



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat lunched privately at the White House as the emergency Middle East summit got under way in Washington. [Page 1]**

■ **Two Palestinians and one Israeli soldier wounded in last week's clashes died of their wounds. A total of 15 Israelis and 57 Palestinians have been killed as a result of the fighting. [Page 3]**

■ **The head of the Israel Defense Force central command said joint Israeli-Palestinian patrols would not yet resume in the West Bank, even though the recent conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has calmed down. Some Israeli-Palestinian joint patrols in the Gaza Strip continued, even through last week's violence.**

■ **Most Israelis support the peace process with the Palestinians, but many expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to an opinion poll. The survey, published in the Israeli daily Ma'ariv, found that 57 percent of the 521 people surveyed said Netanyahu dealt unsatisfactorily with last week's violence. [Page 3]**

■ **The Swiss Parliament took a first step toward determining whether Swiss banks concealed any financial misdeeds against victims of the Nazi Holocaust, it was reported. The lower house voted unanimously to approve legislation that would create an independent commission to investigate the Swiss banks' role during World War II. Jewish groups say the banks hold billions of dollars belonging to Jews killed by the Nazis.**

■ **The State Department is expected to establish an office of religious persecution to investigate charges of discrimination, harassment and torture against religious minorities worldwide. [Page 4]**

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### U.S. domestic politics injected into the crisis in the Middle East

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When Benjamin Netanyahu came to the White House this summer for the first time as Israel's prime minister, U.S. officials widely predicted that it was only a matter of time before the Likud government would face American pressure over its peace policies.

At the same time, the Clinton administration sought to minimize the risks of a confrontation by extracting a pledge from the Israeli leader that there would be no surprises.

But Netanyahu broke this pledge when he ordered the opening of a new entrance to a archaeological tunnel in Jerusalem last week without advance notice, U.S. officials said. The move reportedly incensed Clinton and sent the U.S. diplomatic corps into a tailspin as they tried to stop the violence and salvage a peace process once thought to be irreversible.

As Netanyahu, Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat and Jordan's King Hussein gathered here this week for a hastily convened Middle East summit, Clinton walked a fine line with considerable political risk only one month before Election Day.

With a commanding lead in national polls and an electoral map heavily in his favor, the last thing the Clinton-Gore campaign wanted was a foreign policy crisis like the one unfolding in the Middle East.

How the crisis in relations between the Israelis and Palestinians plays out at the American ballot box in November will largely depend on the implementation of any agreements brokered here, whether the peace lasts and whether Clinton is seen as pressuring Israel, political activists say.

For their part, Republicans are seizing on the crisis to attack Clinton's foreign policies. "The violence is a painful reminder that too many differences have been glossed over in earlier stages of the peace process," said Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole.

"Neither the United States nor any other party can impose a solution," Dole said in a statement, adding, "Our friend Israel must not be asked to make concessions as a means of restoring order."

The Netanyahu government deserves the "full support of the United States at this moment of crisis," said Dole, who was scheduled to meet with Netanyahu during his visit.

Clinton denied that he has pressured Israel in any way.

"What the United States has done since I have been president is not to pressure anyone, but to get the parties together and to explore alternatives and to see what can be done to find common interest and shared values," Clinton said in the Oval Office Tuesday as he began his meeting with Netanyahu, Hussein and Arafat. "Our role is to try to help bring people together" to find solutions, he said.

### Netanyahu, Arafat lunch privately

Apparently the effort worked. Despite concerns that Netanyahu and Arafat would refuse to come together for discussions during the summit, the two leaders ended up lunching privately at the White House on Tuesday.

Aware of the political stakes — inside and outside the Jewish community — the Clinton-Gore campaign's foreign policy spokesman shot back at the critics. Dole "is on thin ice when talking about pressuring Israel," the spokesman, James Rubin, said in an interview. "Senator Dole has a checkered past when it comes to Israel," he added, citing the GOP presidential candidate's 1990 call for a cut in aid to Israel.

Also eager to make inroads into the traditional support Democrats receive from American Jewish voters and to paint Clinton as an ineffective foreign policy president, the Republican leadership on Capitol Hill called on the White House to avoid isolating Israel.

"We believe it would be counterproductive to the long-term prospects for peace in the Middle East" if the meeting "is used as an opportunity to pressure Israel to make unilateral concessions in the face of violence aimed at its people," Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) wrote in a letter to Clinton.

Gingrich also went on the offensive, initiating an unprecedented

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conference call Tuesday with Jewish media to attack U.S. policy in the Middle East. Gingrich, who denied that the recent outreach was politically motivated, said the "abject American failure" to deal with Syrian President Hafez Assad was the root cause of the current crisis.

"This immediate problem can only be understood in the continuous loss of Israeli life and Syrian intransigence," he said. Israel's security is "not ours to give away."

Democratic leaders in Congress also joined the fray. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) and House Minority Leader Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) sent a letter to the president, supporting his policies, especially his decision to hold the summit.

As recently as the Democratic convention in Chicago, the Clinton-Gore campaign was banking on a quiet foreign policy arena during the fall campaign season.

Rubin joked in numerous appearances that his job is like that of the Maytag repairman featured in a television commercial, with nothing to do because the machines do not break. But now, after the recent escalation in Iraq, reports of Russian President Boris Yeltsin's failing health and the threat to the Middle East peace process, there is a lot of fixing going on.

But Rubin said this week's summit was not a political calculation. "It strikes me that the president's decision on what to do about the problems in Israel right now are not based on politics, but what is the best course for the peace process," he said.

Still, the stakes for Clinton are high. Jewish voters who had joined the Republican camp largely abandoned President Bush in 1992 in part because he was seen as pressuring Israel.

While Clinton still enjoys a reputation as one of the most pro-Israel presidents, he has had the luxury of working with the Israeli administrations of Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin, which did not need American prodding in the peace process.

All that has changed, and the administration finds itself staking out new ground in its relations with the Jewish state. Secretary of State Warren Christopher was rebuffed by Netanyahu at the height of last week's conflict, when America's senior diplomat asked the Israeli leader to close the new opening to the tunnel.

When U.S. officials called on the parties to avoid "inserting new issues," this was widely interpreted as criticism of Israel. But Clinton administration and campaign officials categorically deny any policy shift.

The crisis in the Middle East has not derailed what officials still hoped would be a triumphant week for Clinton's outreach to Jewish voters.

The Clinton-Gore campaign was scheduled to unveil its thousands-strong Clinton-Gore Jewish Leadership Council on Tuesday night with satellite hookups to more than 60 home parties across the country. The program, set to feature addresses by Hillary Rodham Clinton and Elie Wiesel, included an added note, according to officials: a discussion of the crisis in the Middle East. □

#### **NEWS ANALYSIS**

### **Violent clashes in territories strengthen Arafat's position**

*By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat has emerged far stronger than he was before last week's bloodshed.

The widespread fighting in the West Bank and Gaza that erupted over Israel's opening of a new entrance to an archaeological tunnel near the Temple Mount united extremist and moderate Palestinians behind Arafat.

The consensus that was so swiftly built around the Palestinian leader also included Israel's Arab citizens, who held a general strike last Friday and a protest in Nazareth that turned into a violent clash with Israeli police.

"You must understand," said Ahmad Jabarin, 25, of Umm el-Fahm. "This is no longer a national conflict, it is a religious one. And in religion we are all united."

Whatever happens this week in Washington — where Arafat was attending a meeting with President Clinton, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jordan's King Hussein — Arafat has already found new strength, not only among his own people, but also in the international arena.

His international support was evident Saturday, when the U.N. Security Council voted 14-0 on a resolution that indirectly called on Israel to close the tunnel entrance. It did not even mention the use of force by the Palestinian police.

Among his own people, Arafat's prime consideration in the crisis was his own survival.

The man who in recent weeks had failed several times to rally the masses behind him, the man who had become the target of wide-ranging criticism from his own people, felt that unless he took drastic action, the Palestinian Authority might collapse.

Last week's opening of the tunnel entrance provided Arafat with a new opportunity.

On Sept. 24, Arafat described the opening of the tunnel entrance as a "crime against our religious and holy places," and called on his people to launch a massive protest.

The next day, armed Palestinian police joined a stone-throwing populace for a three-day confrontation with Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that was the bloodiest since the 1967 Six-Day War.

Israeli intelligence officers said this week that they had no doubts that it was Arafat who personally instructed Palestinian police to open fire on Israeli troops.

Their assessment contradicted earlier speculation that Arafat had lost control over his police.

Ze'ev Schiff, the military analyst of the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, wrote this week that Arafat seeks to keep the territories in a continuous state of tension.

He will achieve this, wrote Schiff, by inciting the masses while ordering his policemen to cease fire.

After months during which he seemed to lose ground among his own people, Arafat has found a formula to rally their support.

#### **'A totally different and new situation'**

He acted as chief flag-bearer in the struggle against what he described as an Israeli declaration of war on Islam's most sacred sites.

And in the process he beat his rivals, the Hamas fundamentalists, at their own game.

"I am not a religious believer," Ali Jiddah, a former member of the rejectionist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said in an interview.

"But as far as I am concerned, the opening of the tunnel is a declaration of war against the Palestinian people. If Netanyahu wants war, he will get one. We have nothing to lose, only you do."

Before the tunnel opening, it would have been hard to believe that people like Jiddah — or the leadership of Hamas — would rally behind Arafat.

"It is a totally different and new situation," said the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak, who admitted that he was taken by surprise by the drastic Palestinian reaction to the opening of the tunnel. Arafat was the man responsible for the surprise and in the days ahead, he will do his best to capitalize on it. □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****Polarization among Israelis surfaces with premier in U.S.***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As U.S. and Middle East leaders gathered this week for an emergency summit in Washington, Israelis took to the streets to express their support for or opposition to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's peace policies.

Couched in biblical phrases and spelled out in bold red and blue, "Prime Minister, Be Strong and of Good Courage" was the message of encouragement that young kippah-wearing supporters unfurled on banners Tuesday along the main Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway.

In Tel Aviv, meanwhile, anti-government activists, led by members of Peace Now, put the finishing touches on what they hoped would be a massive demonstration Tuesday night in support of a return to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process pursued by the previous Labor government.

Just north of Haifa, a small demonstration of pro-government youths formed along the highway.

The young people assured passing drivers that "the people are with Bibi."

Reflecting this popular activism, Israeli newspapers Tuesday carried large display ads that either backed Netanyahu or warned him not to be recalcitrant in the meetings with President Clinton and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat in Washington.

Israeli public opinion, still digesting the cataclysmic nature of last week's bloodshed across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, has shown enhanced polarization, with people on each side of the political divide asserting that the violence vindicated their long-held positions.

**'Don't give them guns'**

The right and religious camp is now recalling its vociferous demand of 2 1/2 years ago: "Don't give them guns."

The reference is to the Palestinian Authority's police force, whose members used those guns last week to shoot at Israeli soldiers.

The clashes left 15 Israelis and 57 Palestinians dead.

Tsomet's Moshe Peled, the deputy minister of education, has demanded a commission of inquiry into the previous government's decision to strike a deal with the Palestinians to provide thousands of weapons to these police.

On the other side, Labor Knesset members were demanding an inquiry into Netanyahu's decision to open a new entrance to an archaeological tunnel that runs alongside the Western Wall.

The opening of the entrance sparked the outbreak of violence in the territories.

The opposition's criticism was being fueled by the continuing efforts of Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, as well as the army's senior command and the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic intelligence agency, to distance themselves from the timing of the decision of the prime minister.

Beyond the ideological polarization, however, the first public opinion poll appeared to show a dissatisfaction with Netanyahu's overall performance, and specifically with his handling of the crisis in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The poll, published Tuesday in the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*, found that 79.5 percent of the 521 people surveyed favored pursuing the implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords.

But 57 percent of those surveyed said Netanyahu dealt unsatisfactorily with last week's violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The poll also said 54 percent believed that the prime minister's decision to open the entrance was a mistake.

Nonetheless, 60.5 percent of the respondents said they wanted to keep the tunnel entrance open.

But 80 percent want the process of implementing the peace accords to continue.

This poll does not spell danger yet for the prime minister.

Certainly, it does not reflect the widespread criticism of him in the Israeli media, or the still-muted doubts being expressed about him among some in his own Likud Party.

Within Likud there has been talk, all speculative at this point, of forcing Netanyahu to resign if he fails to head off a resumption of the violence and to retrieve at least a modicum of Israel's fallen standing in American and world opinion, according to sources from the Likud Party.

Meanwhile, among the opposition, Labor, Meretz and the non-parliamentary peace movements resolved Tuesday to launch a sustained and nationwide "struggle" against the government's policy within 10 days if Netanyahu returns from Washington without having defused the crisis. □

**Controversial Old City tunnel among stops for Sukkot visitors***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Thousands of Israelis and tourists made the traditional pilgrimage this week to Jerusalem for the holiday of Sukkot, some walking through the archaeological tunnel near the Temple Mount that was the focus of last week's violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Israeli government's decision to open the northern entrance to the tunnel had sparked the violence.

By Tuesday, after another Israeli and two Palestinians died of their injuries, the death toll had risen to 15 Israelis and 57 Palestinians.

The government closed the entrance for Shabbat, then opened it again without any major incident, because security was beefed up around the Old City and in the Western Wall plaza in particular.

Some stone-throwing incidents were reported in eastern Jerusalem, but no one was hurt.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused the Palestinians of using the tunnel "as an excuse" for last week's violence and said he would refuse to negotiate closing it down.

This week, visitors to the Old City were able to pass through the tunnel, from the southern entrance in the Western Wall plaza to the new entrance in the Christian Quarter.

Tens of thousands of people came Monday to the Western Wall to receive the traditional priestly blessing from Kohanim.

Members of the Temple Mount Faithful, a group that seeks to rebuild the ancient Jewish Temple, attempted to enter the Temple Mount complex, where the Al-Aksa Mosque is located.

But police blocked their way, saying that their presence on the Temple Mount could endanger public security.

Elsewhere in Jerusalem, President Ezer Weizman held an open house to greet visitors in the sukkah erected at his official residence. □

## **Congress' last bill includes key issues for Jewish groups**

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As the 104th Congress concluded its major business this week, Jewish activists celebrated several last-minute legislative achievements.

The catch-all spending bill signed Monday by President Clinton includes \$3 billion in U.S. aid to Israel and a measure that eases admission standards for Jewish refugees fleeing persecution in the former Soviet Union.

Both issues were legislative priorities for the Jewish community during the past year.

But the enactment of immigration reform legislation drew a tepid response. Jewish activists said they won a reprieve as lawmakers and White House officials worked out a compromise that tamed most of the legislation's most onerous provisions concerning legal immigrants and access to federal benefits.

At the same time, the bill, aimed primarily at curbing illegal immigration, contains some provisions that one activist called "extremely problematic." The legislation, for example, would mandate the instant return of any refugee who cannot provide the proper documentation.

Jewish activists also objected to a provision they say could adversely affect immigrants because it weakens the ability of employees to sue for discrimination in the hiring process.

Still, Jewish activists said the removal of several key provisions viewed as punitive toward legal immigrants constituted an important victory. One such provision would have denied refugees unemployment compensation. Another would have created additional obstacles for legal immigrants seeking to gain access to government benefits.

The bill also includes a compromise on the income level required for sponsorship of a relative seeking to immigrate.

### **HIAS welcomes amendment**

"Nobody in the White House, nobody in the Congress and in other groups working on these issues thought that we would be able to get the egregious provisions concerning legal immigrants out of the bill," said Diana Aviv, director of the Council of Jewish Federation's Washington office.

Meanwhile, the \$12 billion foreign aid bill was folded into the massive spending bill passed by Congress. It contains \$3 billion in funds for early dispersal to Israel, \$80 million for refugee resettlement and \$50 million in anti-terrorism aid to Israel. Congress also authorized U.S. participation in the Middle East Development Bank, but declined at this time to provide funding for the project.

The bill also mandates that all relevant U.S. government publications refer to Jerusalem as Israel's capital. And the appropriations package provides \$2.1 billion in aid for Egypt, \$75 million for the Palestinians as well as the final payment of Jordan's debt forgiveness.

The legislation also includes a measure that renews U.S. law affording special refugee status to historically persecuted groups in the former Soviet Union.

Under the law, first enacted in 1990, Jews and evangelical Christians seeking refuge in the United States only have to show a "credible basis for concern" about the possibility of persecution instead of having to prove "well-founded fears," as is the case with other refugees.

The legislation, known as the Lautenberg Amendment, extends the law for one year. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society welcomed renewal of the amendment. In a time of "continuing instability in the former Soviet Union, Congress' action is important," said Martin Wenick, HIAS executive vice president. □

## **Evangelicals launch campaign against religious persecution**

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Mindful of the Jewish community's successful efforts to free Soviet Jews in the 1970s and 1980s, evangelical leaders are seeking to launch a similar campaign to end the persecution of Christians around the world.

After months of prodding from church leaders, the Clinton administration and Congress are beginning to take action to address religious persecution.

Church officials say many Islamic countries and the few remaining Communist nations continue to target their Christian populations.

The administration is forming an advisory committee on religious freedom consisting of about 20 prominent religious leaders. The committee, to be housed in the State Department, will include at least one Jew with expertise on religious persecution as well as two specialists on the persecution of Jews.

Both houses of Congress, meanwhile, have adopted a non-binding resolution condemning the "egregious human rights abuses and denials of religious liberty to Christians around the world," and calling upon the regimes responsible to stop the persecution.

Evangelical leaders see the attention now being drawn to the issue as long overdue. But as they implore the U.S. government to fulfill its "obligation to speak out" against worldwide religious persecution, they acknowledge that their own community has remained silent for too long.

### **'Walked this road before'**

"We are intent upon changing the public perception of human rights issues from simply one that has focused for a large measure on the Jewish community — and rightly so — to one that includes the mainstream," said Richard Cizik, policy analyst for the National Association of Evangelicals, which released a "call to action" on the issue in January.

Jewish leaders say it is important for the Jewish community to realize that religious persecution is endemic around the world. At the same time, they emphasize that the community has been highly active in defending human rights both in the United States and abroad.

Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, stressed the importance of building inter-religious coalitions to combat religious persecution. Such cooperation, he added, proved integral in the national campaign to free Soviet Jews.

Cizik said church leaders plan to seek Jewish support publicly as the campaign progresses. "We would like to think that we can learn a great deal from the Jewish community," Cizik said. "They have walked this road before and have experienced firsthand the hurdles."

Some observers, however, view the task of curbing religious persecution as a far more complex problem than freeing Soviet Jews. In that situation, Jews were seeking to leave an oppressive country; now, the goal is to change the way that oppressive countries treat religious minorities.

Still, Jewish leaders intend to lend their voices to the cause. "I'm confident the Jewish community would be quite responsive on this agenda," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, who has pressed the administration to address religious persecution.

Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of the interfaith affairs department of the Anti-Defamation League, said, "It is our obligation as fellow people of God."

A formal announcement about the formation and makeup of the advisory committee was expected soon. □