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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Arafat to feel heat?

President Clinton will confront Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat with a harsh assessment of his failure to crack down on terrorism.

Arafat, who is slated to meet with Clinton at the White House on Thursday, arrived in Washington just hours before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to return to Israel.

Rumors of a possible Netanyahu-Arafat meeting appeared unfounded. [Page 4]

Netanyahu wraps up visit

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wrapped up his three-day visit to Washington with meetings on Capitol Hill.

President Clinton, who described his meetings with the Israeli premier as "difficult" but productive, said in a television interview, "We came up with an approach that we thought, in the ballpark, would satisfy both sides' objectives." [Page 4]

A plea for justice

Members of Congress and Jewish organizational officials joined the parents of American citizens killed in Palestinian terrorist attacks in Israel to demand the extradition of Palestinian terrorists.

Nine Americans have been murdered by terrorists in Israel and the territories since the Oslo accords were signed in 1993. [Page 4]

NY rabbis go to Israel

A coalition of interdenominational rabbis from the New York Board of Rabbis is traveling to Israel to testify before a committee working to reach a compromise on the crisis over religious conversions in Israel.

The delegation, made up of four rabbis each from the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox movements, is expected to tell the Ne'eman Committee how the groups work together despite their denominational differences.

Falwell mobilizing for Israel

The Rev. Jerry Falwell announced that evangelical Christians are mobilizing support for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's position on peace with the Palestinians.

Falwell said he will ask some 200,000 evangelical pastors to urge their congregants to lobby Congress to support Netanyahu, who has recently faced criticism from President Clinton and some American Jews.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Palestinian Covenant retakes the stage as matter of debate

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Nearly two years after the Palestine National Council voted to draft a new charter, the subject is still creating a bitter controversy.

For months, the charter seemed all but forgotten in the delicate back-and-forth of the peace process.

But last week, on the eve of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Washington, the Israeli Cabinet spelled out the conditions it was demanding from the Palestinians — in the name of reciprocity — before Israel would authorize a further redeployment from rural areas of the West Bank.

The total annulment of the Palestinian Covenant topped the list of demands.

On April 24, 1996, the PNC, by a vote of 504-54, with 14 abstentions, passed a vaguely worded resolution that, in effect, canceled the clauses in its charter that call for the destruction of Israel.

The PNC, the supreme body representing all Palestinian political parties, also adopted a resolution calling on a legal committee of the organization to draft a new charter within six months.

Then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres hailed the vote, calling it "the most important change in the last 100 years."

Netanyahu, then the opposition leader, was more cautious, saying the vote was only a vague mandate giving a "committee the power to amend clauses sometime in the future."

Palestinian officials explained in the months immediately after the vote that no new covenant had been drafted because their Israeli counterparts had informally requested that the move be delayed.

Their reasoning was purely practical.

A new charter, the aides speculated, might recognize the Jewish state, but it could also give voice to the Palestinian goal of sovereign statehood with Jerusalem as the capital.

And last year, too, the Netanyahu government appeared to have all but put questions regarding the covenant on a back burner.

Last May, Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh, one of the key negotiators with the Palestinians, said in an interview, "There are more immediate issues on the agenda, and I just don't know how practical our demand is" regarding any changes in the covenant.

But last week, that view changed.

Indeed, it was Naveh himself who put together the list of Palestinian violations that needed to be corrected before Israel would agree to hand over any additional West Bank lands.

According to Naveh's recommendations, Israel was now demanding that the Palestinian legal committee be convened to redraft the charter — and that some 95 percent of it be scrapped.

Moreover, Israel demanded that the PNC convene once again to approve the new charter by at least two-thirds.

The Palestinian Covenant surfaced more than 33 years ago, on June 2, 1964.

The political manifesto of the Palestinians, it contains such sections as Article 9: "Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine"; and Article 19: "The partition of Palestine in 1947 and the establishment of the State of Israel are entirely illegal."

It took a lengthy and painful process, stained with many bloody clashes between Israelis and Palestinians, before Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat announced in Paris in 1989 that the covenant was "caduc," French for null and void. The declaration was

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharansky cancels trip

Israeli Trade and Industry Minister Natan Sharansky canceled his scheduled trip to Washington next week because of "pressing issues" in Israel, according to an Israeli spokesman in New York.

The trip is likely to occur in late February or early March, the spokesman added.

Jubilee chairman resigns

The chairman of the organizing committee for Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations resigned after two months on the job.

Yitzhak Modai'i was said to have stepped down over differences with Tourism Minister Moshe Katzav and frustration that not enough money was being allocated for the celebrations.

Those planning the celebrations have confronted numerous obstacles, from organizational problems to controversial proposals that included a call for a general amnesty for prisoners.

Ethiopians feel stigmatized

Israel's Ethiopian community criticized a recent decision by the Education Ministry to suspend classes at an Ethiopian immigrant caravan site after a number of workers were diagnosed with tuberculosis.

Labor Knesset member Adisu Massala, who is of Ethiopian descent, accused health officials of stigmatizing the community at a time when tuberculosis had also been found in Russian immigrant communities.

Better to flame-broil?

McDonald's restaurants in Israel are succumbing to their chief competitor's practice of flame-broiling hamburgers.

After opening its kosher chain in Israel, McDonald's acknowledged that the practice used by Burger King worked better on kosher meat. However, McDonald's intends to continue using flat griddles for making its burgers in the rest of the world.



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hailed as a sign of moderation, and it undoubtedly paved the way to the historic Declaration of Principles signed Sept. 13, 1993, on the White House lawn.

Four days before that ceremony, in an exchange of letters of mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, Arafat wrote then-Premier Yitzhak Rabin that the articles in the Palestinian Covenant that negate Israel's right to exist "are no longer practical and therefore invalid."

Arafat repeated his commitment to change the covenant in the May 4, 1994, Cairo Agreement that ratified the transfer of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho to Palestinian self-rule. In the Interim Agreement that was signed Sept. 28, 1995, in Washington — whereby Israel agreed to transfer six additional West Bank population centers to self-rule — the Palestinians again agreed to draft a new covenant.

The Palestinian Authority also agreed to "complete the process of revising" the charter in the Note for the Record attached to the Hebron Agreement reached almost exactly one year ago.

In the wake of last week's Cabinet demands, the Palestinians gave no indication that they would budge an inch regarding the charter. Indeed, they repeated their position that the PNC meeting of April 1996 had bid farewell to the old covenant.

"The PNC will not be reconvened on this issue," Dr. Ahmed Tibi, Arafat's Israeli adviser, said flatly. As far as he was concerned, "even if the members of the PNC all sing the Betar anthem, Netanyahu will not fulfill his commitments," Tibi said, referring to the nationalist Zionist youth movement.

On Sunday, before his departure for Washington, Netanyahu seemed to soften his position somewhat.

In an interview with CNN, the premier said "the atmosphere of the talks in Washington would be significantly improved if the Palestinians would dump the part of the PLO charter still calling for the destruction of Israel." Changing the charter, Netanyahu appeared to be saying, was not a precondition for any Israeli concessions.

Netanyahu was tacitly admitting that the charter was not a major obstacle to achieving mutual understanding.

Indeed the main obstacles continued to be the dispute over the size of the Israeli withdrawals and the sincerity of the Palestinian Authority's efforts to crack down on terror. For their part, the Palestinians reacted to the Israeli Cabinet's list of demands by preparing their own set, which Arafat was expected to present during a meeting Thursday with President Clinton.

One document, prepared by Tibi, points an accusing finger at "Israeli terror and incitement by individuals and organizations," presumably right-wing extremists seeking to avoid any rapprochement between the two sides.

The second, prepared by Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator, spelled out alleged Israeli violations of already signed commitments.

On the eve of his visit to Washington, Arafat radiated confidence.

In a speech Monday in the Gaza Strip, Arafat chalked up a new charge, claiming he was aware of Israeli plans for a possible takeover of the territories.

"Have they forgotten Beirut? Have they forgotten the intifada?" Arafat asked mockingly, referring to the Palestinian uprising.

Arafat then told the cheering crowd that nothing would stop the Palestinian people from creating their own Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

And whoever does not like it, Arafat said, repeating a phrase he has used before, "can go drink from the waters of the sea of Gaza." □

Jewish TV show in Ukraine celebrates fifth anniversary

MOSCOW (JTA) — A Jewish television show beamed throughout Ukraine marked its 5th anniversary last week.

Yachad, Hebrew for "together," broadcasts one hour a week on state-run television.

The program was the first such show in the former Soviet Union. Today, Ukraine boasts several regional Jewish television programs, but Yachad remains the only program in the former Soviet republic that is broadcast nationwide. □

JEWISH WORLD

Crown Heights suit settled

The City of New York settled a lawsuit with a Chasidic father and son who were beaten in Crown Heights, N.Y. during riots in the summer of 1991, according to the lawyer for the plaintiffs. Isaac Bitton and his son Yechiel alleged that New York City police officers who saw them being attacked did not come to their rescue.

Rioting began after a car in the motorcade of the late Lubavitch Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson struck and killed a black youth.

The Bittons' story made headlines when a picture of Yechiel Bitton crying over his father's bloodied body appeared on the cover of the New York Post during the rioting.

Evidence about Hitler presented

A German researcher uncovered what he described as proof that Adolf Hitler personally gave the order for the Final Solution.

Christian Gerlach's findings were presented on the 56th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference, when high-ranking Nazi officials drew up plans for the extermination of Europe's Jews.

Hitler did not attend the conference, but Gerlach said he uncovered documents in Russian archives indicating Hitler gave the order days before the conference was held.

Gerlach supported his theory using entries from the diaries of SS chief Heinrich Himmler and Nazi Propaganda Chief Josef Goebbels.

Belarus temple gets Torah

A Reform congregation in Belarus has received a Torah scroll as a gift from its sister congregation in Oklahoma.

The scroll, which the Minsk congregation Simcha received in a ceremony in the Belarussian capital last week, is being kept at a private apartment.

Simcha is the only Reform congregation in Belarus to have its own scroll.

The Belarussian Reform movement — which is relatively new in Belarus — does not have ordained rabbis or permanent synagogues, according to the leader of Simcha, Yakov Basin.

Basin said the congregation now wants to obtain a permanent meeting place that would house the scroll.

The Tulsa, Okla., and Minsk congregations have been linked through Yad L'Yad, or Hand-to-Hand, a program of the Washington-based Union of Councils for Soviet Jews. The 5-year-old project works to support Jewish communities and synagogues throughout the former Soviet Union.

Simcha, which is celebrating its fifth anniversary, is one of 12 Reform congregations in Belarus.

Orthodox ad campaign seeks to influence the Israeli public

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — On billboards, buses and in full-page newspaper advertisements, Israelis are being introduced to a new movement with a pro-Orthodox message on the conversion bill conflict.

The campaign, which has support from some secular individuals, is an effort to get such a message across to an Israeli public that has grown increasingly frustrated with religious coercion.

The advertising campaign echoes a similar one in the United States, where a group spearheaded by the fervently Orthodox Agudath Israel of America has launched a \$2 million campaign to explain its opposition to the introduction of religious pluralism in Israel.

Both campaigns come as a government-appointed committee of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform representatives is trying to reach a compromise regarding conversions in Israel.

Reform and Conservative rabbis currently have no legal authority to perform conversions in Israel.

But while the campaigns in Israel and the United States run under the same name — Am Echad (One People) — a spokesman for Agudath Israel in New York said there is no connection between the two.

"There is no connection at all except that we're fighting on the same side," said Rabbi Avi Shafran, an Agudah spokesman.

In Israel, one of the newspaper ads proclaim that "250,000 foreign workers want 'quickie' conversions."

Playing on Israeli fears that a flood of foreign workers applying for citizenship could strain the state's coffers, it goes on to ask readers if they agree.

The ad goes on to discuss "the danger threatening us" if Israel allows groups other than the Chief Rabbinate, be they ultra-Orthodox sects or Reform Jews, to perform conversions.

A woman answering the Tel Aviv number in the ads provides a news release from Am Echad, which says it is a "Movement for the Unity of the People," an apolitical movement set up by secular and religious Israelis.

The group says it recognizes the right of every Jew to live as he or she pleases; however, the entry ticket to the Jewish people must be according to the Orthodox interpretation of halachah, Jewish law.

One of four individuals listed on the news release is Arieh Zaritsky, a professor of genetics and bacteriology at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

"Why should we institute other types of conversions when Orthodox conversions are recognized by all of the Jewish people?" asked Zaritsky.

Zaritsky is also known as a founder of a group of secular backers of the Orthodox National Religious Party.

He claims his ad-hoc group has as many as 100 supporters, but he says he does not know who is funding the advertising campaign.

"I have no idea where the money comes from, and I don't want to know," Zaritsky said.

The public relations office handling the campaign also does not say who is footing the bill. And Moti Moral, a Tel Aviv advertiser responsible for the campaign, did not return several calls.

Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center, said his group carried out a comprehensive survey of the campaign in Israel and estimated it would cost \$700,000 to fund.

"This is a fictitious movement — it doesn't exist," he charged, saying that their message implying that 250,000 foreign workers would get phony conversions if liberal rabbis are recognized is false.

"The only quickie conversions we know about have been done by Orthodox rabbis," he said. □

Arafat expected to feel heat from Clinton on security issues

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat will hear a stark U.S. assessment of his failures in the security arena when he meets with President Clinton and his top foreign policy advisers this week.

According to U.S. officials, Clinton plans to warn Arafat to end his threats that violence will return to the West Bank if the peace process stalls.

At the same time, the president, who will welcome Arafat to the Oval Office on Thursday, two days after he welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, plans to press Arafat on the Palestinians' failure to rein in Hamas militants and seize illegal weapons.

Clinton will also continue his effort to formulate a plan that will get Israel and the Palestinian Authority back on the negotiating track.

The ideas being discussed include a phased further Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, contingent on specific Palestinian actions to combat terrorism.

"We came up with an approach that we thought, in the ballpark, would satisfy both sides' objectives," Clinton said in a television news interview on Wednesday.

Clinton described his day with Netanyahu as "difficult," but productive.

"The primary message" to Arafat is that he "needs to be realistic about what a further redeployment would look like, and he needs to understand the linkage between any movement forward by the Israelis and the question of security," said James Rubin, State Department spokesman.

At the same time, Arafat, who arrived in Washington on Wednesday, is likely to hear sympathy for the political constraints he is under.

Clinton told Netanyahu that he does not expect Arafat to agree, as Israel has demanded, to extradite to Israel accused terrorists from Palestinian-controlled areas.

But the United States does believe that there is much more the Palestinian Authority chairman can do to sustain a constant war against terrorists.

U.S. officials said Clinton also told Netanyahu that Arafat should complete the revisions to the Palestinian Covenant that calls for Israel's destruction.

But it is politically impossible for that to happen before more progress in the peace process, Clinton said, according to the officials.

Arafat's first order of business was to meet with State Department officials.

He was slated to have dinner Wednesday night with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Albright was then slated to meet one last time with the Israeli premier before Netanyahu's scheduled Wednesday night return to Israel.

His return to Israel was being anxiously awaited by some angry members of Knesset who have threatened to topple his government if Israel withdraws from a significant portion of the West Bank.

Gesher member of Knesset Michael Kleiner, who heads Greater Israel, a Knesset coalition of hard-liners opposed to any West Bank pullout, reiterated his threat to support a no-confidence motion if the Israeli premier tries to implement a troop redeployment.

But in the United States, Netanyahu wrapped up his three-day visit to Washington with continued voices of support from lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

As Netanyahu called upon a series of legislators — including House and Senate leaders — Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) launched a barrage of criticism at the White House for its Israel policy.

The House speaker, who had met Netanyahu earlier in the week, accused Clinton of operating "below the dignity of the United States of America" for not scheduling an official luncheon with Netanyahu only months after hosting a state dinner for the president of China.

After his White House meetings, Arafat has scheduled his only public event at a reception hosted by the Center for Middle East Peace and Economic Cooperation.

Arafat is also scheduled to tour the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum before leaving Washington on Friday afternoon. □

A demand for justice issued as Arafat arrives in Washington

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Members of Congress, Jewish leaders and the parents of American citizens killed in Palestinian terrorist attacks in Israel and the territories are urging the Clinton administration to demand that Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat extradite the suspected perpetrators for trial.

Nine Americans have been murdered by terrorists in Israel since the Oslo accords were signed in 1993.

The families of some of those victims joined together on Capitol Hill on Wednesday afternoon to issue an impassioned plea for justice.

The news conference, arranged by the Zionist Organization of America, was held in advance of President Clinton's meeting with Arafat at the White House on Thursday. The Oslo accords require the Palestinian Authority to transfer accused terrorists to Israel for prosecution, but Arafat has not complied.

Lawmakers and parents of the victims are calling on Arafat to surrender the terrorists, some of whom are currently being held in Palestinian custody or living under Palestinian control, to authorities in the United States.

The 1986 Anti-Terrorism Act permits the United States to prosecute those who murder American citizens abroad.

About 20 lawmakers sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright this week urging the administration to "make all diplomatic and legal efforts to guarantee that the terrorists guilty of killing and maiming Americans are brought to justice."

"There's a simple message here," said Rep. Steve Rothman (D-N.J.), who is a member of the House International Relations Committee.

"If you murder innocent Americans and tear innocent families apart, the United States of America will never forget and will demand justice until justice is realized." □