



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **President Clinton put the brakes, at least temporarily, on speculation that Israel and the Palestinians would move soon to intense Camp David-like talks.** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who met with Clinton, has proposed moving directly to expedited final-status talks with the Palestinians to revive the peace process. [Page 3]

■ **Vice President Al Gore told delegates of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee that he is "deeply angered" by Palestinian terrorism.** Peace talks cannot continue until there is a clear "red light" to terrorism, he said to more than 2,000 cheering delegates.

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu canceled an appearance before a major gathering of the Reform movement in Washington.** A Reform leader said the cancellation would be perceived as a failure to recognize the anguish caused by controversial conversion legislation pending in the Knesset. Meanwhile, Netanyahu met privately with Reform, Conservative and fund-raising leaders to discuss possible compromise solutions. [Page 1]

■ **Oman refused to grant an entry visa to an Israeli diplomat, becoming the first state to act on an Arab League resolution to suspend ties with Israel.** Officials in Jerusalem expressed concern that other nations would soon follow suit.

■ **A Jewish settler with an assault rifle fired on a Palestinian after his van was stoned in a West Bank village, witnesses reportedly said.** Two Palestinians apparently were wounded in the incident, one seriously.

■ **Three firebombs were thrown at an Israel Defense Force position near Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip.** No one was hurt and no damage was caused in the incident.

■ **A 12th-century Torah scroll is one of the items missing from the Russian State Library, a Moscow newspaper reported.** A complete inventory was made for the first time in 20 years, revealing that more than 200 items have disappeared during that period. [Page 2]

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### Netanyahu angers non-Orthodox on conversion bill during U.S. visit

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cancellation of an appearance before a major Reform movement gathering this week in Washington deepened the anger provoked by the advance of divisive conversion legislation in the Knesset.

And Netanyahu did not help the cause of harmony by quipping at a Monday afternoon news conference, "It is probably easier to make peace with the Palestinians than to resolve this satisfactorily" between the Jews.

Nonetheless, some hopes were being pinned on a Monday night meeting between Netanyahu and leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements and the fund-raising establishment to discuss compromises to the legislation.

Others feel that compromises that have surfaced are unlikely to be accepted by the Orthodox parties in Netanyahu's governing coalition, which have made the passage of the measure a condition of their remaining in the government.

The bill would give the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate exclusive control over conversions performed in Israel, in effect barring the recognition of Reform and Conservative conversions performed there.

The Knesset passed the measure last week in the first of three votes known as readings.

Netanyahu played down the legislation in the news conference, saying that it "won't change anything" and it only "formalizes something which has been informal" throughout the history of the state.

But an atmosphere of urgency prevailed as a delegation of leaders from the 1,400-strong Conservative Rabbinical Assembly left their annual convention in Boston to attend the meeting with Netanyahu in Washington.

"We declare that we have had enough," said a proposed Rabbinical Assembly resolution slated for adoption this week. "We are outraged at the latest attempt to once again deny full religious rights to our segment of world Jewry, an act that denies the pluralistic nature of Judaism and betrays the inclusive vision of Zionism."

Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the assembly, said, as he was en route to the nation's capital, that he wanted to convey to Israeli leaders the depth of concern among his constituents.

At the same time, he said he wanted evidence that "we are being heard and there is a willingness to deal with this issue in a constructive way."

Netanyahu's representatives said a scheduling conflict forced the cancellation of his appearance Monday afternoon at the Reform Religious Action Center's Consultation on Conscience, attended by 500 people from across the nation.

### 'Deliberate affront and a failure'

The premier's itinerary included a series of meetings with President Clinton, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and other top U.S. officials. At the same time, he was able to honor his speaking engagements before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, and the largely evangelical Voices United for Israel.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said the prime minister's cancellation of the Religious Action Center appearance would be perceived by many as a "deliberate affront and a failure to recognize the anguish" caused by events in Israel.

"Reform and Conservative Jews are looking to the prime minister for moral leadership, and we hoped he would offer, in a public forum, his plan to avoid a schism between the State of Israel and North American Jews."

He also said Netanyahu had long been confident of his ability to "convince American Jewry of the correctness of his positions."

But he said sources told him that the prime minister suddenly grew concerned that he would get a "very negative reception" in light of the Knesset legislation.

Indeed, anger was at a high pitch at several Reform and Conservative

gatherings over the weekend after last week's Knesset vote on the measure leaders here have lobbied so hard to thwart.

The action prompted the Conservative and Reform movements to issue an unusually strong joint statement, calling on 1,800 congregations across North America to boycott Knesset members who support the bill in its final vote.

"We adopt this policy with regret," the statement said.

But "we ask our synagogues to refrain from extending invitations to them to appear as speakers or lecturers, or as guests of honor in our institutions.

"Furthermore, we ask our congregational leaders to refrain from supporting any communal activity to which such Knesset members have been invited."

Touching on a highly sensitive issue, the statement also expressed continued support for the central fund-raising campaign for Israel run by federations and the United Jewish Appeal.

At the same time, it called on its members "to encourage their federations to provide increased support to Conservative and Reform programs in Israel."

It singled out the Jewish Agency for Israel, the primary recipient in Israel of UJA funds, to reallocate more money to such programs.

The agency now gives about \$1 million annually to each of the three major streams.

For his part, Jewish Agency Chairman Avraham Burg blasted the legislation in speeches he made this weekend at the national assembly of the Association of Reform Zionists of America in Washington and the Rabbinical Assembly in Boston.

"The law is a danger to the future of the unity of the Jewish people," he said, calling for a separation of synagogue and state. "As politics has corrupted religion, religion has corrupted politics."

At the same time, he warned against any boycott of the fund-raising campaign.

Philip Meltzer, the president of ARZA, challenged the federation world in a sermon he delivered at ARZA's national assembly.

"Obscene amounts of funding are funneled through the government of Israel to Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox institutions, while virtually no funding is received from the government for Reform and Conservative institutions."

"It is time for our federations to affirmatively act to redress the imbalance," he said.

### **Orthodox as a whole backs measure**

The fund-raising establishment, in turn, has tried to demonstrate that it shares its donors' concerns. It issued a statement of protest after last week's Knesset vote and has implied that it will look into increasing its allocations to the religious streams in Israel.

Reform and Conservative conversions have been performed in Israel for years but have not been sanctioned by law. The Knesset initiative is a response to a 1995 Supreme Court ruling that no law existed to justify that non-recognition.

Orthodox Jewry as a whole is united behind the legislation.

But other American Jewish leaders have warned Israeli officials repeatedly that Reform and Conservative Jewry view this legislation as a slap at their legitimacy and that there would be repercussions for the central fund-raising campaign for Israel.

Netanyahu has repeatedly responded by saying that internal Israeli politics give him little alternative, and by pledging to protect the "status quo," which validates Reform and Conservative conversions abroad.

Only last week, he told a group of Jewish journal-

ists in Israel that the imbroglio was overinflated as a result of a "misrepresentation" of the facts by leaders of the liberal Jewish movements in Israel.

And Monday in Washington he once again blamed these movements in Israel for causing the problem by bringing their cause to the Supreme Court.

He said that "it might be possible to change the legislation" if cases brought by the Reform and Conservative movements are withdrawn.

It was hard for some to imagine what Netanyahu might have offered at the public Reform gathering that would have mollified the intensifying anger.

At the private meeting, Netanyahu was to be joined by Alexander Lubotsky, a Knesset member from the Third Way party and point man for the governing coalition on religious matters.

That made it likely that a compromise Lubotsky is helping circulate in Israel would be discussed.

That compromise calls for the legislation to be halted in exchange for some recognition of Reform and Conservative conversions.

That recognition would be reflected in a classification as "Jewish" on the national identity cards of such Israeli converts.

But in central population registry records, subject to certain privacy laws, such conversions would be categorized according to their religious streams.

That differentiation would be most important to the Orthodox establishment in connection with marriage, over which it would continue to have exclusive control.

The Reform and Conservative streams in both countries have expressed some openness to such a plan, but say it is a political non-starter.

"This would lead to a recognition of conversions in a way that we never had happen before" in Israel, said Yoffie.

But he said he believed that it was "inconceivable" the Orthodox parties would agree. □

### **12th-century Torah missing from Russia's largest library**

*By Lev Krichevsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — A 12th-century Torah scroll, along with dozens of manuscripts and rare books, has been reported missing from the Russian State Library.

The first inventory of the library's manuscript and rare book collection in nearly 20 years revealed that more than 200 items have disappeared during that period, according to the daily newspaper *Moskovsky Komsomolets*.

One library employee said the books and manuscripts must have disappeared years ago and were "sold somewhere abroad."

The employee, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the library — the nation's largest — had no money to conduct regular checks of its collections.

The lack of funds had resulted in insufficient security and safety measures, the employee added.

The Russian State Library, formerly known as the Lenin Library, is where the Schneerson Library has been stored for more than 70 years.

The collection — consisting of 12,000 volumes of books and manuscripts that had been collected by five generations of Lubavitcher rebbes — was confiscated in the early 1920s by Soviet authorities and transferred to the Lenin Library.

Lubavitch officials have been battling in the Moscow courts since 1990 for the return of the books.

It remained unclear whether any portion of the Schneerson Library was among the missing items. □

## Clinton, Netanyahu discuss ways to revive ailing peace process

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Clinton has put the brakes, at least temporarily, on speculation that Israel and the Palestinians will move soon to intense Camp David-like talks.

"It's important not to jump the gun" on Camp David-style talks, Clinton told reporters at the beginning of two hours of meetings Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"The first thing we have to do is get the process going again. There is a pre-existing process," he said. "I think it's important that we not put form over substance here."

The presidential retreat at Camp David was the site for intensive Egyptian-Israel peace negotiations in 1978.

Speculation that a similar round of Israeli-Palestinian talks could ensue arose after Netanyahu proposed that the two sides move immediately to permanent-status negotiations and aim to complete them in six months.

Israeli-Palestinian talks broke down after Israel began building a Jewish neighborhood, Har Homa, in eastern Jerusalem, and Palestinians responded with violent protests in the West Bank.

The Palestinians maintain that they will not return to the talks until Israel stops construction of Har Homa and freezes all settlement activity.

Israel is demanding, in the wake of last month's suicide bombing at a Tel Aviv cafe, a clear commitment by Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat to end terror.

### 'Very crude and preliminary ideas'

The Clinton administration has voiced interest in Netanyahu's proposal to complete the permanent-status talks in six months as part of a package being developed to revive the dialogue.

However, both Israeli and U.S. officials said Clinton and Netanyahu made no breakthroughs on the quest to get talks at any level back on track.

Netanyahu told Israeli reporters that he and Clinton discussed "very crude and preliminary ideas" on reinvigorating the peace process.

White House spokesman Michael McCurry said after the talks that Clinton "gave the prime minister some serious things to think about."

But Israeli and American officials refused to comment on the specifics of the proposals discussed.

"We have a practical problem right now," the prime minister said, citing Palestinian violence in the West Bank.

"Israel and the United States see eye-to-eye on the need to effectively combat terrorism," in order for talks to resume, Netanyahu said.

Clinton lined up behind Netanyahu on at least this front, saying that no Israeli concessions should be necessary to get Palestinians to renounce violence.

"Freedom from terrorism is something which no one should have to purchase," Clinton said. "It's a precondition."

As for final-status talks, Netanyahu said they are "one of the options" and that there are "many differences in viewpoints."

Clinton refused to say whether he would call on Netanyahu to suspend construction at Har Homa.

After the meeting, Netanyahu told Israeli reporters that he had informed Clinton that Har Homa construction would continue and that he gave the president no promises regarding new settlement construction or expanding existing ones.

Netanyahu did not say whether Clinton asked him to make such a pledge.

American officials, for their part, said they would continue to talk to the Palestinians about Netanyahu's proposal when a delegation visits here later this week.

"Now it's important for us to visit with the Palestinians, and we'll try to get this thing up and going again," Clinton said after meeting with Netanyahu.

"You know how these things are; I need to say not too much about it and work very hard on it. And that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to do my best to get it back on track."

Anchoring his official meetings, Netanyahu met with Voices United for Israel, a largely evangelical Christian group, where he issued a strong defense of Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem.

Later in the day, Netanyahu told reporters that Israel has an "inherent right" to build at Har Homa.

He planned to deliver a similar message to the annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee policy conference Monday night.

Meanwhile, he met with Reform and Conservative Jewish leaders to talk about controversial conversion legislation pending in the Knesset. □

## N.J. man who aided Nazis, entered U.S. illegally, dies

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK (JTA) — A New Jersey man who had worked as a propagandist during World War II in Nazi-allied Hungary has died, according to U.S. government sources.

Ferenc Koreh, against whom the United States had won a court order of deportation in January, was 87 years old and had suffered from a blood disorder.

The U.S. government had agreed at the time of the court order that it would not act to remove Koreh from the United States unless his rapidly deteriorating health improved.

Similar cases have been settled in this manner.

Koreh died April 1 after undergoing surgery, the government sources said.

Koreh had publicly advocated the persecution of Jews.

From 1941 to 1944, he was an editor of Szekely Nep, the largest provincial newspaper in Axis Hungary.

In the Jan. 13 agreement with the Office of Special Investigations, the Nazi-hunting arm of the U.S. Justice Department, Koreh admitted that he was deportable for having assisted in persecution and for lying about his wartime activities to gain admission in 1950 to the United States.

The agreement also stated that Koreh did not contest that he was responsible for the publication of some 200 racist articles that helped create a climate in Hungary that made the Nazi persecution of the Jews acceptable.

In June 1994, as a result of his activities, he was stripped of his American citizenship by a U.S. District Court in Newark. The judge said in making that decision that articles in the Hungarian newspaper for which Koreh worked advocated the "de-Jewification of Hungarian life."

That decision was upheld in February 1995 by a federal appeals court.

The OSI began denaturalization proceedings in 1989 against Koreh, a retired Radio Free Europe producer and broadcaster who resided in Englewood, N.J. The January deportation order canceled Koreh's Social Security benefits, a Justice Department official said at the time.

About 435,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Nazi camps between May and July 1994. □

**NEWS ANALYSIS****What's behind Israel's proposal to accelerate final-status talks?***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — How serious is Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about accelerating peace negotiations with the Palestinians?

This was the question on President Clinton's mind when he met with Netanyahu this week in Washington and discussed the Israeli premier's proposal to move straight into the permanent-status negotiations as a means to breathe new life into the peace process.

If Netanyahu intends to expedite final-status talks with his government coalition intact, then the whole exercise may be nothing more than a public relations stunt. In his Cabinet are some of the harshest critics of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

If, on the other hand, Netanyahu's proposal is part of a strategy to advance the peace process by setting up a national unity government with the Labor Party, then it may herald a breakthrough out of the current crisis.

Under the Israeli-Palestinian agreements, known as the Oslo accords, the final-status talks were slated to begin in earnest last month and be concluded by 1999. In the meantime, Israel was to carry out three redeployments from West Bank rural areas.

But the process hit a logjam after Israel began building a Jewish neighborhood in eastern Jerusalem and decided on a first redeployment that the Palestinians charged was paltry.

The Palestinians maintain that they will not return to the talks until Israel stops construction of Har Homa and freezes all settlement activity.

Israel is demanding, in the wake of last month's suicide bombing at a Tel Aviv cafe, a clear commitment by Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat to end terror.

The Clinton administration has voiced interest in Netanyahu's proposal to complete the permanent-status talks in six months as part of a package being developed to revive the dialogue.

But speculation is rife about Netanyahu's intentions, and the Palestinians themselves are wary of deviating from the step-by-step Oslo process.

**Talks may produce permanent deadlock**

Those who view the proposal as a publicity stunt point out that all the hard-liners in Netanyahu's coalition have enthusiastically endorsed it.

Ministers and Knesset members from the Likud and the National Religious Party as well as other coalition partners who have been among the most outspoken opponents of the Oslo process now welcome the premier's idea of launching into permanent-status negotiations.

One explanation for this enthusiasm is that these hard-liners presume that no compromise is possible on the permanent-status issues — Jerusalem, borders, settlements, refugees' rights. They therefore believe that such talks will produce permanent deadlock and bring to an end the process they so vehemently oppose.

However, if Netanyahu believes that his proposal will advance the peace process, his ability to form a unity government to implement it may be hindered by rivalries within the Labor Party.

While Shimon Peres, Labor's leader, is the most energetic campaigner in favor of the unity option, his likely successor as party leader — former Foreign Minister Ehud Barak — is opposed to it.

So is the candidate now in second place for the leadership position, Yossi Beilin, who was long Peres' political acolyte.

Of the four contenders for the party leadership, only former Health Minister Ephraim Sneh supports Peres' unity efforts.

The Labor leadership election, scheduled for June 3, looms as a deadline for Netanyahu. He must decide before then whether to make Labor an offer, because afterward, the proposition may well be refused.

On the other hand, say seasoned observers here, if Barak wins the leadership position, he may prove more agreeable than he appears now to Netanyahu's overtures.

To Barak, Peres' eagerness to lead Labor into a unity government looks like the former premier's way of hanging onto the party leadership.

Netanyahu said last week that he intends to move fast on the unity option — if he decides to go for it. But he has not yet decided to do so.

And even Peres, for all his enthusiasm, has said he will not be part of a unity government until the conclusion of an ongoing police investigation into alleged improprieties surrounding the abortive appointment in January of a new attorney general.

In terms of substantive policy considerations, neither Barak nor Beilin is opposed in principle to moving directly into permanent-status talks.

Beilin, even though he was the principal Israeli negotiator of the Oslo accords, was never personally or ideologically committed to their phased approach.

Instead, as he has explained privately, he embraced the idea of a five-year interim period as a tactical means for getting the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to approve the Oslo process.

Barak, too, has indicated support for advancing the timetable for the permanent-status talks.

He harbored serious reservations about the original time frame because it provided for three major Israeli redeployments in rural areas of the West Bank before the permanent-status negotiations were to reach their critical phase.

**Palestinians felt betrayed**

In Barak's view — a view that was shared by Netanyahu and other Likud officials, who were then in the opposition — this meant that Israel would relinquish the bulk of its territorial assets in advance of the toughest phase of final-status negotiations.

It would conduct those crucial negotiations, therefore, from a position of weakness.

As premier, Netanyahu's strategy was to call for a first redeployment that was far less extensive than the Palestinians had been led to expect in earlier negotiations with the previous Labor-led government.

But that decision, which has yet to be implemented, played a vital role in triggering the current crisis in the peace process.

The Palestinians felt betrayed when they understood that a mere 2 percent of West Bank land now under Israeli control would be turned over to them in the first redeployment. Another 7 percent now under joint control also was to be transferred to the Palestinian Authority.

For the Palestinians, as much as they mistrust Netanyahu, the prospect of an expedited permanent-status settlement led by a Likud prime minister and backed by the broad consensus of a unity government must be appealing.

They know enough about domestic Israeli politics to understand that an agreement achieved on this basis would have the credibility and strength necessary to assure its longevity. But neither they nor the Labor Party leaders know whether this is what Netanyahu intends.

Perhaps, after Monday's conversation in the White House, the only person who does know what is on the Israeli premier's mind is Clinton. □