living up to the Oslo accords?" he said.

Or, "what does statehood mean? Does it include having an army?"

Meanwhile, respondents expressed general optimism about Netanyahu.

Seventy-eight percent said they believed he would do an excellent or good job "keeping Israelis secure from terrorism."

Eighty-three percent said he would do an excellent or good job "maintaining strong relations with the United States."

An overwhelming 94 percent said they believe that "the continuation of the peace is important to United States' interests and to a strong U.S.-Israel relationship."

Turning to the issue of religion, 66 percent of those surveyed said they were "concerned" about the "new influence of the religious parties in Israel."

Twenty-four percent said the influence made them "hopeful."

The elections gave religious parties an unprecedented 24 seats in the Knesset.

Fifty-eight percent, however, said they expected Netanyahu to do a good or excellent job "maintaining relationships with Jews of different denominations living in Israel."

A full 74 percent said he would do a good or excellent job maintaining strong relations with Jews living outside Israel.

Forty-two percent of the respondents identified themselves as Reform, 34 percent as Conservative and 8 percent as Orthodox.

Seventy percent said they contribute to Jewish organizations "like the UJA (United Jewish Appeal)," and 43 percent said they otherwise volunteer or participate in Jewish organizations.

Fully 48 percent of respondents said they were 50 or older. □

Bypass road inaugurated, links Jerusalem to Etzion bloc

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A \$42 million bypass road linking Jerusalem to Jewish settlements south of the city was inaugurated this week, resulting in applause from Jewish settlers and criticism from others.

"This is the fulfillment of an old dream to be connected to Jerusalem," said Yeshayahu Yehieli, deputy head of the Etzion bloc council.

The council represents Jewish settlements in the southern West Bank.

Zionist settlement in the Gush Etzion region goes back to the pre-state era.

The Etzion bloc was the location of the first Jewish settlements after the Six-Day War and was established in part by orphans of the original settlers.

The new road is made up of the longest tunnels and bridge ever built by Israel.

One tunnel, which is about 900 feet long, goes under the Gilo neighborhood in southern Jerusalem.

The other tunnel, which is some 3,000 feet long, passes under Beit Jala, a Palestinian village near Bethlehem.

A 1,150-foot bridge connects the two tunnels.

Initially begun under the Likud-led government in 1992, construction of the road, which bypasses Palestinian communities, was continued by the following Labor-led government.

Palestinians have strongly opposed the building of bypass roads, and say Israel has expropriated land for the projects.

In addition, dozens of Israeli peace activists protested at the otherwise uneventful dedication.

Ariel Sharon, Israeli infrastructure minister, said in response to the demonstrators: "There were days when a new road didn't bypass problems, but solved problems."

He added, "I believe if we succeed in defining clear national goals and stick to them, those great days will return and with them peace and security." □

Aides to Netanyahu, Arafat striving to arrange summit

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli and Palestinian negotiators were continuing intensive discussions in an effort to bring about a summit meeting this week between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat.

Speaking to reporters Monday in Gaza, Arafat said the latest talks had failed to reach "a common ground" that would make a meeting with Netanyahu possible.

"There are attempts from both sides," Arafat said, "but until now, nothing concrete" has been reached.

Shai Bazak, Netanyahu's media adviser, said no date had been set for a meeting.

At the same time, Israeli sources in Jerusalem said Monday night that the sides could possibly make enough headway for a Tuesday night meeting.

Netanyahu has said repeatedly since his election in May that he would meet with Arafat only if it was necessary for Israeli security.

But after Israeli President Ezer Weizman announced last week that he was ready to meet the Palestinian leader, the prime minister indicated that he would do likewise, possibly before his trip next week to the United States.

Egypt, meanwhile, reiterated its warning that a regional economic conference planned for November in Cairo would be canceled if Israel did not implement within three weeks signed agreements with the Palestinians.

"The five points that Israel must implement are redeployment from Hebron, further redeployments from the West Bank, opening safe passages between Gaza and the West Bank, release of all women prisoners and lifting the closure completely," Egyptian Ambassador Mohammed Basiouny told reporters.

He said Egypt was interested in action, not words.

His remarks reflected the tone of Egyptian newspapers Monday that commented on Foreign Minister David Levy's talks in Alexandria the previous day with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The papers said the test of Israel's commitment to the peace process would be its implementation of the redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron.

'Closed for business'

Netanyahu's office said in response that "the Egyptian pronouncement constitutes an unfortunate threat which can only exacerbate tensions in the region."

Danny Gillerman, chairman of the Israeli Chambers of Commerce, said cancellation of the regional summit would hurt Egypt more than any other country.

"It would send the message that the Middle East is closed for business," he told Israel Radio.

Monday's contacts were a continuation of marathon talks held the previous night between Dore Gold, Netanyahu's senior political adviser, and Palestinian Interior Minister Saeb Erekat.

Gold also met Monday with Mahmoud Abbas, a senior Palestinian official also known as Abu-Mazen, in an effort to hammer out a joint formula for the resumption of peace talks. Among the issues they discussed were Palestinian demands that the Israeli troop redeployment be carried out and that the Palestinian Authority be allowed full control over the newly constructed Palestinian airport in Gaza at Dahaniya, near Rafah.

For Israel, maintaining security control over the airport and an end to illegal Palestinian activities in Jerusalem were uppermost on the agenda.

Terje Larsen, a Norwegian who was involved in

the secret Israeli-Palestinian talks in Oslo that led to the first agreement in 1993, has hosted Gold and Abu-Mazen for talks at his Tel Aviv apartment since mid-August, according to Monday news reports.

The Norwegian paper Aften Posten reported that in the talks, the two sides had agreed to discuss certain changes to the Hebron redeployment plan.

Discussion of additional Israel Defense Force redeployments in the West Bank, set to begin Saturday under the Interim Agreement, would be put off until the redeployment in Hebron is carried out.

They also agreed that Israel would grant entry permits to a total of 50,000 Palestinian workers, an increase from the 35,000 now allowed to enter.

But Monday, Palestinians retracted whatever reported agreement was reached. Palestinian official Faisal Husseini told reporters that the Palestinians would refuse to renegotiate signed agreements.

In addition, Mohammed Dahlan, the head of the Palestinian preventive security service in Gaza, warned of a renewed armed struggle if Netanyahu did not advance the process. □

Ex-official with neo-Nazi past becomes adviser in Argentina

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Rodolfo Barra, who resigned as Argentine justice minister in July after a local magazine exposed neo-Nazi ties in his youth, has become a legal adviser to the country's Senate.

Jorge Yoma, an Argentine senator who used to be President Carlos Menem's brother-in-law, said last week that Barra is "one of my most trusted advisers."

Barra is now advising Yoma on the composition of a future body charged with the supervision of the Argentine judiciary. Yoma oversees the influential Senate Constitutional Affairs Committee.

Barra gave up his post after the magazine Noticias exposed him as a former member of a right-wing youth organization affiliated with the extremist group Tacuara and, later, as a follower of Argentina's most prominent fascist, Alberto Ottalaganno. Tacuara was responsible for hundreds of anti-Semitic attacks in the early 1960s and for the murder of a local Jewish lawyer.

In response to the revelations, Barra denied being a Nazi but admitted to "the mistake of being against Jews."

"I was taught that all Jews were Communist, and I was against communism," Barra wrote in an open letter to the Argentine Jewish community organization DAIA.

After leaving his post, Menem presented Barra with a memorial medal as a "token of thanks."

At the time of his resignation, Barra had been overseeing the investigations of the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy and the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community headquarters.

Barra was replaced by Elias Jassan, a former deputy justice minister who is Jewish. □

Minsk Torah scrolls nabbed

MOSCOW (JTA) — Torah scrolls were recently stolen from two synagogues in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

The thefts occurred the same night, local community leaders said.

The scrolls each have an estimated worth of \$20,000.

Local police officials said they had some leads on who might sell the Torahs. □

Farrakhan's critics applaud U.S. prohibition of Libyan gift

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Clinton administration's decision to deny Louis Farrakhan's request to receive \$1 billion from Libya came as a welcome relief to the Nation of Islam leader's leading critics.

Farrakhan submitted an application last week to the Office of Foreign Assets Control at the U.S. Treasury Department asking for permission to receive \$1 billion in humanitarian aid promised to him by Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi.

The government must approve any such transaction because of sanctions against Libya.

Farrakhan, who was widely criticized for visiting Libya and other rogue states earlier this year, asked for an exemption because the money, he said, would go to help blacks in the United States.

In a letter to Farrakhan's legal representatives, the Treasury Department said it was turning down the request because of long-standing grievances with the Libyan regime and because American law prohibited the acceptance of the money.

The Nation of Islam pledged to fight the ruling in court, declaring in a statement, "It is an action taken in callous disregard of the needs and hopes of black people, at a time when their needs are dire and their hopes under assault."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said, "We're pleased the Treasury Department has demonstrated its resolve against terrorist states and their supporters by rejecting Minister Farrakhan's request."

Foxman and ADL National Chairman David Strassler sent a letter last week to Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin urging the Clinton administration to deny Farrakhan's request in accordance with the sanctions against Libya and with the U.S. anti-terrorism law passed this year.

The law makes it a criminal offense for citizens of the United States to engage in financial transactions with governments designated as supporters of international terrorism.

"Allowing this transfer would undermine U.S. anti-terrorism policy and facilitate Libya's efforts to circumvent U.S. law," the ADL officials wrote in the letter.

'Did the right thing'

Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, said, "It is imperative we make it plain that we will not allow terrorist states to use their abundant dollars to buy support in this country for their outrages against decency.

"We can only regret that there are U.S. citizens of any persuasion and belief who might be willing to sell themselves for this purpose."

Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), one of Farrakhan's most outspoken critics, said the Treasury Department "did the right thing" in refusing Farrakhan's application.

In letters to Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Attorney General Janet Reno, King called on the administration to go further by freezing Farrakhan's bank accounts, forcing Farrakhan to surrender his passport when he returns to the United States and launching an investigation to explore criminal prosecution of Farrakhan.

"Farrakhan by himself is a hateful racist whose words and actions are a disgrace to everything for which this nation stands," King said in a statement.

King also said, "Farrakhan, together with the

moral and financial backing of Muammar Gadhafi and other tyrants of terror, is nothing less than a threat to our national security."

The Treasury Department's decision came as Farrakhan arrived in Tripoli last week to receive a \$250,000 humanitarian award from Gadhafi.

That amount is in addition to the \$1 billion Gadhafi pledged in February.

The Treasury Department said Farrakhan also would not be allowed to claim the \$250,000.

Before leaving for Libya last week, Farrakhan said at a news conference in Chicago that if the federal government does not allow him to accept the money, "I will go across the nation stirring up not only my own people, but all those who would benefit from it."

"We are not terrorists," Farrakhan said.

"We are not trying to do anything against the good of America.

"What we want to do is good for our people and ultimately good for our nation."

Farrakhan has said he would use the money for voter registration drives, charitable contributions and economic development opportunities for black people.

In Tripoli, Farrakhan praised Gadhafi as "one who would not only use the wealth of Libya to improve the lot of Libya's people but also to improve the quality of life throughout the world."

During Farrakhan's visit in February to Libya, JANA, the official Libyan news agency, quoted Gadhafi as saying that American blacks should set up their own state within the United States and form the largest black army in the world.

"Our confrontation with America used to be like confronting a fortress from outside," Gadhafi was quoted as saying.

"Today, we have found a loophole to enter the fortress and to confront it from within." □

Birobidzhan may soon have no Jews

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The town of Birobidzhan, the center of an area of the same name, may soon have no Jews.

The percentage of Jews emigrating from the town of Birobidzhan, located in the area also known as the Jewish Autonomous Region, is one of the highest in Russia.

The area in the Russian Far East was a destination for Jewish immigration since 1928.

It was officially designated the Jewish Autonomous Region by Stalin in 1934 and was long touted by the Soviet authorities as an example of flourishing Jewish life in the Soviet Union.

In 1989, the town of Birobidzhan had a Jewish population of about 9,000.

By 1996, 7,500 Jews had left Birobidzhan. Most of them went to Israel.

But David Vaiserman, spokesman for the local administration, recently said that at least 15,000 people of the town of Birobidzhan's population of 75,000 might be able to "claim that they have Jewish ancestry."

Most of the families in which both parents are Jewish left Birobidzhan in the first wave of emigration in the late 1980s.

In the next wave, from 1990 to 1993, many families with one Jewish parent emigrated.

Now, some of those leaving the area for Israel are people with Jewish grandparents.

"A wish to emigrate is the only thing that binds them to Jewry," Vaiserman said. □