



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ A United Nations resolution that would have given the Palestinians member-state status without the right to vote in the U.N. General Assembly was withdrawn. The United States, Israel, Russia and the European Union had opposed the measure. [Page 2]

■ A Massachusetts Court unanimously upheld a ruling that barred a divorced Christian fundamentalist father from taking his three children to church services or enrolling them in Sunday school. The children are being raised by their mother, an Orthodox Jew. The father's attorney said he may appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

■ Syrian President Hafez Assad urged Muslim nations to halt all cooperation with Israel. His call came in a speech at the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which has brought dozens of Arab and Muslim nations to Iran.

■ Israel and the Palestinian Authority agreed that four of the nine committees addressing matters outstanding from the 1995 Interim Agreement will resume talks. Thursday's discussions will address issues that include security matters and a safe-passage route between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. [Page 3]

■ The Israeli Knesset is considering legislation that would prevent the Palestinian Authority from taking a census in eastern Jerusalem. The amendment would prohibit "any activity" in eastern Jerusalem "inconsistent with the sovereignty of the State of Israel." [Page 3]

■ A team of Israelis reportedly visited Iran recently to teach agricultural techniques to Iranian farmers. Israel's Foreign Ministry said the visit was not coordinated with any government official.

■ A suspected Latvian war criminal was ejected again from the United States. Konrad Kalejs was stopped this week at a Los Angeles airport and sent back to Australia, according to Australian news reports. Kalejs is alleged to have been a member of a mobile killing squad that collaborated with the Nazi SS during World War II.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Under United States pressure, Israel facing a moment of truth

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With the United States pressing for progress in the peace process, the Israeli government is about to face a moment of truth.

Will Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu present his government's plan for a redeployment from the West Bank, as U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright expects, when they meet next week?

Or will he merely submit his Cabinet's broad thinking on Israel's security interests in a permanent-status settlement — as he told his ministers earlier this week?

The apparent incongruity between Netanyahu's dialogue with Albright and his discussions with the Cabinet is jarring.

Netanyahu and Albright began their current round of talks — which took place against a backdrop of strained relations between Washington and Jerusalem — with two tough sessions that took place in Paris last Friday and Saturday night.

Between those meetings, Albright met with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in Geneva.

In public comments, Albright made it clear that she was not endorsing the Palestinian demand for a redeployment that would remove Israeli troops from another one-third of the West Bank.

But at the same time, her aides said, reported Israeli suggestions of a pullback totaling 6 percent to 8 percent would not be satisfactory.

Nor would the White House be prepared to accept Netanyahu's contention that this proposed second redeployment would be the last such pullback by Israel until a permanent-status accord is finalized.

The Americans, like the Palestinians, have welcomed Israel's proposal to accelerate final-status talks. But they do not accept Israel's argument that a third redeployment, prescribed in the Interim Agreement, be eliminated.

Netanyahu told his Cabinet on Monday that he had not "discussed percentages" with Albright.

But, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, he made clear privately that he doubts the United States would accept any transfer that is less than 12 percent of Israeli-controlled territory in the West Bank. American officials have warned that they would not try to convince the Palestinians to accept Israel's proposal if the scope of the redeployment is too little.

Israel may not be able to meet U.S. timetables

Israeli Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani said this week that he had no doubt American pressure on Israel is growing.

Netanyahu's meeting next week with Albright "is not for drinking a cup of coffee together," said Kahalani, of The Third Way Party. "I imagine the next meeting is to receive an Israeli plan."

But the Netanyahu government may not be able to meet American desires for progress by the end of the year.

The premier's aides said in Paris, and repeated in Jerusalem, that the Cabinet's timetable for preparing its redeployment proposal does not necessarily dovetail with Albright's scheduling. At a news conference Tuesday in Eilat, Netanyahu said Israel would not allow any external pressure to determine the government's decision on redeployments.

Netanyahu's Cabinet approved a conditional redeployment last week — pending the Palestinian Authority's agreement to begin accelerated final-status talks and to fulfill its commitments under the Oslo accords, including increased security cooperation to combat terrorism.

But the Cabinet decision did not specify the extent of the redeployment. Under the terms of the decision, the ministers are to address the broad security issues of a final-status settlement first and determine the details of the pullback later.

National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon, a member of the ministerial committee set up last week to craft the proposals, has developed detailed maps providing for Israeli annexation of two relatively thick swaths of territory that would serve as buffers between the West Bank and Jordan as

well as along the pre-1967 border between Israel and the West Bank.

Despite his hawkish map-making, Sharon has been sounding a moderate tone on the interim redeployment.

What is important above all, he said, is to achieve "strategic coordination" with the United States over Israel's long-term security interests in the West Bank.

Once that is in place, Sharon argued, Israel could afford to be generous in the second redeployment and need not rule out a third redeployment, as prescribed by the 1995 Interim Agreement. Under the Interim Agreement, Israel was to carry out three redeployments in the West Bank by mid-1998. The first phase, rejected in March by the Palestinians because Israel would relinquish about 2 percent of the West Bank territory, was never implemented.

The Cabinet is scheduled to discuss Sunday proposals that Netanyahu presumably could bring to his Dec. 17 meeting with Albright in Paris.

But sharp divisions within the Cabinet make an agreement on any concrete proposal doubtful. Hard-liners in the Cabinet have said openly that they hope last week's decision to offer a redeployment will remain a dead letter.

Transport Minister Yitzhak Levy, of the National Religious Party, objected strenuously to the idea that Israel present specific proposals for the interim redeployment and the permanent-status settlement "in accordance with the secretary of state's timetable, when we have not held serious discussions on these basic questions for 30 years."

Foreign Minister David Levy warned the Cabinet that the Clinton administration wants a credible, sizable redeployment now — not mere words about future security guidelines. Levy reportedly brushed aside Netanyahu's protestations that Albright had not pressured him.

The foreign minister suggested that it is time for Israel to confront reality and decide if it wishes to cooperate in the initiative or to reject it.

Political observers here, impressed by the vehemence of Levy's remarks, quickly linked the foreign minister's performance to coalition rumblings speculating that Levy and his Geshar faction may be contemplating bolting from the government.

Yisrael Ba'Aliyah leader Natan Sharansky also warned that he would not stand by passively if the government brought about the collapse of the peace process. Sharansky made it clear that his Russian immigrant constituency wants to see the process move forward.

Given the discord in the Cabinet, some observers were suggesting this week that Albright's unexpected vigorous involvement — she in effect summoned Netanyahu and Arafat back to Europe next week to meet with her again — has hastened the government's "moment of truth."

While cynics viewed the Cabinet decision to agree to a redeployment as meaningless, other observers saw it as postponing an inevitable showdown between hard-liners and moderates, who genuinely want to offer a meaningful redeployment and thereby attempt to put the peace process back on track. Now, with a sudden sense that Albright is "breathing down Israel's neck," the moment of truth for the Netanyahu government seems much more real and imminent. □

Proponents of peace hail withdrawal of U.N. resolution

By Faygie Levy

NEW YORK (JTA) — Proponents of the Middle East peace process are breathing a sigh of relief after the withdrawal of an Arab-sponsored U.N. resolution that would have elevated the status of the Palestinians at the international body.

After a week of diplomatic haggling, the sponsors withdrew their resolution Tuesday when they realized that they did not have enough support to pass the measure.

The Palestinians currently have observer status at the United Nations. The resolution would have granted them member status without voting privileges.

The United States, Israel, Russia and the European Union all opposed the resolution, fearing that any change in the Palestinian status would have harmed the Middle East peace process. "Cool heads and better sense prevailed," said a spokesman at the U.S. mission to the United Nations, a view that was echoed in Washington.

It would have sent "a negative signal for the Middle East peace process and efforts under way to inject new momentum into that process," said James Foley, deputy spokesman at the U.S. State Department.

Prior to the scheduled vote, U.S. Sens. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) and Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), in a joint statement, called the Palestinians' effort to obtain non-voting member status a "major violation of its commitments to the Oslo agreements" that would "undermine the Oslo peace process in the most ominous manner."

The Israelis, who had also feared that the move would have destabilized the peace process, hailed the developments.

This is the "first time in many years that the General Assembly gathered in striking opposition against the Arab bloc," telling them "that you can't have what you want this time," said Shivi Isman, spokeswoman for the Israeli Mission to the United Nations.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said the withdrawal of the resolution was a "historic achievement." For their part, the Palestinians had argued that they needed the change in status to facilitate their work at the United Nations.

Had the resolution passed, the Palestinians would have been allowed to sit in the assembly with other member states and it would have been easier for them to participate in U.N. debates. With the resolution effectively "dead," it is not expected to come up again until next year, the U.S. spokesman said.

Meanwhile, an Arab-sponsored resolution scheduled for next week that challenges Israel's authority over the West Bank and Jerusalem is expected to be withdrawn as well, said one U.N. insider. □

Israel extends teen's detention

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Jerusalem court has decided to extend indefinitely the detention of a Maryland teen-ager charged with murder until a decision is made on whether to extradite him.

The Justice Ministry last week asked the court to honor a formal extradition request for Samuel Sheinbein submitted last month by American officials.

Lawyers for the youth have been challenging the request.

Sheinbein, 17, fled to Israel in September, shortly after the body of 19-year-old Alfred Tello was found in a Maryland suburb. Maryland police suspect that Sheinbein and another suspect killed Tello and dismembered his body with a saw. Sheinbein hoped to escape trial in the United States by claiming Israeli citizenship through his father, who was born here and left in 1950.

Under Israeli law, a citizen cannot be extradited for a crime committed in another country. But after pressure from the United States, Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein recently stated that the citizenship law does not apply to Sheinbein. □

Israel quickly passing legislation to ban eastern Jerusalem census*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian Authority plans to conduct a census in eastern Jerusalem have prompted Israel's Knesset to expedite legislation aimed at stopping them.

Bowing to the Israeli government's wish to race through the legislation, a Knesset committee agreed Wednesday to waive the 24-hour interval required between the introduction of legislation and a first vote.

The Knesset plenum then passed by 35-22 the first of three votes, known as readings, to amend the law implementing Israel's 1995 Interim Agreement with the Palestinians.

With the opposition throwing its support behind the bill, it was expected to pass the second and third readings by Thursday.

Because of the vague wording of the Interim Agreement, the bill was needed in order to put teeth into Israeli demands that the census not be carried out in any portions of Jerusalem.

Only once in Israeli history has the government tried to push through legislation in such lightning fashion.

In 1981, then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin succeeded in passing legislation in one day to extend Israeli law to the Golan Heights, which was captured in the 1967 Six-Day War along with the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In recent weeks, Israeli officials warned against Palestinian plans to conduct the census in eastern Jerusalem.

Empowering Israeli security forces

Israel maintains that the Interim Agreement prevents the Palestinian Authority from conducting any activities in areas outside its control.

The Palestinians contend that the issue of Jerusalem will only be resolved in final-status talks, and that they therefore have leeway to conduct some activities in mostly Arab eastern Jerusalem.

If passed, the law would empower Israeli security forces to take action against all Palestinian activities in Jerusalem.

"We are against any move by the Palestinian Authority that is undermining Israel's authority in its capital city," said Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi.

"They don't have any authority to do anything in Jerusalem, and they'd better stop it."

He said he had no doubt that the Palestinian Authority was trying to establish its influence in the city.

The Palestinian Authority began its census Tuesday, the first in the territories since 1967.

Palestinian officials confirmed only that the population count would include all areas where Palestinians live.

Faisal Hussein, the Palestinian Authority official in charge of Jerusalem affairs, rejected Israel's claims of sovereignty over the city.

"They use repression to try to prevent the Palestinians of this city from implementing their rights, including the census," he said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, addressing the plenum Wednesday, urged coalition and opposition members to unite in passing the measure.

"The test of Jerusalem is the test of our people," he told the Knesset.

The opposition Labor Party decided to vote with the government in favor of the amendment.

At a stormy party caucus session preceding the vote, Labor leader Ehud Barak argued that regardless of

how the party views government policy, Labor must take a firm and unequivocal stand on Jerusalem.

"Whenever the problem of Jerusalem comes to the agenda, in spite of our reservations of the behavioral patterns of the government, we will vote" for Jerusalem, Barak later told Israel Radio.

On Tuesday, Netanyahu reiterated that any Palestinian attempt to include areas within Jerusalem's municipal boundaries in the census represented a violation of the Oslo accords and of Israel's sovereignty over the city.

He instructed Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani to take every measure to prevent the survey from being carried out in the eastern half of the city.

Israeli security officials were then stationed in eastern Jerusalem to block residents from returning the questionnaires to Palestinian Authority officials.

The future of Jerusalem is perhaps the most sensitive issue slated to be discussed in the final-status negotiations.

The Palestinians want the eastern half of the city as the capital of an independent Palestinian state. Israel counters that Jerusalem must remain as its eternal, indivisible capital.

Wednesday's Knesset vote came as Foreign Minister David Levy met with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's deputy, Abu Mazen, to discuss the resumption of talks between joint committees on unresolved issues in the Interim Agreement.

They agreed that four of the nine committees would resume talks Thursday.

The committees are dealing with security issues, a Palestinian airport in Gaza, a proposed industrial park at the Carni crossing on the Israel-Gaza border, and a safe-passage route for Palestinians traveling between Gaza and the West Bank. □

Israel's defense chief visits Turkey to enhance relations*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai's historic visit to Turkey may lead to more sales of Israeli military aircraft to Ankara.

The two countries signed several military cooperation agreements last year, and more moves were discussed this week during Mordechai's three-day visit.

The visit began Monday — a day after foreign ministers attending an Islamic summit in Tehran passed a resolution calling on Arab states to reconsider their relations with Israel.

Turkey has come under sharp attack from Syria, Iraq and other Arab states for its defense agreements with Israel.

Israeli and Turkish leaders have stressed that their cooperation agreements should not be interpreted as being directed against any country.

Under already signed military agreements, Israel has a \$630 million contract to upgrade Turkey's F-4 jets and is allowed to fly its air force planes over Turkish air space.

Among the deals now under discussion, Israel may sell Ankara its Merkava tanks and may upgrade Turkey's F-5 jets. Turkey is also reportedly interested in acquiring anti-missile missiles from the Jewish state.

During his visit, which included meetings with Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, Mordechai discussed holding early next year joint Mediterranean naval exercises that would also involve the United States.

Mordechai's visit, the first by an Israeli defense minister, came as a follow-up to last May's visit to Israel by his Turkish counterpart, Ismet Sezgin. □

Christian leader's remarks draw rage of Jews, Muslims

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Rev. Pat Robertson has reignited a controversy stemming from anti-Islamic remarks he made on his television program.

Robertson called on his "700 Club" show for a unified front against the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and labeled adherents of Islam "insane."

Jewish leaders joined the American Muslim community in roundly condemning Robertson's October statement as bigotry.

Last week, Robertson, who heads the Christian Coalition, shot back at one Jewish leader who called for an immediate apology.

"I said on my program, and I say now, for any thinking American to embrace Islam is nothing short of insanity," wrote Robertson, responding to a letter from Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center.

"This is not bigotry, it is a fact based on the action of those who hold to Islam all over the world," Robertson wrote.

Robertson said his assessment was based on "the appalling persecution of Christians that is taking place in various parts of the Muslim world."

In his letter to Robertson, Saperstein wrote, "These remarks step over the line of decency. Any vision of an ethical, tolerant, pluralistic America is simply irreconcilable with the ugly anti-Islamic animus of your remarks."

"That you engaged in such religious bigotry in the name of combating religious persecution compromises all of us engaged in efforts to rebuff that persecution," said Saperstein, who has been working with religious leaders to advance legislation aimed at the problem of religious persecution abroad. □

Anti-Semitic history book remains in Latvian schools

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Latvia has agreed to halt further distribution of a controversial history book, but human rights activists are questioning the sincerity of the move.

In response to a campaign led by the Washington-based Union of Councils for Soviet Jews and local activists, who had demanded that Janis Karklins' "Latvian Eulenspiegel" be withdrawn from schools, the Latvian president's office apologized for its distribution.

Jewish and human rights activists in Latvia charge that the book contains statements insulting to the Baltic nation's minorities.

"Latvian Eulenspiegel," a reference to a popular jester-like character in German and Latvian folklore, contains references to Jews as "zids," which is a pejorative term.

The book, which describes pre-World War II Latvian history, also contains "terrible insults" about Russians and Poles, according to Mikhail Avrutin, director of the Baltic-American Bureau on Human Rights, an affiliate of the UCSJ that is based in the Latvian capital of Riga.

Last spring, copies of the work were delivered as a gift to the country by people of Latvian heritage living in the United States.

The Latvian Education Ministry subsequently ordered that each school in the country receive copies of the two-volume work.

The ministry recommended that it be used as a

companion to history textbooks, according to Grigory Bikson, a teacher at the Dubnov Jewish Day School in Riga, which received copies of the book.

The president's response reversed the stance taken in letters to the UCSJ in October.

At that time, Latvian Education and Science Minister Juris Celmins defended "Latvian Eulenspiegel" as satirical rather than xenophobic and described the book as a "monument of Latvian literature."

Despite the presidential apology, the book remains on school bookshelves, Bikson said in a phone interview from Riga.

Avrutin said Latvians were unaware of the government's decision. □

Mazel tov — times 30,000

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — It sounds like a wedding planner's nightmare — you plan a marriage and 30,000 people come.

But that scenario happened recently at the Tel Aviv exhibition hall when a couple from two different Chasidic dynasties exchanged wedding vows.

The bride, Machla Hager, is the daughter of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Hager, who is the heir apparent to the helm of the Viznitz group, which is based in the Tel Aviv suburb of Bnei Brak.

The groom is Rabbi Mordechai Katz, the son of Rabbi Hershel Katz, head of the rabbinical court of the Vien community in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Large weddings are common among the fervently Orthodox, particularly in Israel.

There are two reasons for such large ceremonies, said Zalman Shmotkin of the Lubavitch World Headquarters in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Having people attend a wedding to make the bride and groom happy is a mitzvah, and when there are thousands of people dancing at the wedding, there's a certain amount of joy in the air, he said.

He added that people also want to share the joy of their rebbe.

For the event, Coca-Cola printed up special labels featuring a crown displaying the names of the bride and groom next to Coke's logo. □

Bodies of Hungarian Jews found

BUDAPEST (JTA) — The remains of 10 corpses found earlier this month in Vienna may have been Hungarian Jews who perished in the Holocaust, according to a Hungarian historian.

The remains, which were believed to be mostly of women and children, indicated that the victims had been shot at close range.

The victims could well have been slave laborers or people who were trying to make their way back to Hungary near the end of World War II, according to Holocaust historian Szabolcs Szita.

"All 10 were shot and buried in a shallow grave, where the bodies were covered with lime," Szita said in an interview.

This was the "typical" way of disposing of Jewish corpses, Szita said, noting there was often "no time to dig deeper graves."

During the later stages of the war, some 6,000 Hungarian Jews were used in forced labor in and around Vienna out of a total of about 15,000 throughout Austria.

Vienna had three labor camps where Hungarian Jews forced to work at construction and agricultural projects. □