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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Little optimism for talks

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright arrived in London to prepare for scheduled meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said Albright was not optimistic about reaching a breakthrough. Israeli officials also downplayed expectations. [Page 1]

Israel sentences Hamas terrorist

An Israeli military court sentenced a Hamas member to four life terms plus five years for his role in a terror cell responsible for killing 11 Israelis.

Rayad Abu Hamadiyah was convicted in the 1996 murder of Israeli soldier Sharon Edri and for his involvement in last year's terror bombing at the Cafe Apropos in central Tel Aviv, among other charges.

NATO bill may help survivors

Legislation passed last week by the U.S. Senate to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization contains an amendment requiring former Eastern Bloc countries to aid in the recovery of life insurance records lost during the Holocaust.

The amendment, drafted by Sens. Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.) and Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), suggests that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright raise the issue during future meetings with the governments of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

The three nations are seeking entry into the NATO alliance.

Eastern European nations that nationalized private property after World War II are believed to possess vital records about unpaid Holocaust victims' insurance policies.

Argentina plans extradition

Argentina will likely extradite a former concentration camp commander to Croatia within a week, according to a government official in Buenos Aires.

Argentine officials arrested Dinko Sakic last week after Croatia requested his extradition to stand charges for war crimes committed while he headed the Jasenovac camp from 1942 to 1944.

Some 85,000 Jews, Serbs and Gypsies were murdered at the camp, run by Croatia's Nazi puppet regime.

Albright confronts dim prospects for advancing Mideast peace talks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It appears unlikely that the stalemated Middle East peace process will spring into motion any time soon.

As U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright prepared to hold separate meetings in London this week with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, both American and Israeli officials were downplaying expectations of a breakthrough.

Indeed, as Albright arrived Saturday in London to prepare for the meetings, the U.S. State Department spokesman, James Rubin, said Albright was not optimistic about bridging differences between the two sides.

Rubin said her pessimism was based on preliminary telephone reports from U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, who was in the Middle East last week to talk with the two sides prior to the London meetings, and from Vice President Al Gore, who tried his hand at peacemaking last week during a visit to mark Israel's jubilee.

Nor was there much optimism emerging from Israel, which along with the Palestinian Authority has been reiterating the same positions for months.

The talks have been stalled for some 14 months. The Palestinian Authority broke off negotiations with Israel after infrastructure work began for a new Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem.

Three ensuing Hamas suicide bombings of Israeli targets in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv dealt a further blow to hopes of bringing Israel and the Palestinians back to the path of trust and compromise needed to give substance to the Oslo accords.

At a joint news conference with Gore last Friday, Netanyahu said the gaps between the Israeli and Palestinian positions were "considerable."

During his conversations with Netanyahu, including a surprise two-hour session Sunday before he traveled on to Egypt, Gore failed to convince the premier to accept a reported American proposal for Israel to redeploy from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank in exchange for specific Palestinian steps to crack down on terror.

Arafat, who met with Gore in the West Bank town of Ramallah early Sunday morning, has accepted the U.S. proposal, but wants an additional redeployment by the end of this year. Israel maintains that the proposal would be harmful to its security interests. It has offered 9 percent and balks at offering an additional redeployment, saying any further transfer of West Bank territory should only take place as part of the final-status negotiations.

Some Western and Arab diplomats say Israeli officials have told them privately they might hand over as much as 11 percent. Palestinian officials, who have been warning for months that the region could explode into violence, are now reiterating their impatience with what they view as Israel's intransigence.

Arafat told journalists in the Gaza Strip on Sunday that Israel would be squarely to blame if no progress were achieved in London. The talks' success would "depend on Netanyahu's actions because the problem does not lie anywhere else," he said.

Palestinian negotiator Nabil Sha'ath charged that Israel's wrangling over the redeployment percentages proved that the Jewish state was refusing to accept already-signed accords.

"They are dragging their feet and hoping that the whole process will change," he said. "If it changes, it will be for the worse, not the better." But, in the run-up to the London talks, Israel showed no signs of changing its stance. On Sunday, Netanyahu

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. rejects Sheinbein plan

U.S. officials reportedly turned down a compromise under which an American teen-ager would return to the United States from Israel to face murder charges.

Under the compromise, Samuel Sheinbein would return voluntarily to the United States, but serve out his sentence in Israel if he were convicted. Meanwhile, lawyers fighting Sheinbein's extradition called their last witness to appear before a Jerusalem court.

Fighting erupts in Lebanon

Fighting heated up in southern Lebanon, with Israeli forces firing artillery at suspected Hezbollah positions after the Shi'ite gunmen launched mortar fire at positions of the Israel-allied South Lebanon Army. The fighting took place after a Hezbollah gunman was killed in a skirmish Saturday.

Surrogate birth in Israel

The second surrogate birth to occur in Israel took place during last week's Independence Day celebrations. The emotional hardships described by the first woman to serve as a surrogate in Israel prompted Israeli officials to re-evaluate government policy. But the second surrogate mother said she had no regrets or problems linked to the birth.

Canceled dance sparks debate

During an angry demonstration in Tel Aviv, Israeli artists accused the National Religious Party of artistic censorship. Education and Culture Minister Yitzhak Levy, a member of the NRP, countered that any state ceremony or event should be sensitive to all sectors of the public.

The demonstration was sparked by a decision of the Batsheva Dance Troupe to cancel their performance at an extravaganza celebrating Israel's jubilee after religious groups protested their stripping down to their underwear during the performance.

spokesman David Bar-Illan reiterated the Israeli position, saying it would be "utterly impossible" for Israel to accept a 13 percent redeployment.

An Israeli official traveling with Netanyahu to London was quoted as saying that Israel would like the London talks to focus more on the future course of the peace process — the timing for starting the final-status talks in particular — than on the exact percentages of an Israeli redeployment.

Despite Israel's rejection of the 13 percent redeployment figure, Israeli officials quoted by the daily Ha'aretz believed that the United States would not present an ultimatum for the acceptance of its proposals and would continue its mediation efforts.

Gore, the highest-ranking foreign dignitary to attend the Jewish state's jubilee, got a first-hand glimpse of the difficulties confronting American mediators.

After meeting with Netanyahu on Sunday, Gore traveled on to Egypt for discussions with President Hosni Mubarak. Gore later conceded to reporters that both sides had a "long way to go" before resolving their differences.

Using the careful language of other American officials — many of whom have tried unsuccessfully to nudge the peace process forward — Gore spoke of the "extraordinary" opportunity for peace being offered at the London talks.

"The stage is set for progress. Progress in these discussions would have very significant leverage for the future in the entire region," he said.

Observers concur that the stage is set — but they find little reason to believe that the actors in the peace process drama are ready to move the action forward. □

State Department: Palestinians can do more to combat terrorism

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Palestinian Authority cooperated with Israel to combat terrorism last year, but still needs to make greater efforts in this area, according to a recent State Department report.

In its annual report, "Patterns of Global Terrorism," the State Department also said that despite Syria's stated commitment to the peace process, Damascus has not acted to stop anti-Israeli attacks by the Islamic fundamentalist group Hezbollah and other terrorist groups.

Some 304 acts of international terrorism occurred last year, eight more than in 1996, the State Department said. But the figure for 1997 was still one of the lowest annual totals recorded since 1971, when the State Department began keeping track of such acts. The attacks killed 221 people, compared with 312 in 1996 and 177 in 1995.

The number of wounded also was down as compared with last year — 693 as opposed to 2,912. The report said the Middle East witnessed some of the world's most horrific acts of terrorism in 1997, including three deadly suicide bombing attacks carried out against Israelis by Hamas that killed 24 and wounded more than 420.

The region also had the largest number of terrorist victims — 105 dead and 375 wounded. The deadliest attack of the year occurred at a temple in Luxor, Egypt, where Islamic extremists slaughtered 62 people.

As Israel continued to face terrorist attacks by groups opposed to the peace process, the Palestinian Authority pre-empted several anti-Israeli attacks, including several planned suicide bombings, the report said.

"At the same time, more effort is needed by the PA to enhance its bilateral cooperation with Israel and its unilateral fight against terrorism," the report said.

Iran remained the world's leading "state sponsor of terrorism," carrying out at least 13 assassinations, according to the report.

The State Department designated the same seven countries as last year — Iran, Cuba, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria — as state sponsors of terrorism, making them subject to U.S. sanctions. It said there was no evidence directly linking Cuba, Iraq, North Korea or Syria to terrorist acts last year, but that those countries continued to harbor terrorists. The report said Syria continues to provide safe haven and support for several terrorist groups, while it "assists the resupply of Hezbollah and Palestinian rejectionist groups operating in Lebanon." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Year-old magazine aims to catalyze Polish Jewry

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Why is Midrasz magazine different from all other Jewish publications?

Because Midrasz is the only Jewish monthly published in Poland — and because on Passover it celebrated its first birthday. This first year has seen Midrasz grow from an optimistic experiment into a respected journal that publishes provocative new articles, commentary, cultural essays, poetry and fiction each month.

With a print run of 2,500, it reaches a significant proportion of Poland's emerging Jewish community and is fast becoming that community's most important voice.

"I'm a great believer in Lenin's maxim that a newspaper is a great collective organizer," Konstanty Gebert, Midrasz's editor in chief, said in an interview.

"We're trying to get this Jewish community together again. There is no one single Jewish institution in Poland today to which all Jews can relate without antagonism, without problems," he said.

Gebert, 44, would like Midrasz, pronounced "Midrash," to be such an institution.

"We don't tell people in what way they should be Jewish, or even that they ought to express their Jewishness at all," he said. "We simply want to show them that Jewishness is something so interesting they'll be sorry to miss it!"

Poland has seen a surge of Jewish activity since the fall of communism, as hundreds if not thousands of people have stepped forward to reclaim Jewish roots in the new atmosphere of religious freedom. Midrasz — Hebrew for "commentary" — was launched with a generous grant from the New York-based Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, which has sponsored numerous programs for Poland's Jews.

A longtime Jewish activist in Poland and a well-known underground militant in the anti-Communist Solidarity movement of the 1980s, Gebert quit his job as foreign correspondent and columnist at *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland's largest circulation daily, to take the helm at Midrasz. "I was waiting for years for a decent, Polish-language Jewish magazine to appear so that I could write for it," he said. "It eventually dawned on me that if I didn't create one, I wouldn't have one."

Gebert works with a staff of five in a one-room office at Warsaw's bustling Jewish center, located next door to the city's only synagogue. Staff members — like the content of the magazine — reflect the diversity of the new Polish Jewish community.

"I'm religious, the rest of the staff is secular," said Gebert. "We are divided in the strength of our Zionist commitment, from a strong commitment to a very strong Diaspora identity."

Midrasz's analyses of the Torah are popular with its readers. "We want to reintroduce the habit of talking [about] the Torah, making it again a living presence in peoples' lives," Gebert said. And the magazine does not shy away from controversy.

A cover story on kashrut in Poland produced a strong reaction. The issue also revealed kashrut problems at a restaurant that advertises itself as kosher.

Another story, on Jews who converted to Christianity — an issue of some importance in Poland, where thousands of Jewish war orphans were raised as Catholics by foster parents — provoked criticism from some Orthodox circles.

"We want to generate controversy," Gebert said. "We want to show that Jewishness is not all Shoah, anti-Semitism and 'Fiddler on the Roof.'"

Midrasz also devotes a lot of attention to Jewish life in neighboring countries, and its literary section has attracted the Polish Jewish literary elite. But the fact that the magazine is in Polish has alienated some among the generation of Holocaust survivors, and its attitude toward Orthodoxy has irritated the Orthodox chief rabbi.

"We are being read. We are being argued about," said Gebert. "And if someone decides not to read us anymore, that means he cares about his version of Jewishness so much that he will not stand ours. From a Jewish perspective, that's not so bad."

Gebert's strategy seems to be working. Sales are growing at a modest-but-steady rate, and the first ads have appeared. "This is important in a country where associating oneself with Jewish undertakings is not necessarily good for business," he said. □

Senate passes Holocaust bill

The U.S. Senate unanimously approved a bill to create a presidential commission to study Holocaust victims' assets in the United States.

The proposed commission, approved last week by the Senate Banking Committee, would be charged with examining the fate of dormant bank accounts, artworks, insurance policies, looted gold and a range of other assets that arrived in the United States during and after World War II. The Clinton administration supports the measure, and a similar bill is pending in the House.

Neo-Nazis rally in Leipzig

Thousands of German neo-Nazis rallied in Leipzig, blasting Chancellor Helmut Kohl for not doing enough to fight record unemployment. Police turned water cannons on dozens of leftist extremists to keep them away from the rally by the extreme-right National Party of Germany. The May Day rally followed a strong showing of another extreme-right party, the German People's Union, in a recent state election.

New York opens trade office

New York state opened its first trade office in Israel. Gov. George Pataki said he had chosen to station the office in Jerusalem to emphasize that it was the "undivided capital of Israel." Pataki, who visited Israel with a New York delegation to celebrate the Jewish state's jubilee, also supported Israeli construction at Har Homa.

Norway proposes compensation

Norway proposed setting aside some \$60 million to compensate Jews for property lost and sufferings endured during World War II.

"We have an obligation to make a historic and moral settlement for what happened," Prime Minister Kjell Bondevik was quoted as saying in a speech to mark Israel's Independence Day.

Some 2,000 Jews lived in Norway before the 1940 Nazi invasion. About half were sent to Auschwitz, where only 20 survived.

Uzbekistan passes religion law

The former Soviet republic of Uzbekistan passed a law requiring all religious groups to register with the state.

President Islam Karimov had called for the law because of a rise in fundamentalist Islam that he said had led to increased violence in the Central Asian country.

Human rights activists charge that the new law would further the government's practice of arbitrarily arresting individuals for their beliefs rather than on the basis of criminal activity.

Spate of racial hate crimes hits Northern Californian towns

By Leslie Katz

Northern California Jewish Bulletin

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — A spate of racial hate has hit Northern California in recent months.

The most recent event in the spree, which has included cross burnings, occurred last month in the San Francisco suburb of Santa Rosa when someone stuffed Ku Klux Klan fliers into free copies of an advertising publication and then delivered the newspapers.

Picking up their copies of the Classified Gazette, Santa Rosa residents found fliers titled "Political Program of the American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan."

The fliers seek new recruits and promise, among other things, that the Klan will "place trained, patriotic white economists in charge of our economy and punish the Jew tycoons and leeches who have brought America to the brink of financial disaster."

The Klan, the flier states, will also remove blacks and "other inferior beings from our white schools. No longer will our children be forced to go to school with wild jungle savages. The Klan will no longer permit liberals, race traitors and Jews to poison our children's minds with race mixing, Communist propaganda and perversion."

In recent months, similar fliers have been placed in inserts in free newspapers, coupon books and real estate magazines in Texas and western Pennsylvania.

The Classified Gazette issued a statement denying any responsibility for the fliers and is offering a reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the act.

Whether or not a crime was committed has yet to be determined, however, because free speech has broad protections under the First Amendment.

In the fliers, the American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, a group with 12 chapters around the country, lists its national headquarters in California's San Joaquin Valley.

But Barbara Bergen, executive director of the regional Anti-Defamation League, believes its presence in Northern California is small.

"It's likely there are a few disgruntled people who live on hate and are determined to cause problems, make people suspicious of one another," she said.

Bergen says it's hard to pinpoint a cause for the recent KKK activity. She does see it, however, as part of a rise in general anti-government, anti-minority sentiment among militia and white supremacist groups as well as some religious extremists.

"It has to do with the changing demographics in our society," she said, "a concern about loss of power and influence that may be real or imagined.

"People who are generally insecure may be threatened by the fact California is becoming more diverse, that minorities and women are present in all walks of life, in all careers, in all levels of achievement."

The fliers that appeared in Santa Rosa also appeared on the lawns of some residents of the central California town of Stockton earlier this year.

Jason Gwasdoff, Temple Israel's rabbi, is aware of some Klan activity in the communities outlying Stockton.

"That was a wake-up call, a reminder not to be so complacent," he said.

At about the same time, the nearby town of Lodi witnessed two cross burnings.

In January, less than 24 hours after Martin Luther King Day, someone set a wooden cross ablaze on the lawn of Tokay High School.

The two men accused of the act, Gary Lee Howard Jr., 22, and Shawn Vernon Lyman, 28, have been charged with a misdemeanor hate crime.

Local leaders are exploring ways to make cross burnings on public school campuses punishable as felonies.

Several weeks later, meanwhile, another cross was burned on an overpass over one of Lodi's major thoroughfares. □

Argentine case to be tried under new hate crime law

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Late at night on July 1, 1995, Claudio Salgueiro was looking for cigarettes near his house in the comfortable middle-class neighborhood of Belgrano.

He heard a voice calling out, "Hey you, yid."

Salgueiro, who is not Jewish, kept walking. Suddenly, a fist landed hard on his face.

Salgueiro fell on the sidewalk. As he tried to protect himself from a shower of kicks, he heard his assailants insult him.

"Jews have to die. You are filth," said an attacker.

Bleeding and in pain, Salgueiro was dragged to a nearby park and beaten again.

Before passing out, he heard his attackers discussing burning him alive. They also broke into a chant: "Death to the Rolling Stones, rock-and-roll and Jews! Long live the Fuhrer!"

Hours later, Salgueiro was found by neighbors and taken to a hospital. He had sustained serious injuries to his back, hands and eyes. His face was a bloody, bloated mess.

In the following days, the victim learned he had been attacked by a neo-Nazi gang that had mistaken him for a Jewish neighbor.

Salgueiro, who is a Catholic of Portuguese descent, identified three of his six attackers, who were subsequently arrested.

Now, for the first time in Argentine history, the skinheads will be tried under the harsh terms of a 1995 anti-discrimination law.

The law doubles the punishment for any crime committed with a racist, xenophobic or biased purpose.

The three skinheads, who refused to name their accomplices, face charges for aggravated assault.

The case has awakened much interest in Argentina, where security officials have warned lately of a "mild growth" in neo-Nazi activities.

The prosecutor, Miguel Romero, announced that he will ask the three-judge tribunal to have the accused serve at least three years in jail, plus an additional 18 months for their "political and racist motivations."

Romero said in an interview that he will use the case "to expose neo-Nazi ideology as it is today in this country" and will try to show that the attack against Salgueiro is consistent with "their prejudice against Jews, homosexuals and immigrants from Bolivia and Paraguay." □