



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) conducted his own shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Syria. The State Department distanced itself from the senator's proposed Washington summit between Israeli and Syrian leaders. [Page 2]

■ Israel announced plans to send food and medical supplies to Rwanda, which has seen a huge influx of refugees coming home from Zaire. The Jewish state also said it might set up a field hospital in the African nation.

■ Israeli and Palestinian negotiators resumed contacts in an effort to conclude an agreement on the Israeli redeployment in the West Bank town of Hebron. Each side accused the other of prolonging the talks. [Page 2]

■ At least two Palestinian youths were killed by an explosion in a West Bank village. The blast was thought to have come from a land mine. [Page 3]

■ European donor nations pledged more than \$845 million to the Palestinian Authority at a Paris meeting. The 34 donor countries met to address the Palestinian Authority's infrastructure, investments and trade.

■ Federal and city agents in New York seized records from a Jewish social services group in Brooklyn to determine whether charitable funds were illegally diverted for other uses. The Council of Jewish Organizations of Borough Park aids programs for local businesses and immigrants.

■ China reportedly sold missile technology, about 400 tons of chemicals to produce nerve gas and military hardware to Iran. A top-secret CIA report details the sale of goods, which could be used to build missiles capable of reaching Israel.

■ Germany decided to keep open its investigation center for Nazi war crimes as long as there are cases to be prosecuted. The future of the center was in doubt because its director died during the summer and the number of Nazi trials has lessened.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Netanyahu's peace strategy remains unclear after Hebron

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Almost half a year into his administration and with the Hebron redeployment apparently now imminent, debate is swirling anew around Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Is he a pragmatist or an ideologue?

Many leaders, diplomats and political observers here and abroad are undecided about where the 46-year-old premier will head next, given his actions on Hebron and recent statements on the course of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Nonetheless, they all would agree on the importance of better understanding Netanyahu, whose meteoric rise to power has left his own country as well as the rest of the world wondering about his long-term strategy. That Netanyahu, the Likud Party leader, has kept everyone guessing at this point in his term is no small achievement, some would add.

Others, less sympathetic to Netanyahu, argue that perhaps he does not know where he is headed. They point to examples of fumbled decision-making as evidence of the young leader's irresoluteness.

The pragmatist-ideologue debate first occurred immediately after Netanyahu's May 29 election victory, but it subsequently died down.

The controversy has resurfaced, however, with the current talks on the implementation of the Israeli redeployment from most of Hebron.

The planned pullback from the West Bank town is a dramatic event, which makes it natural to re-examine the ideological makeup of the leader who has to implement it while trying not to isolate the hard-line members of his coalition.

At the same time, Netanyahu faces a Clinton administration that is still deeply committed to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process that it promoted during the past three years. And for the most part, the administration in its second term will be freed of domestic political constraints in its dealings with Middle East peacemaking.

Predicting the course of U.S.-Israel relations during the next four years also has resulted in Middle East analysts making another attempt to pin down the political composition of the Israeli leader.

In and of itself, the Hebron redeployment does not necessarily provide firm evidence of whether Netanyahu is a pragmatist or an ideologue.

For instance, regardless of whether Netanyahu remains a dyed-in-the-wool ideologue, he still could not have turned his back on the explicit Israeli commitment to turn over most of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority.

Pondering Netanyahu's next move

The governments of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres agreed that Israel would take this step, the last of seven redeployments of Israeli forces — which effectively turn the main urban centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over to Palestinian control. Originally scheduled for March, the Hebron redeployment was postponed by then-Prime Minister Peres after a series of suicide bombings in Israel by Islamic militants.

The debate about Netanyahu's character also has resurfaced as the international community ponders what his next move will be.

Under the terms of the Interim Agreement, Israel is to carry out three additional redeployments in the next year — from rural areas of the West Bank still under direct Israel Defense Force control.

The agreement excludes two types of areas: Israeli settlements, whose future is to be determined in the permanent-status negotiations, and "specified security locations," which Israel deems necessary for its defense.

Netanyahu has indicated clearly and repeatedly that he does not intend to pull out of the entire West Bank, leaving Israel effectively denuded of the territories when the permanent-status talks reach their climax.

The final-status talks, which are scheduled to end by May 1999, will determine the status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and the Palestinian self-rule areas.

Netanyahu says his interpretation of "security locations" is broad and

flexible. And he has proposed several times in recent weeks that the two sides forgo the "further redeployment" phase altogether and move directly to the permanent-status talks.

Netanyahu has cited the U.S. commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the tiny nation of Andorra, tucked between France and Spain, as two examples of limited sovereignty that might serve as useful examples for fashioning a Palestinian entity.

Those who believe that Netanyahu is a pragmatist characterize these ideas as moderate.

But the ideologue school, which is more cynical, claims that Netanyahu's proposal to go to the final-status talks now is bound — even designed — to throw the entire peace process into a deadlock. The upshot, these observers, say, is that the Palestinians will get no more land and will remain in scattered urban enclaves while the IDF continues to control the surrounding rural areas.

A third view now gaining ground here is that Netanyahu is himself evolving.

Regardless of whether he began as a rigid pragmatist, he has already softened his own hard-line positions during his months in office.

Some of these observers see these changes in the premier's thinking as being paralleled in the opposition Labor Party.

Ehud Barak, the ex-foreign minister and former chief of staff, is clearly the leading contender to succeed party leader Peres when Labor holds its internal elections in the summer.

Barak is more than anything else a man of the center. Indeed, Barak's critics are already saying that his core problem in challenging Netanyahu for the premiership in the year 2000 will be how to persuade the public that his political message is substantially different.

Barak, both as chief of staff and later as a Cabinet minister, made clear his reservations about the "further redeployment" plan. He would be hard put now to lead an attack against Netanyahu for not implementing it.

Netanyahu and Barak both claim to speak for the centrist Israeli who supports the peace process and is prepared to make concessions, but insists on a measured process that preserves the security of the nation as well as the Israeli citizens living in the West Bank.

Once Netanyahu has undergone the politically and psychologically complex experience of surrendering land in Hebron to the Palestinian Authority, he may, as he moves to capture the center ground, both develop his Puerto Rico-Andorra themes in greater detail and negotiate the future of the West Bank in earnest.

But he will do so while Israel still holds a substantial part of the disputed territory. □

Israel wants right to enter Palestinian areas of Hebron

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Talks between Israel and the Palestinians resumed Thursday in an effort to overcome the final obstacles to an agreement for an Israeli troop redeployment in the West Bank town of Hebron.

After seven weeks of talks, the differences have boiled down to disagreements over Israel's demand to have freedom of troop movement in Arab neighborhoods of Hebron that would be under Palestinian self-rule.

As happened often during the past weeks, each side blamed the other for the delay.

Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat said Thursday that Israel was deliberately delaying implementation of the redeployment, which was called for in the Interim Agreement signed last year.

"Accurate and honest implementation of the agreement requires international effort to push the Israeli side to commit itself to what has been signed," he said in the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Palestinians were well aware that they were the ones delaying implementation.

David Bar Illan told Israel Radio that the differences between the two sides' positions were "very small."

He did not rule out a Netanyahu-Arafat meeting to wrap up the accord, but he said that both sides were hesitant to schedule one unless they were "completely assured that it will be successful."

Palestinian Authority official Yasser Abed Rabbo warned Thursday that failure to implement the accord could lead to a further deterioration of relations with Israel and a renewal of violence. "The Israeli policy will bring us back to the age of total confrontation," he told a news conference. "This policy will lead only to the destruction of all that was achieved between the two sides."

The Prime Minister's Office issued a statement saying that Rabbo's remarks were not helpful to the ongoing dialogue. □

Jewish senator urges Clinton to arrange Israel-Syria summit

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) has proposed that President Clinton invite the leaders of Israel and Syria to Washington next week for a peace summit.

"My sense of the situation is that the next step is up to the United States," Specter said here after separate meetings this week with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Syrian President Hafez Assad.

In Washington, a State Department spokesman, Glyn Davies, attempted to distance the Clinton administration from Specter's remarks.

"This is a mission that Senator Specter is engaged in on his own," Davies said Thursday at a briefing. "He's not traveling at our request."

Davies would not comment directly about the senator's proposal for a Clinton-Netanyahu-Assad summit.

"I think we'll wait until Senator Specter comes back," he said.

Specter met Thursday with Netanyahu to brief him on his talks in Damascus.

Speaking to reporters after meeting with Netanyahu, Specter said he believed that Syria was not planning any aggressive actions toward Israel.

He described recent Syrian troop movements in Lebanon that put Israel on high alert as "purely routine."

"There was no sense of hostility with respect to the Syrian intention in any way, shape or form," Specter said. "On the subject of resuming peace talks, President Assad said he would be willing to do so only if the parties resume the negotiations where they broke off" earlier this year.

A senior Israeli source welcomed the idea of a Washington summit, but said it was unlikely to take place.

Negotiations between Israel and Syria were suspended in March after Syria refused to condemn a series of Hamas suicide bombings carried out at the time in Israel.

The talks, which then involved a Labor-led Israeli government, had been conducted on the principle that Israel would make a withdrawal on the Golan Heights in exchange for peace with Syria.

Netanyahu has rejected the idea of a Golan withdrawal as a precondition for resuming the talks. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Kazakhstan Jewish center will be the country's first

By Rachel Katz

ALMATY, Kazakhstan (JTA) — In the shadow of the Tian Shan mountain range near the Chinese border lies the silent gravesite of Rabbi Levy Yitzchak Schneerson, father of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, the late Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Just a short distance away, the ground is being prepared to build this former Soviet republic's first Jewish center.

It will serve the descendants of those who, like Levy Yitzchak Schneerson, were sent to this Central Asian region from across the former Soviet Union.

"This is the first time in history that a Jewish center is being built in Kazakhstan," says Yeshiya Cohen, chief rabbi of Kazakhstan. "It's a big step. We've come to a time of democracy."

In August, the community held a ground-breaking ceremony for the new synagogue at a site graced by a backdrop of snow-covered mountains.

Completion of the center's first building, at a cost of \$250,000, is scheduled for June 1997.

Along with a new synagogue, the community is planning a library, soup kitchen and mikvah.

A second facility, featuring a sports hall and school, is also planned.

Nearly 8,000 Jews now live in Kazakhstan, a predominantly Muslim country that was the second largest republic in the former Soviet Union. About 6,000 members of the community live here, in the capital.

Almaty's Jewish community is today based in a tiny building on the city's outskirts that served as the country's only official synagogue throughout the Soviet period.

About 50 worshipers now attend Sabbath services, with another 15 elderly men coming daily for morning services and lunch.

Unlike communities in the ancient Central Asian cities of Bukhara and Khiva that can document hundreds of years of Jewish life, Almaty's Jewish community traces its origins back a little more than a century.

Wave of migration

Founded 130 years ago as a Russian outpost, Almaty, then Verny, saw its first Jews in the form of soldiers who had been drafted into service. Many of them had been baptized into the Russian Orthodox faith, as called for by army tradition.

The 1920s and early 1930s brought a wave of migration, as Soviet leaders brought professionals and bureaucrats to Central Asia to boost industrial production and collectivize farms.

As war loomed over Eastern Europe, thousands of Jews from Ukraine and Poland fled to Central Asia.

Others were exiled to the region — like Rabbi Levy Yitzchak Schneerson, who was taken in 1939 by the NKVD, the KGB's predecessor, to Kzyl-Orda, a Kazakh town located west of here.

Five years later, he passed away in Almaty. His grave, now protected by a small concrete shelter covered with the leaves and branches of surrounding trees, is still visited today by members of the Lubavitch movement.

Toward the end of his rule, Stalin furthered his goal of divide and conquer, scattering Jews from communities in the Caucasus across other republics, including Kazakhstan.

"I was sent here in 1950 with my family from Tbilisi," the capital of the former Soviet republic of

Georgia, says Zola, an elderly woman whose gray hair is covered by a brightly colored kerchief.

Seated in the women's section of the existing synagogue during Shabbat services, she and seven other women originally from the Caucasus discuss current events in an intriguing-sounding language that is neither Russian nor the Turkic Kazakh tongue.

"It's Aramit," Zola says of the Persian dialect spoken by many Caucasian and Central Asian Jews.

"Our forefathers brought it when they came from Syria," she adds before returning to the small window that opens onto the main sanctuary, raising her hands in worship as the Torah is replaced in the ark.

Isaac Eidelman, 73, came to Central Asia in 1930 when his father was sent to Frunze, now known as Bishkek, the capital of neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

"I didn't know anything about the synagogue," says Eidelman, who until recently was an avowed atheist. "But my grandfather was very religious, and I used to help him put his tallis on."

Today, he comes to the synagogue every day to pray and learn.

"I need to know my roots, my heritage," he says, adding that it was wonderful that "we'll soon have a real synagogue."

Almaty's current synagogue has been home for Isaac Eldster, 77, for half a century.

Originally from the Polish town of Chelm, he was relocated during the early months of World War II and crossed paths several times with Rabbi Levy Yitzchak Schneerson during his exile.

"We had to do everything secretly," Eldster says, recalling how he managed to buy bricks while an employee of the railroad in order to build the matzah oven for the synagogue.

But after all the difficult years, the days of secrecy are finally over, says the republic's chief rabbi.

"People here should be proud of who they are," Cohen says.

Although Jews make up less than 1 percent of the city's population, the local media have begun to pay attention.

A 30-minute program on the Jewish High Holidays was broadcast several times prior to Rosh Hashanah on Radio Kazakhstan, and the ground-breaking for the new Jewish center was covered in television and newspaper reports.

When the new synagogue is completed, Cohen hopes, it will serve the needs of the community from the cradle to the grave. "It's not enough to give people something spiritual. You give them something physical, too, and it will all come together," he says. □

Two Palestinians killed in blast

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — At least two Palestinian teen-age boys were killed this week in what could have been a land-mine explosion in a West Bank village near Jenin.

Several were hurt in the Thursday blast, whose cause was not immediately clear, Israeli media reported. One person was in critical condition.

The explosion occurred when the 13-year-olds were playing near what might have been an old land mine.

Israeli security officials assisted Palestinian police in the investigation into the explosion.

An Islamic militant, possibly preparing to launch a suicide attack against Israel, was killed in the same area of the West Bank last weekend when a bomb exploded in his hands. □

Pending Czech-German accord on compensation concerns Jews*By Randi Druzin*

PRAGUE (JTA) — Czech Jews are at odds with their government over a declaration meant to improve relations between the Czech Republic and Germany.

The statement is intended to ease tensions rooted in Germany's wartime occupation of Czech lands, and the subsequent deportation of Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia. The document, developed over the past year, is expected to be signed later this month.

The Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic opposes a provision in the declaration requiring the German government to compensate Czech victims of Nazism by contributing to a foundation that funds civic initiatives. The federation wants victims to be compensated on an individual basis.

In a letter sent to Czech Foreign Minister Josef Zieleniec last month, the federation said, "Individual reparation of Nazi victims is a very important matter" and "any other solution would not be considered proper reparation."

The federation claims that it has been virtually ignored by the Czech government on this matter.

"We met with some people at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and they seemed receptive," said Tomas Kraus, the federation's executive director. "But our voice was not heard."

Last week, Czech Foreign Ministry spokesman Vit Kurfurst said the declaration "doesn't talk about individual reparations, and it isn't supposed to."

Kraus suggested that Czech officials might not want to broach the subject of individual compensation because they might have to discuss claims made by Sudeten Germans who were expelled by the Czech government at the end of the war.

"And that is an explosive issue," Kraus said.

For Kurfurst, the federation's views are not important. "It's a matter to be dealt with by the foreign ministries of Germany and the Czech Republic," Kurfurst said.

"We can't consult interest groups here, just as the German side can't consult Sudeten Germans." □

Group says police mishandled concert organized by neo-Nazis*By Randi Druzin*

KOZOLUPY, Czech Republic (JTA) — A Czech human rights group has filed a complaint against local police for not intervening to end a concert organized by a neo-Nazi group.

The Civic Solidarity and Tolerance Movement said the Nov. 10 concert was organized by a neo-Nazi organization called Blood and Honor.

The event violated Czech law because some 800 skinheads attending it "supported and promoted a movement aimed at the suppression of people's rights and freedoms," the group added.

"Police should have ended the event as soon as they heard chants of 'Sieg Heil' inside the hall," said Ondrej Cakl, spokesman for the human rights group.

Police in this western Bohemian town arrested seven skinheads outside the hall when they gave the Nazi salute, and have since arrested three more.

A local political leader defended the police actions.

"Police were extremely professional. Further intervention would have resulted in violence, and the damage would have been extensive," Augustin Hrboticky, a state representative, told a Czech newspaper. □

Live video of Western Wall will be available on Internet*By Michele Chabin*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — If you'd like to see the Western Wall but can't afford the plane fare, your computer terminal could be the next best thing.

On Dec. 5, the first night of Chanukah, an Israeli multimedia company will launch a live video feed, via the Internet, from the Western Wall plaza.

Avi Moskowitz, a native New Yorker who founded Virtual Jerusalem a year ago, said the company would transmit live "photos" of the Wall, or Kotel, and adjoining Temple Mount.

The service, which is free of charge, will enable Internet users anywhere in the world to access the photos, which will be updated every 30 seconds.

Virtual Jerusalem designs and hosts World Wide Web sites for Jewish organizations and media, including the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. It also offers Web surfers the chance to mail prayers electronically to the Western Wall with confidentiality assured.

The company decided to install a "Kotel Cam" to give "people of all faiths the opportunity to really experience the city's holiness," Moskowitz said.

In addition to attracting Internet users and advertisers to the company's popular Web page — which reportedly receives more than 100,000 "hits" each day — Moskowitz hopes the new service will provide some divine inspiration.

"For centuries, Jews, Muslims and Christians have flocked to Jerusalem by horse, donkey and camel," he said. "Jews, who traditionally face east, toward Jerusalem, while praying, will now have the opportunity to look at the Wall while saying their daily prayers at home or at work."

Moskowitz said the camera, which will be mounted on a yeshivah that borders the back of the plaza, will be turned off every Shabbat.

He said the privacy of those visiting the Wall would not be an issue, because the camera would provide a panoramic view of the Wall, but no close-ups. Officials at the Chief Rabbinate said they would monitor the camera to ensure that it does not violate the site's sanctity.

To access the Kotel Cam, log onto Virtual Jerusalem's home page at <http://www.virtual.co.il>. □

Moscow Jews form cultural group

MOSCOW (JTA) — The leaders of 40 Jewish groups here have formed a new organization that will represent Moscow's Jewish community in discussions with city authorities.

The new group, the Moscow Jewish National Cultural Autonomy, will deal with Moscow officials on issues of Jewish culture and education. Recent Russian legislation enabled the formation of the group. □

Israelis spend a night in Djibouti

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Several dozen Israelis en route to India had an unexpected layover in Djibouti when their Air India flight made an emergency landing because of technical problems.

Israel does not have diplomatic relations with the East African country.

The passengers were transported to a hotel for an overnight stay, before the arrival of another Air India plane to take them to Bombay.

The treatment they received in Djibouti was "great, really great," one Israeli passenger told Israel Radio. □