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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clinton phones Netanyahu

President Clinton telephoned Israeli Prime Benjamin Netanyahu to discuss the agreement reached this week between United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Iraq.

Netanyahu said he was confident Clinton would ensure that the conditions set by the United States regarding weapons inspections are fulfilled. [Page 4]

Progress reported in talks

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators made progress in talks about opening a Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian officials were reported as saying.

Israel's cabinet secretary, Danny Naveh, and the chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, were involved in the discussions, which also focused on the creation of a safe-passage route for Palestinians traveling between Gaza and the West Bank. [Page 3]

Mossad chief resigns

The head of Israel's foreign intelligence service resigned. Danny Yatom's resignation comes after a government inquiry that held him responsible for the failed assassination attempt on a Mossad leader in Jordan last September. Jordanian officials welcomed his resignation. [Page 3]

Clinton speaks to Jewish women

President Clinton emphasized the importance of child care in a speech before the National Council of Jewish Women in Washington.

"There are still too many kids that don't get off to the start they need," Clinton said.

In his first appearance before a Jewish convention since his second term began, Clinton praised the group's work in promoting child care. [Page 1]

Date set for Lileikis trial

The trial of alleged Lithuanian Nazi collaborator Aleksandras Lileikis is scheduled to begin March 4.

Lileikis, 91, is suspected of having handed Jews over to Nazi death squads during World War II, when he was a deputy head of the Nazi-organized Lithuanian secret police.

The case will be the first trial for Holocaust crimes in any of the three Baltic states since they gained their independence from the Soviet Union seven years ago.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Clinton turns to Jewish group for support for child care plan

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Twenty-five years after the National Council on Jewish Women issued a landmark study exposing the child care crisis in America, President Clinton turned to the group this week in his effort to build support for his child care initiative and his broader educational goals.

In his first personal appearance before a Jewish convention since his second term began, Clinton praised the group's work in promoting these issues. While many Jewish groups seek the president's presence, such appearances are rare.

Clinton's decision to speak in front of the women's activist organization was seen at least in part as an effort to recognize the pioneering work the 90,000-member NCJW has done in placing the issue on the nation's radar. In fact, not much has changed since NCJW — an advocacy and educational group that focuses mostly on issues related to women, children and families — issued its report, "Windows on Daycare."

Many of the same findings apply today: an acute shortage of care, a high turnover among caregivers, poor training, inadequate licensing, low reimbursement rates in some states and an overall lack of quality. While decrying the poor educational showing of American high school students in math and science and the failures of adults responsible for educating them, Clinton, in his speech, emphasized the importance of starting "with the basics" in areas such as child care.

"There are still too many kids that don't get off to the start they need," Clinton said at NCJW's Washington Institute, which the group holds for activists every three years.

Child care is one of the core issues on the group's agenda for the coming year. The more than 700 Jewish activists from across the country were slated to fan out across Capitol Hill this week to urge lawmakers to support legislation aimed at improving the quality of child care.

They also planned to lobby members of Congress to oppose school voucher initiatives and support continued funding for international family planning programs — the group's two other priority issues this year.

A number of different child care bills introduced by both Republicans and Democrats are pending in Congress.

"We know child care is needed now more than ever and we remind those on Capitol Hill who suggest that women should stay home that unfortunately many parents do not have that choice," said Nan Rich of Westin, Fla., the national president of NCJW. "Most women work outside the home out of economic necessity."

In wide-ranging remarks that touched on Iraq and campaign finance reform, Clinton also highlighted the success of an NCJW brainchild, a program called HIPPI — Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters.

Developed in 1969 by NCJW's research arm at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the program was designed to help parents with limited formal schooling provide education enrichment for their preschool children.

In 1986, Hillary Clinton invited Rich to Arkansas to talk to her and then-governor Clinton about the program, and Arkansas soon became the first state to implement it.

It has since expanded to 26 states, serving more than 13,000 families.

"If every child could be in that kind of program, it would do as much to strengthen families and the later success of children who are otherwise at risk as anything we could do," Clinton said. Clinton also reiterated the proposal he unveiled earlier this year for

MIDEAST FOCUS

Rabin portrait defaced

A vandal defaced a portrait of Yitzhak Rabin hanging in Israel's Knesset building by scratching an "X" over Rabin's face. Knesset security officials have opened an investigation.

Egypt foils bomb plot

Police in Egypt arrested five Muslim extremists suspected of planning to bomb the American and Israeli embassies in Cairo, according to an Arabic-language newspaper.

The Al-Hayat newspaper in London reported that the men are part of groups that want to overthrow the government of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Meimad to form party

A moderate religious movement in Israel again has decided to form an independent political party.

Officials of Meimad, whose earlier electoral efforts were unsuccessful, said they wanted to give a voice to observant Jews who take a moderate stand on such issues as negotiations with the Palestinians.

Hanegbi wins Likud vote

Israel's justice minister, Tzachi Hanegbi, was recently elected chairman of the Likud Party's Central Committee. In his victory speech, Hanegbi vowed that the primary system in the Likud would be eliminated. Likud officials said Hanegbi's victory represented a victory for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who drew the ire of the Likud's rank-and-file when he called for the suspension of party primaries last year.

EI Al plans PG section

Israel's national airline decided to set up a PG section in the rear of its planes, where only cartoons and nature movies will be shown. The move comes after complaints from some of EI Al's fervently Orthodox customers that the airline was showing racy in-flight movies.



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spending \$21.7 billion on child care programs over five years to improve the affordability, accessibility and quality of child care.

Clinton's message on child care clearly resonated with the NCJW participants, many of whom had to make creative arrangements with their own children in order to attend the four-day conference.

"It's a constant struggle to balance doing what's right as a professional and making sure that you take care of your child," said Amy Baker, director of NCJW's Center For the Child, which works to promote the well-being of children and families.

"You can't warehouse a kid, and, optimally, kids shouldn't be in child care 10 or 12 hours a day, but you don't always have that choice," said Debbie Greene of Dallas, Texas, a 42-year-old mother of two who teaches early childhood education.

"If you're going to have children in care, it needs to be quality care for their emotional, physical, social and intellectual well-being — it's imperative."

In appearing before the Jewish women's organization, Clinton was reaching out to one of his core constituencies. If his support among women has waned at all in the face of allegations about presidential peccadilloes, it was not apparent in this group.

Clinton worked the rope lines for nearly 20 minutes, shaking hands with just about every eager-faced participant within reach, even hoisting up a baby. He appeared to linger under the glow of the klieg lights as the strains of triumphant music blared from the PA system, including the theme from "Superman."

"We feel really honored that he thinks so highly about the National Council of Jewish Women, and we certainly feel the same way about him," said Helene Wichner of San Pablo, Calif. □

Swiss government rejects refugee's restitution claim

By Fredy Rom

ZURICH (JTA) — Should Switzerland pay restitution for its wartime policy regarding Jewish refugees?

The resounding no offered by the Swiss Cabinet has received an equally resounding condemnation from Jewish leaders here and abroad.

The Cabinet, known as the Federal Council, rejected last week the \$68,000 compensation claim of Charles Sonabend, a World War II Jewish refugee whose parents were murdered in Auschwitz after Swiss authorities deported them in 1942.

"The Federal Council is aware of the personal tragedy that the fate of his family has meant for Charles Sonabend," the government said in a statement, adding that such claims "have expired with time and are not materially justified."

Sonabend's lawyer, Marc Richter, retorted that this was a "cheap argument," adding that Swiss authorities were to blame for years of delay because they had only recently allowed former refugees like Sonabend to see their family's deportation files.

Sonabend is seeking damages under a new Swiss law that allows individuals to make liability claims against public officials. The law leaves the decision to the Cabinet, but allows for an appeal to Switzerland's Supreme Court.

The executive director of the World Jewish Congress, Elan Steinberg, said in an interview with Swiss Television, "This is a sad day for Swiss justice and morality."

Echoing that stance, Rolf Bloch, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Switzerland, told Swiss Television that the "refusal of the government to pay restitution is not acceptable from a moral point of view."

Sonabend, a 67-year-old resident of London who filed the damage claim last year, intends to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court, his lawyer said.

Sonabend was 11 years old when he and his parents entered Switzerland in 1942 from Belgium. Two days later his parents were arrested and deported to Nazi-occupied France. They were then sent to Auschwitz.

His suit focused renewed attention on the refugee policy of Switzerland, which expelled more than 30,000 Jews during the war, most of whom died.

At the same time, however, Switzerland provided haven to some 25,000 Jewish refugees, who survived the war together with Switzerland's 20,000 Jewish citizens. □

JEWISH WORLD

Toronto man faces deportation

A Canadian federal judge ruled that a Toronto man lied about his activities in Nazi-occupied Ukraine when he immigrated to Canada in 1951.

The ruling opens the way for the denaturalization and deportation of Wasily Bogutin.

Bogutin, 88, has been accused of participating in the execution of a Jewish family and other brutal acts while serving as a police official in southeastern Ukraine from 1941 to 1943.

Shanghai shul to be restored

A historic synagogue in Shanghai will be declared a historic landmark and restored, the mayor of the Chinese city told a visiting delegation of U.S. religious leaders.

The leaders were appointed by President Clinton to travel to China to investigate the climate of religious freedom there.

Communist slams minorities

The leader of Russia's Communist Party is stirring up racist sentiments.

"One can seldom see a Russian face in the government," Gennady Zyuganov told a rally in downtown Moscow, where some 15,000 people gathered this week to mark the 80th anniversary of the creation of the Red Army.

It was unclear whether his attempt to distinguish between ethnic Russians and minorities living within the country was directed exclusively at Jews.

But given the prominence of some Jews in the Yeltsin administration, it is difficult to imagine that he was excluding Jews from his attack.

Zyuganov, who placed second to Yeltsin in the 1996 presidential elections, recently called for the imposition of policies to revive the power and prestige of ethnic Russians.

Zyuganov told the rally that the opposition will take to the streets in April or May to "force the regime to resign."

Verdict in Avi Weiss suit

A jury found that Howard University in Washington and a former campus security guard were guilty of unlawful battery against Jewish activist Rabbi Avi Weiss and must pay him \$5,000 in compensatory damages.

The jury cleared the university of charges that it had violated Weiss' civil and constitutional rights.

Weiss had claimed that the security guard grabbed a sign from him and struck him on the hand while ordering him and four other protesters to stop their April 1994 demonstration outside an auditorium where Nation of Islam official Khalid Muhammad was appearing.

Israelis, Palestinians resume talks, but thorny issues remain

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have returned to the bargaining table once again.

But one of the thorniest issues left unresolved from their 1995 Interim Agreement — Israel's further redeployment from rural West Bank areas — seems unlikely to be resolved soon. In discussions that were expected to continue all week, Israel's Cabinet secretary, Danny Naveh, and the chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, met Monday to discuss such issues as the opening of a Palestinian airport and seaport in the Gaza Strip and the creation of a safe-passage route for Palestinians traveling between Gaza and the West Bank.

Indeed, Palestinian officials were reported as saying Tuesday that progress had been achieved on the airport.

But the issue that has garnered the most headlines — the redeployment — appears likely to remain contested, given the position attributed this week to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. According to the newspaper, Netanyahu is intent on holding on to some 64 percent of the West Bank, regardless of how much land the United States calls on Israel to turn over.

Because the Palestinian Authority already controls some 27 percent of West Bank lands, the premier's reported comments indicated that he would not turn over more than 9 percent of the West Bank as part of a further redeployment.

This 9 percent — which is in line with earlier comments made by the premier — falls significantly lower than Palestinian and American expectations. An American proposal that was put off until after the Persian Gulf crisis ended calls on Israel to transfer 13.1 percent in three phases during a three-month period, according to Ha'aretz.

The American plan also calls on the Palestinians to fulfill their obligations, particularly cracking down on terror, as the redeployments are carried out. □

Head of Mossad resigns after inquiry blames him

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The head of Israel's foreign intelligence service resigned this week after a government inquiry held him responsible for the failed assassination attempt last September on a Hamas leader in Jordan.

Danny Yatom agreed, at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's request, to stay on until a new director of the Mossad was appointed.

Though Netanyahu had approved the plan to assassinate Khaled Mashaal, the government-appointed commission probing the affair last week cleared him of any blame. The commission, headed by a former Defense Ministry director general, Yosef Chekhanover, reserved its criticism for Yatom, saying he bore "a heavy responsibility" for the flawed mission.

The failed operation seriously strained relations between Israel and Jordan, which reportedly refused to reinstate security cooperation with the agency unless Yatom left. Pressure for him to step down reportedly also came from within the agency.

In his letter of resignation, Yatom said he categorically disagreed with the conclusions of the Chekhanover Commission, but "as someone who bears overall responsibility for Mossad activities, I have no intention of ignoring the report and therefore I decided to submit my resignation."

Yatom had served as military adviser to former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Prior to that, he had served in a number of senior positions within the Israel Defense Force, including a stint as the head of army intelligence.

Jordan's foreign minister, Jawad Anani, told Israel Radio's Arabic service that while Yatom's resignation was purely an internal Israeli matter, Jordan viewed it as a "step in the right direction." □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Crisis with Iraq reverberates despite inspections agreement*By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It appeared for a while this week that Israel and its neighbors were the only countries unable to get used to the idea that there might not be a Gulf War after all.

Frustrated Palestinians and Jordanians proceeded this week with violent demonstrations to show solidarity with Iraq — as if no agreement had been signed in Baghdad, as if President Clinton had not given his tentative support to the pact.

As Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat was proclaiming in Gaza City that the agreement U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan reached Sunday with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was “a very important start to achieving real peace,” hundreds of university students there were burning Israeli and American flags, chanting: “We love you, Saddam, we will fight for you!”

And similarly in Jordan, security forces clamped a curfew on the southern city of Ma'an to put an end to weekend pro-Iraqi demonstrations. Paradoxically, it is taking the Palestinians, the Jordanians — and the Israelis — more time to recuperate from the war-that-never-was than the Iraqis.

Even in Israel, the distribution of gas masks to the population continued as if war were still just around the corner. The turnout at the distribution centers declined somewhat, but Israelis were still worried as they recalled sitting in sealed rooms as Iraq rained 39 Scud missiles on the country in 1991.

At the same time, government officials continued to debate whether to distribute antibiotics to the entire population to counter a biological weapons attack — despite the low likelihood of an Iraqi attack employing either conventional or biological weapons.

Israeli leaders continued to talk of the need to preserve some measure of preparedness because Saddam was so “unpredictable.”

This was the note struck by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was quoted as telling the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that while the Iraqi threat may have been eliminated in the short run, Israel must get used to the concept of a Middle East with missiles as long as Saddam remains in power.

At the same time, the premier also voiced optimism that Clinton would ensure that the conditions set by the United States regarding Iraqi weapons inspections are fulfilled.

Netanyahu made the latter comment Tuesday after Clinton telephoned him to discuss the agreement reached this week.

Even if the crisis is indeed over, it exposed certain unavoidable truths about the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

The 1991 Persian Gulf War opened a window of opportunity that ultimately set the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in motion.

But this time around, with Clinton unable to assemble the broad Arab coalition that backed the earlier conflict, the confrontation with Saddam sent shock waves throughout the region that are likely to be felt long after the present crisis is forgotten.

The demonstrations held day after day by the Palestinians and Jordanians were more an expression of frustration with their leadership and with the stalemated peace process than a show of real solidarity with Saddam. Throughout the Arab world, Saddam was hailed as the proud Arab leader who had the guts to face up to the Americans and tell them no. Even in Cairo, where President

Hosni Mubarak adopted a critical attitude toward Saddam, hundreds of Islamic students took to the streets, undeterred by Egyptian police. Frustration was strongest among the Palestinians because of the 11-month-long impasse in the negotiations with Israel and the feeling that Arafat is not delivering the goods.

For Arafat, the demonstrations created discomfort because they came at time when he is desperate to seek American support to break the negotiating deadlock with Israel.

Arafat instructed his security forces not to let the demonstrations get out of hand. At least one pirate radio station and one pirate television station were closed after they carried pro-Iraqi and anti-American programs. The Palestinian people repeatedly ignored the anti-demonstration directive, and Palestinian Police Chief Ghazi Al-Jabali was widely criticized for ordering his troops to disperse demonstrations.

In Jordan, the frustration is more of an economic nature. Many Jordanians feel that they have yet to see the economic fruits of the peace signed with Israel in 1994.

Ma'an, with a population of 100,000, had been the scene of anti-government demonstrations in the past, particularly after the so-called bread riots of two years ago, which came after the authorities cut bread subsidies. In this latest round of violence, one person was killed and 24 injured.

The Jordanian authorities also found themselves in a delicate position. Because of the peace agreement with Israel, and the growing political and economic dependency on the United States, King Hussein could not repeat the 1991 Gulf War scenario and support Saddam.

But at the same time, he could not ignore certain economic facts of life. Although Hussein and Saddam have not exchanged words since the Gulf War, the two countries share a long border and engage in lively trade.

Dozens of trucks cross the border daily from Jordan into Iraq loaded with agricultural and food products. Annual Jordanian exports to Iraq stand at \$450 million, compared to the \$30 million in total trade volume between Israel and Jordan.

In addition, Jordan still receives most of its oil supplies from Iraq, at half price. The main reason for Jordanian concern during the latest crisis was the fear that once hostilities broke out, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees might cross the border into Jordan and create instability within the monarchy.

Even so, Jordanian officials could not tolerate the demonstrations because they were well aware that the demonstrations could soon turn against the regime itself.

For all the shock waves still reverberating in the region, Palestinian and Israeli officials are beginning to realize that the peace process may return to center stage.

Arafat welcomed the possibility of an agreement that could defuse the Iraqi crisis, saying he hoped it would allow for renewed attention on the peace process.

Netanyahu, also seeing this possibility, rushed to propose in a television interview Monday that the two sides engage in Camp David-style discussions to reach a final settlement.

Ziad Abu Ziad, a member of the Palestinian legislative council, reacted on behalf of Arafat that the Palestinian Authority would be willing to join in such negotiations — on the condition that Israel honor its previous commitments to the Palestinians.

All of which sounds like old times — before Saddam stole all the headlines. □