



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **U.S. Rep. Robert Livingston (R-La.) is threatening Israel's \$3 billion in foreign aid if Israel does not extradite 17-year-old Samuel Sheinbein to the United States.** Sheinbein, an Israeli citizen who is accused of murdering a friend in suburban Maryland, fled to the Jewish state earlier this month. Israeli law prevents the extradition of a citizen.

■ **Jewish school voucher advocates expressed their disappointment after the Senate voted to block consideration of a Republican school voucher proposal for the District of Columbia.** The vote came just hours after President Clinton accused voucher supporters in Congress of "waging an effort to undermine our commitment to public education and our public schools."

■ **Israeli security forces identified the man behind the two recent bombings in Jerusalem that killed 20 Israelis, according to Israeli news reports.** The man, now a fugitive, had been a resident of the West Bank town of Ramallah and assembled the bombs in an explosives factory in the West Bank town of Beit Sahour.

■ **The deadline has expired for the U.S. election for delegates to the 33rd World Zionist Congress in December.** American Zionist Movement officials said they expected to announce the results by Oct. 9, even as the number of international delegates, originally slated at 500, is in flux and could be increased. Ten slates competed for the roughly 150,000 American Jews who registered to vote.

■ **Avraham Burg, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the World Zionist Organization, will stay in his post for an additional two years in a rotation deal reached with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to sources.** The deal calls for the post to be filled for the two years after that with a Likud candidate. Burg is a member of the Labor Party.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, Oct. 3.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israelis oppose conversion bill after eye-opening sojourn to U.S.

By Kenneth Bandler

NEW YORK (JTA) — A key Likud legislator is ready to risk losing his Knesset seat in the name of Jewish unity.

Ze'ev Boim says he will vote against conversion legislation even if he cannot convince his Likud colleagues to oppose the measure, which has become a central source of friction between Israel and a majority of American Jews.

But he intends to use all his skills of persuasion to get Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Likud Knesset faction to drop their support of the controversial bill, which would codify Orthodox control over conversions performed in Israel.

The sudden reversal by the Likud Party whip came after a weeklong whirlwind visit to American Jewish communities sponsored by the United Jewish Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations.

Boim was joined by three other coalition Knesset members from the Yisrael Ba'Aliyah and Tsomet parties as well as four legislators from the opposition Labor Party.

The eight Knesset members, three of whom had voted for the legislation in a preliminary vote, jointly pledged at the conclusion of their trip last Friday to lobby their colleagues to stop the bill.

"Passing the law would cause a serious split in the Jewish world," they said in a statement. "Action should be taken to prevent the legislative process and instead find a just and fair compromise that the Jewish world would accept."

They said they plan to meet with Netanyahu soon to convey their findings about the American Jewish community.

The visit came amid a deepening crisis between American Jews and Israel over the issue of religious pluralism in the Jewish state.

American Jews, most of whom are not Orthodox, have voiced outrage over the conversion bill as well as over assaults on non-Orthodox men and women praying together near the Western Wall on Tisha B'Av and Shavuot.

The issue has heightened concerns amid a backlash against the annual fund-raising campaign run by local federations in concert with UJA.

'Divisive issues' affected annual campaign

While contributions to the annual campaign are up this year, the campaign has fallen behind its projected goal because of "the divisive issues that have confronted us over the past months relating to the treatment of Reform and Conservative Jews in Israel," Richard Wexler, national chairman of UJA, said in a telephone interview.

The 1997 campaign is expected to finish at about \$730 million, which would be \$20 million less than had been projected for the year, said Bernie Moscovitz, UJA vice president and chief operating officer.

But, he added, the campaign will still result in a 2 percent increase — some \$15 million to \$16 million — over last year.

In an effort to educate Israeli lawmakers, in whose hands legislation relating to religious pluralism may rest, UJA and CJF decided to sponsor a tour of Jewish communities around the country.

"I've never seen the people I represent so sad and demoralized," Martin Kraar, CJF executive vice president, told the Knesset members last Friday at a meeting at UJA in New York recapping their visit.

"We invited you to see it for yourself."

What the Israeli lawmakers saw and heard in meetings with Jewish communities in New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Washington, Baltimore and Richmond, Va., proved to be an education not only on American Jewish attitudes toward pluralism but also on the vibrancy of Jewish life in the United States.

"We got such a strong impression of an enormous effort you are putting in Jewish education, in Hebrew and in bringing your youth to Israel," said Yuri Stern of Yisrael Ba'Aliyah. "It made us committed to help you" on religious pluralism issues.

Boim recounted with passion his visit to a Jewish day school in

Chicago, where he was surprised at the sight of students discussing the Bible in Hebrew.

Prior to his election to the Knesset last year, Boim had ties to several American Jewish communities as the mayor of Kiryat Gat.

Despite that experience, Boim said last week's visit gave him a "better understanding of the Jewish community in the United States."

The Knesset members admitted that Israelis are generally unaware of American Jewish life and concerns.

Stern said he had not previously considered the conversion legislation's impact on American Jews because it would not change the status quo of recognizing non-Orthodox conversions performed outside Israel.

Conservative and Reform leaders have maintained that passage of the conversion bill would delegitimize their movements in Israel.

"We did not take into account those feelings when discussing the law," Stern said. After touring U.S. communities, he said he realized that "it's so painful that we should do our best to avoid it."

Although Kiryat Gat has a large Orthodox constituency, Boim said he would cast his vote on the conversion bill "according to my Jewish conscience, not according to daily politics."

The Orthodox parties made conversion legislation a condition for joining the Netanyahu government last year, and the coalition backed the measure on a preliminary vote in April.

After that vote, Netanyahu appointed a committee made up of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform representatives to find a solution to the crisis.

But the committee missed its Aug. 15 deadline, and despite confidence exuded by its chairman, Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, that a solution would be found, it remains doubtful whether the disparate interests of the three religious streams can be satisfied before the Knesset reconvenes in November.

"I am not sure we can find a compromise," Labor Knesset member Ophir Pines-Paz said at last Friday's meeting.

The Orthodox parties have threatened to bolt from the coalition if the legislation is not brought to a vote and adopted. If they carry out their threat, it could force new parliamentary elections.

"This question is so important that it is worth even to lose a chair in the Knesset," Boim said in an interview, explaining that he could lose his seat if new elections were called.

Wexler of UJA said the visit of the Knesset members should help give a boost to the annual campaign.

"Our fund raising will always be impacted when our people are disunited," he said. "To the extent that the Knesset members build bridges toward Jewish unity, our campaign will be affected positively." □

Poll: Majority of American Jews support pressing Arafat, Netanyahu

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For months, the Israel Policy Forum has tried to convince Washington's policy-makers that the American Jewish community would support increased U.S. pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Now a group that supports the Middle East peace process has armed itself with an extensive poll of 1,198 American Jews that supports their argument.

By margins that surprised the poll's sponsors, 84 percent of the respondents said the Clinton administration should "pressure Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman

Arafat to act more constructively and be more forthcoming."

Respondents also overwhelmingly favored, 79 percent to 17 percent, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's call for a "timeout" in settlement expansion.

The telephone poll, which was conducted in the days after Albright's mid-September visit to the Middle East, aims to shatter some of the organized American Jewish community's core principles on Israel. Respondents even hinted at support for a Palestinian state.

Through newspaper advertisements, meetings with key administration officials and lobbying visits to Capitol Hill, IPF activists have worked to provide the Clinton administration with political cover as they stepped up their criticisms of Netanyahu's policies.

The group, which was founded to support the Labor government's peace policies but has moved toward the political center, is also seeking to stir the organized Jewish community to more aggressively support the peace process.

The group recently appointed hired Marshall Breger, a political adviser to IPF. As part of this effort, the group released the poll, which was conducted by President Clinton's pollsters, Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates.

"It's important for the administration to recognize there is a lot of support for the approach that they've been taking," said Tom Smerling, the IPF's Washington director.

"There was some grumbling from some quarters when Albright called for a timeout. That's not supported by the poll," he said.

Among the poll's key findings:

- 74 percent of the respondents said "Israel should declare at least a temporary six-month moratorium on settlement expansion";

- 91 percent said it is in Israel's interest for the United States to facilitate the peace process even if it results in disagreements between the U.S. and Israel;

- 82 percent said it is important to reassure each side that in the end the United States will support their major goals. For the Palestinians that means statehood, for Israel a united Jerusalem and security;

- 89 percent said the United States "must be even-handed when facilitating the negotiations";

- 50 percent said Israel is headed in the wrong direction.

'We do not want U.S. pressure on Israel'

Expressing surprise at the results of the poll, Martin Raffel, associate executive vice chairman of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella Jewish organization, said: "It's been one of the cardinal principles of the community that we do not want U.S. pressure on Israel."

If the poll is an "accurate reading of the American Jewish sentiment, then the position of the mainstream Jewish organizations does not reflect that."

Cautioning that it is "dangerous to formulate public policy on the basis of polls," he also said he believed he would have heard from the grass roots if "there were to be a groundswell in support of these positions."

At the same time, Raffel said, "maybe there is something happening out here that is reflected in the polls that has not yet shown up on the organizational radar screen."

It is this conclusion that the IPF hopes takes hold.

"I certainly hope that the poll will help create a greater understanding in the community about where American Jews are," said Jonathan Jacoby, the group's executive director. □

NEWS ANALYSIS**Dispute over settlements looms over resumption of peace process***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — What seemed to be a breakthrough in the peace process this week has quickly soured as the controversy over Israeli settlements loomed large.

Within hours after U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced that Israeli-Palestinian negotiations would resume, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu found himself caught between U.S. demands for a "timeout" on settlement construction and a threat from the National Religious Party that it would quit the government if there were a building freeze.

The talks, suspended since March, are set to resume next week in the Middle East and move a week later to Washington.

But there will clearly be a good deal of "talking about talking" before anyone gets down to substantive give-and-take.

With discussions about the nature and extent of the timeout set to be held in Washington, Netanyahu gave an indication of his stance Monday when he said that he did not intend to change his policy of "making natural growth of the settlements possible."

Indeed, Netanyahu vowed last week to build 300 new homes in the West Bank settlement of Efrat, a pledge that was roundly criticized by Albright and Palestinian officials.

The chasm between Israel and the Palestinians over the timeout issue was reflected in the absence of officials from either side when Albright announced the resumption of talks Monday in New York.

This hardly spoke well of the three-way meeting Albright held prior to the announcement with Foreign Minister David Levy and the Palestinian Authority's second-in-command, Mahmoud Abbas, who is also known as Abu Mazen.

Haggling over the text of the announcement continued right up to the moment Albright approached the podium, according to informed sources.

Small wonder, then, that Albright cautioned reporters that the announced resumption of talks was at best "a medium step forward."

After six months of suspended talks, during which violence and recriminations prevailed, Albright was, nonetheless, able to proclaim a cessation of the "downward spiral" in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

A peace process in tatters

When the talks resume next week in the Middle East, the two sides are expected to discuss outstanding issues stemming from the 1995 Interim Agreement, including the opening of a Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip, the building of a Palestinian seaport and the creation of a safe passage route for Palestinians traveling between Gaza and the West Bank.

Committees discussing those issues were set to resume in July, but those talks were postponed after suicide bombers struck Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market July 30, killing 15 Israelis.

Tensions escalated further after a Sept. 4 triple suicide bombing in Jerusalem left five Israelis dead.

Albright found the peace process in tatters when she visited the Middle East the following week.

The most she could obtain from that visit was an agreement from both sides to hold this week's meeting in New York with Levy and Abu Mazen.

Amid all the flurry of upcoming diplomatic

activity, U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross is expected to return to the Middle East to help launch the renewed talks, and Israeli President Ezer Weizman is slated to visit Washington next week for meetings with President Clinton, Albright and other top American officials.

Along with discussions of the timeout issue, the talks between the two sides slated for Washington the week of Oct. 13 will also focus on security cooperation and on ways to resume the final-status negotiations.

A largely ceremonial opening to those talks was held in May 1996, just weeks before Israel held its general elections.

As the agendas are worked out for the upcoming talks, much remains unclear as the two sides, egged on vigorously by Washington, return to the negotiating table.

In Jerusalem, suspicions among the Israeli right wing were raised by reports that the Netanyahu government had agreed to discuss the timeout that Albright repeatedly called for during and after her visit to the Middle East.

Levy was quoted as confirming Israel's readiness to discuss the issue — although he insisted there would be no "sweeping" timeout, only a "limited" one.

Transportation Minister Yitzhak Levy of the NRP told a radio interviewer Tuesday that he could hardly imagine that Israel would undertake any stoppage of its building programs in eastern Jerusalem and its expansion of West Bank settlements.

NRP Knesset member Hanan Porat was blunter, saying the party would not hesitate to quit the governing coalition if construction in existing settlements were suspended.

Not much of a concession

The most that the NRP and other hard-line factions within the coalition are prepared to accept is a timeout on the building of new settlements.

But, as all sides know, that is not much of a concession. With some 140 settlements and some 150,000 Jewish residents already in the territories, there is little pressure now to create entirely new settlements.

For Netanyahu, meanwhile, the task ahead is to balance the conflicting pressures confronting him — from his coalition hawks on the one hand, and from the United States on the other.

To a certain extent, the NRP's threats may prove useful to Netanyahu, who will be able to cite them as proof during discussions with American and Palestinian officials that he cannot afford to yield on settlement building.

Just the same, officials close to Netanyahu were said to be proposing a symbolic construction stoppage during the High Holidays.

This proposal was said to include the controversial Har Homa project in southeastern Jerusalem.

Groundbreaking for that Jewish neighborhood in mid-March prompted the Palestinians to suspend negotiations.

Israeli officials are meanwhile stressing that everything related to the revived negotiations is predicated on the Palestinian Authority's readiness to act firmly and consistently against terrorism.

Netanyahu himself went out of his way this week to commend the self-rule government for its recent series of arrests of suspected Hamas hard-liners.

During a Cabinet briefing Sunday, the head of the Shin Bet domestic security service, Ami Ayalon, said Palestinian security officials had recently arrested at least 70 suspected Islamic activists and had closed 16 Hamas operations.

In apparent response to that roundup, Israel announced that it would release \$17 million in tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Move to review path of funds to Israel reflects new thinking

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — Pressure from federations across the country has prompted the central Jewish fund-raising establishment to re-examine how donations are funneled to Israel.

That re-examination, triggered by a resolution adopted last week by the board of the United Israel Appeal, turns up the heat on the Jewish Agency for Israel, which is already in the midst of a scramble to reform itself.

The resolution was welcomed by federation executives, who said the national leadership had heard their call for a greater responsiveness to donors and their changing priorities.

For decades, the Jewish Agency has been the primary recipient in Israel of funds raised by the annual campaigns of local federations and the United Jewish Appeal. The transfer of money is administered by the UIA through what is referred to as an exclusivity agreement between the two parties.

That arrangement brought the agency this year roughly \$200 million from the central campaign and \$80 million in U.S. government grants for refugee resettlement.

The UIA board resolution challenges the arrangement by exercising an option to review its terms before its natural conclusion in 1999.

Rabbi Daniel Allen, UIA executive vice chairman, put the decision in a positive context: "It opens up a dialogue between UIA, on behalf of American Jewry, and the Jewish Agency, which will invigorate the relationship."

He added that the decision is not so much a referendum on the agency as it is on the wisdom of collective Jewish philanthropy. But the decision cannot be separated from longtime unhappiness with the agency on the part of some big-city federation executives.

They have maintained that the agency continues to effectively execute its primary mission of resettling immigrants in Israel, on which 65 percent of its program budget is spent.

But they decry what they say are the politics, inefficiencies and inflexibility of such a big agency.

Era of exclusivity said to be over

In fact, individual federations are not technically bound by the agreement, and, in several instances, they have been bypassing the agency to fund projects in Israel directly.

Wayne Feinstein, executive vice president of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco and an outspoken critic of the agency, said he was "delighted" by the decision to review the contract.

He said he expects the agency to continue to get "the lion's share" of the national system's funds for Israel.

In the meantime, he said, "our donors and board would likely support" the "contours of the new directions" being undertaken by the agency.

Nonetheless, he added, the era of exclusivity is over.

"The time has passed when JAFI can be the exclusive agent for UJA dollars raised for Israel," Feinstein said. "There can and will be other philanthropic agents for collective North American philanthropy."

For its part, the Jewish Agency, which enjoys an annual budget of roughly \$400 million, has been furiously at work on sweeping reforms, in part to win respect and confidence from skeptical federations.

A restructuring plan, slated to take effect on Jan. 1, 1998, aims to streamline and depoliticize the agency.

Among other changes, it calls for the agency to take over the bulk of the functions of its organizational partner, the World Zionist Organization.

It also will take over the formerly semiautonomous Joint Authority for Jewish/Zionist Education, long a thorn in the sides of federations who have wanted more control over the programs their donations support. Those programs include teacher training, Israel experiences and curriculum development for Diaspora education in Judaism, Jewish culture, Zionism and Hebrew.

In addition, an intensive strategic planning effort is underway to redefine the mission and direction of the Jewish Agency as communal needs and priorities shift.

In an obvious effort to demonstrate the agency's responsiveness, the UIA has begun to visibly market the agency's contributions to the struggle for religious pluralism in Israel, a hot-button topic for U.S. Jewish donors.

The UIA has distributed newly broken-down budget figures showing that the agency contributed \$17.5 million in fiscal 1997 for "programs promoting tolerance, religious diversity and the unity of the Jewish people" in Israel.

Of this, UIA's total contribution was \$14 million, \$7.1 million of which went specifically to programs of the three major streams.

Jewish Agency advocates have asked for time to let the reform and planning initiatives take effect before rendering a verdict on the exclusivity agreement.

Indeed, WZO leaders have threatened to scuttle the restructuring plan if the exclusivity contract was broken.

The UIA board, 75 percent of which is comprised of federation representatives, evidently tried to find some middle ground. With its decision last week, it was exercising an option in its agreement with the Jewish Agency, which is supposed to last through 1999, to give notice of a desire to review the terms of the contract.

That review could have led to an early termination of the contract or an automatic termination if no renegotiation was completed by Dec. 31 of this year.

However, the board also decided to extend the termination deadline until the end of June 1998.

That decision was made to permit planned reforms to take effect and the strategic planning initiative to unfold, according to Louise Greilsheimer, president of UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.

Said Allen: "It was unrealistic to think that in the midst of the important change going on, this conversation could be effectively held between the end of September and the end of December." □

Doubts raised on early Jew in China

NEW YORK (JTA) — The distinction of being the first European to visit China almost went to a Jew.

Publisher Little, Brown and Company was set to publish a book claiming that an Italian Jewish trader, Jacob d'Ancona, traveled to China in 1270 — four years before Marco Polo, the Italian merchant who is traditionally given credit for establishing the first contact by a European with China.

But the New York-based publishing house announced this week that it was postponing publication of the book, "The City of Light," after scholars raised doubts about its authenticity.

The book, which was featured in a front-page article in the Sept. 21 edition of The New York Times, was written by British author David Selbourne, who said it was based on a 13th-century manuscript written by d'Ancona.

Selbourne, who said he translated and edited the manuscript after he found it in Italy, continues to vouch for its authenticity. □