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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Albright remains in London

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright London remained overnight in London for a second, unscheduled round of talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Despite an intensive diplomatic effort, no progress was reported after the first round of talks.

Swiss bank settles claim

A Swiss bank settled a claim by a Holocaust survivor who was unable to retrieve what she said were millions of dollars left to her by her father, according to her lawyer.

The terms of the settlement between Credit Suisse and 71-year-old Estelle Sapir do not permit disclosure of the amount, the lawyer added. The settlement was officially announced by Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), the chairman of the U.S. Senate Banking Committee.

Milo plans run for premiership

The popular mayor of Tel Aviv announced that he would run against Benjamin Netanyahu for the post of Israeli premier in 2000. Roni Milo said he would quit the Likud Party and run as part of a new centrist party in order to provide what he called more moderate views on the peace process and to reduce the influence of religious extremists.

Vanunu parole refused

Israeli officials refused to parole Mordechai Vanunu, saying his early release would harm the country's security. Vanunu has served 12 years of an 18-year sentence he was given for disclosing Israel's nuclear weapons capabilities to The Times of London. Vanunu's lawyer said he would appeal the prison board's decision.

German party plans another run

A far-right party that scored a surprise success in recent German state elections announced it plans to run in another election in September.

The German People's Union, which won 13 percent of the vote last month in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, hopes to repeat its success in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, another eastern state where high unemployment has fueled anti-foreigner sentiment.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Gore's foray into diplomacy poses risks and opportunity

By Matthew Dorf

JERUSALEM (JTA) — By the time Air Force Two left Ben-Gurion Airport for the second and final time over the weekend, U.S. Vice President Al Gore had done much more than celebrate Israel's 50th anniversary.

He had made his biggest foray into the diplomatic quagmire of the Middle East.

Hoping to capitalize on Gore's sympathetic ear, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had tried, in vain by all accounts, to persuade Gore that the United States' ideas in the peace process endanger Israel's security.

For his part, Gore, hoping to capitalize on his relationship with Netanyahu, told the Israeli leader in more than seven hours of talks that the time had come to think about the current impasse in the peace process in different terms.

Gore prevailed on both Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to ensure that the moment does not pass without progress because the opportunity may not return.

Gore's trip came on the eve of this week's London talks, where U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright formally presented an American plan that includes an Israeli redeployment from an additional 13.1 percent of the West Bank.

The staged further withdrawal would be contingent on specific Palestinian steps to crack down on terrorists.

The vice president's first public solo venture into the Israeli-Palestinian impasse could pose risks for his unofficial presidential campaign for the year 2000 if the process continues to disintegrate.

On the other hand, in the event of an unlikely breakthrough, Gore, who used his Israel trip in part to reach out to the American Jewish electorate, would likely receive some of the credit.

Regardless of the developments in the peace process, Gore's trip, if his reception in Israel is any indication, has likely boosted his standing among many in the Jewish community.

Gore, who stressed time and time again that he had not come to Israel to negotiate, spent much of his time expressing extraordinary solidarity— even for a seasoned politician — with the people of Israel and Jews in general.

Gore sought to capitalize on some of the good will he fostered while in Israel and requested a last-minute meeting with Netanyahu, after a post-midnight session with Arafat, to explain what he had heard from Arab leaders.

Gore left Israel last Friday for Saudi Arabia and returned Saturday night to travel to the Palestinian self-rule areas. He then went on to Cairo before returning to Washington early Monday. Although it was planned well before officials scheduled this week's London peace talks, Gore's visit to Israel evolved from what had been planned as a celebration of Israel's jubilee to include a heavy dose of peace talks.

According to a senior Israeli official, Netanyahu in part used the meetings to feel out Gore's unity with Clinton and Albright, who are pushing the U.S. plan. The Israeli premier found Gore in sync with the administration he represents, the official said.

Nonetheless, Netanyahu used the sessions to reach out to Gore. Israeli reports said Netanyahu, for the first time, committed himself to a larger redeployment than the 9 percent he had reportedly been willing to undertake.

The trip came as many American Jews continue to wait and see how the U.S. peace

MIDEAST FOCUS

Offensive Rabin photo posted

A nude photo composite of the late Yitzhak Rabin was posted in a Jerusalem playground.

Police quickly removed the photo, which was glued near the entrance to the playground operated by Dor Shalom, a peace group chaired by the late premier's son, Yuval.

Cabinet discusses building plan

The Israeli Cabinet held the first of a series of discussions regarding Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman's plan to reduce the country's growing unemployment. The plan, which in part calls for some spending some \$270 million in infrastructure construction projects, would require cutting the budgets of other ministries by 0.2 percent, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Iran backs Hamas

Iran's top spiritual leader pledged to support Hamas during a meeting with the founder of the militant group, Sheik Ahmed Yassin. Ayatollah Ali Khameni also said that Iran would continue its struggle against the "occupying Zionist regime."

Police probe bombing

Jerusalem police are investigating a pipe bomb explosion outside the apartment of three Israeli-Arab students that took place on Independence Day.

Residents of the apartment have been stoned and shouted at by fervently Orthodox Jews from an adjacent neighborhood who oppose their living there.

German cadets train in Israel

Germany sent a first group of officer cadets for military training in Israel.

The 17 cadets, who began their stay with a visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, will spend three weeks participating in training exercises alongside Israeli soldiers.



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initiative turns out. Most of the organized Jewish community has supported the push by American officials to convince Israel to withdraw from more of the West Bank.

Jewish officials have said that support would disappear if the United States put forward its own public plan that would include specific percentages for redeployment.

According to a senior U.S. official stationed in Israel, the American team will publish its plan if Netanyahu and Arafat fail to reach an agreement.

This official believes that despite what Jewish organizations have said, in the end most will blame Netanyahu for not accepting a plan that he said favors Israel's interests.

In any case, such a scenario suggests that the United States and Israel could be headed for an ugly public confrontation.

The question is whether Gore, in the aftermath of his jubilee visit, will be isolated from some of the American Jewish criticism which could accompany that public confrontation.

During his three-day visit, Americans and Israelis saw Gore the statesman laying a wreath at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and meeting with top officials. They also saw Gore the mourner placing a stone on the grave of slain Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin; Gore the techno-environmentalist observing a solar power array at the Weizmann Institute of Science, where aides said he wanted to highlight Israel's future as well as its past; Gore the campaigner speaking to some 400 United Jewish Appeal activists and meeting with a small group of big donors.

But at almost all stops, it was Gore the friend of Israel, listening as a friend would, while reaching out to the Israeli public. Gore balanced the promise to continue America's "ironclad commitment" to Israel's security while calling for "maximum effort" by all sides for peace.

"There is no distinction between our continued commitment to Israel's security and well-being on the one hand, and our commitment to helping Israel achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace between Israelis and Arabs on the other," Gore said at a televised news conference with Netanyahu.

How the United States navigates these commitments, which Gore called "complementary," will speak volumes about whether Democrats can continue to sell the Clinton administration as the most pro-Israel in the history of the modern state.

A skilled politician who generally appears more relaxed in front of Jewish audiences than others, Gore dazzled his listeners everywhere.

Apologizing in Hebrew for not speaking the language, Gore drew the warmest reception of all speakers at the state's major jubilee celebration, where he delivered a heavily theological speech about the Jewish dream that aides said he wrote himself.

Enthusiasm for Gore was evident at virtually all stops, including a visit by his wife, Tipper, to the Western Wall, where an American woman waded through the crowd to tell her, "Your husband gave a great speech last night."

Gore's enthusiasm also came across in a meeting with UJA leaders and a toast at a luncheon hosted by Netanyahu with many visiting American Jewish activists as guests.

"The generosity" that American Jews have shown "in honoring their heritage and the love of Israel is matched by the tremendous leadership that they have shown in communities throughout America."

The toast led one Jewish political activist to joke that Gore is hoping to capitalize on this generosity for his campaign coffers as he seeks the presidency in 2000.

In contrast to his warm embraces of Netanyahu, Gore stood stern-faced as he posed for the cameras shaking Arafat's hand prior to their meeting in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Saturday. Although not nearly as effusive in his praise for the Palestinians as he was for Israel, Gore recognized the plight of the Palestinian people in response to a question at a brief exchange with reporters after their meeting.

"I certainly have a keen sense of the deep desire of the Palestinian people for peace and for a successful resolution of the process now under way," Gore said after he walked past a Palestinian honor guard armed with automatic rifles.

"As I said yesterday, we should not argue about the past or attempt to deny or quantify the suffering and pain that is very real for people who have experienced it in many places in the world."

Instead, Gore said, "We should concentrate on the future." □

JEWISH WORLD

Swiss Jews criticize boycott

Swiss Jewish leaders criticized boycott threats against Switzerland and efforts in the United States to persuade Swiss banks to reach a global settlement regarding Holocaust-era claims.

The Swiss Federation of Jewish communities urged the Swiss government not to join negotiations that began in Washington this week between the banks, the World Jewish Congress and lawyers representing Holocaust survivors in three class-action lawsuits.

Swiss Jewish leaders said a lump-sum global settlement would distract from efforts currently underway in Switzerland to deal with actions stemming from its wartime activities.

National Front loses seat

The far-right National Front lost its only seat in the French Parliament when a Socialist candidate narrowly won a special runoff vote. The vote for the vacant seat in the southern city of Toulon was held after the incumbent National Front deputy was unseated in February for exceeding the legal campaign-spending limit.

Prince Charles marks jubilee

Prince Charles marked Israel's Independence Day last week by attending a religious service at London's St. John's Wood Synagogue.

Flanked by British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks and Israeli Ambassador to England Dror Zeigerman, the prince, wearing a white kippah, was greeted at the entrance by a Jewish day-school choir before being escorted to a place of honor inside the synagogue.

Sweden plans Holocaust project

Sweden initiated a Holocaust-education project after a recent survey indicated that more than 10 percent of the country's schoolchildren did not know what the Holocaust was or when it occurred.

A meeting planned for Stockholm later this week to discuss strategies for the project is expected to bring members of the Swedish government together with Jewish officials from Europe and the United States.

Hitler images published

American intelligence agents created images at the end of World War II of what a disguised Hitler might have looked had he attempted to flee Germany.

The German newsweekly *Der Spiegel* ran the pictures, saying they had been found in the archives of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA.

Among the pictures were images of the Nazi leader without moustache, bald and with a full beard and glasses.

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

Fighting over the front seat; taking the long road around

By Matthew Dorf

JERUSALEM (JTA) — **Fighting over the front seat:** Israel's obsession with security almost caused a diplomatic incident last week as agents with the Shin Bet and the U.S. Secret Service feuded over seating arrangements in Vice President Al Gore's motorcade when he arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport.

Much to the surprise of the Americans, Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, wanted to station an agent in Gore's car.

After delaying the motorcade for several minutes, the Secret Service gave in and both the United States and Israel had an armed agent in the front seat of the vice president's limousine.

It's unclear who had to ride the 40 minutes to Jerusalem in the middle seat.

Look out for that wing: The obsession with security did not carry over to the vice president's plane.

As soon as Gore stepped off the plane and into a VIP lounge for a brief meeting with Israeli Cabinet minister Natan Sharansky, who has assumed the protocol roles of the foreign minister since David Levy resigned, an El Al 747 swung around, putting its wings into the secure area for Air Force Two.

In the United States, the Secret Service closes the entire section of the airport where the pilots park the president's or vice president's plane.

Where's Israel? Gore may not have noticed the decorations on the lampposts that lined the road to Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's Ramallah office. The motorcade zipped past white lights in the shapes of a dove, a crescent and what one assumes would be Palestine.

Staying warm: Tipper Gore was the only person in Gore's party who came prepared to Israel's major jubilee celebration in Jerusalem on April 30. As the temperatures dipped below 50 degrees Fahrenheit, the second lady was warmer than most in her tan overcoat.

The rest of the party, including this reporter, wrapped themselves in El Al blankets that decorated all the seats at the stadium.

Staying focused: For many women at the Western Wall on the morning of April 30, Tipper Gore's visit with Sara Netanyahu was a big deal.

Many applauded and cleared a path.

But not so for two older Israeli women focused on their morning prayers. As the women pressed their faces against the wall, Netanyahu and Gore squeezed in-between to place notes into the cracks in the Kotel.

Seven 'Hatikvahs': By the time Gore left Israel early Monday morning, he had stood at attention for Israel's national anthem no less than seven times in as many days, including two times prior to his Israeli tour.

At one of those times, Gore promised students at the Adas Israel Jewish Day School in Washington, D.C., to deliver homemade cards celebrating Israel's 50th anniversary.

Gore delivered on his promise, making sure they got to Israeli President Ezer Weizman.

The long way 'round: It took Gore's motorcade more than one hour to make a 15-minute ride from Ben-Gurion Airport to Ramallah for his meeting with Arafat. Gore took the "Albright route," named for America's secretary of state, which is a settlers bypass road from Jerusalem into the West Bank.

The route minimized the amount of time spent in populated Palestinian areas for security reasons.

In fact, the Secret Service agents assigned to the "secure package," as the smaller motorcade is called, put on their bulletproof vests before disembarking from Air Force Two. □

(JTA Washington bureau chief Matthew Dorf was one of four U.S. reporters to accompany Vice President Al Gore on Air Force Two during his trip to Israel.)

ISRAEL AT 50**American support for Israel seen in jubilee celebrations***By Susan Jacobs*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Americans have enthusiastically embraced Israel as the Jewish state celebrated its 50th year as an independent nation.

From cultural events featuring some of Israel's performing artists — to public celebrations in cities across the country, to extensive media coverage — Israel this year has received the kind of attention that few countries get when marking 50 years of independence.

An outpouring of support for Israel can naturally be expected from American Jews, but the active involvement of Americans who are not Jewish in the broad range of activities prompts the question: Why so much interest?

"This phenomenon reconfirms how interested people are in Israel. It's a chance to look back and look forward," said Steven Spiegel, a professor of political science at the University of California at Los Angeles who specializes in relations between the United States and Israel.

According to a national survey conducted by The New York Times, 57 percent of Americans said they have a generally favorable opinion of Israel.

Some 76 percent believe the United States has a vital interest in Israel, while 15 percent do not, according to the poll, which the Times published last week, just days before Israelis celebrated Independence Day.

The Times was one of several major daily newspapers across the country that ran a special series, in conjunction with Israel's jubilee, that analyzed how far Israel has come in its brief history, as well as the turmoils, domestic and foreign, that still trouble the small nation.

"Israel is different than other countries. It was created at a specific time in history for a specific reason," said Andrew Rosenthal, the Times' foreign editor.

"The establishment of the state of Israel in the middle of this century was a major event," said Rosenthal.

"The question of what will happen to Israel" has been a concern since the state's creation, he said.

As Israelis marked their jubilee on April 30, the day of independence according to the Hebrew calendar, Americans also gathered to join in the celebrations.

In New York, for example, thousands gathered for a midday celebration that also marked the city's annual Jewish Heritage Week.

Elementary school students from public schools and Jewish day schools attended, and the lunchtime entertainment also attracted office workers from nearby offices.

In southern Florida, Norman Braman, chairman of the Israel at 50 celebrations for greater Miami, said, "The community has rallied" in support of the Jewish state.

The Greater Miami Jewish Federation raised \$1 million in a special fund-raising campaign for a series of Israel 50 events that began last month.

The events will continue into the summer.

"Over half of the funding was from the non-Jewish community," said Braman.

Jewish communities across the United States have been celebrating the anniversary since last fall by hosting a range of cultural performances by traveling Israeli groups.

In some American cities, non-Jews have also expressed public support for the Jewish state, joining in the commemorative jubilee events.

Kenneth Stein, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at Emory University in Atlanta, said that given the depth of American interest in Israel, he was not surprised that widespread celebrations have been taking place.

"It would be noticeable if no one cared," said Stein.

For the New York-based Israeli official who has been coordinating the appearances around the country of Israeli musicians, singers and artists, the American focus on Israel this year is not surprising.

"The history of the state of Israel is not just the history of another state," said Rafi Gamzou, Israel's consul for cultural affairs. "One has to be short-sighted if he doesn't get the dimensions of the jubilee."

The Israeli Consulate in New York has coordinated cultural events featuring Israeli performers throughout the United States. The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. hosted six full weeks of cultural events in honor of Israel at 50, and during the summer Lincoln Center in New York will host a festival featuring productions by Israeli theatrical groups.

The commemorations in the United States stand in contrast to the jubilee celebrations in Israel, which have been marred by divisive political debates over how to characterize the nation's history and religious conflicts.

These debates peaked last week on Independence Day, when a leading Israeli dance troupe canceled its appearance at the main jubilee event because of objections raised by fervently Orthodox leaders.

"There's more celebration in the United States than in Israel, partly because American Jews have a deep but more vicarious purpose in celebrating," said Stein.

"Israelis have more issues they deal with on a daily basis," he added.

But there has been some dissent within the ranks of American Jewry.

At least one rabbi organized an alternative celebration.

"We are very supportive of Israel, but we also want to recognize the pain of the Palestinian people and the tragedy that we continue to occupy the West Bank," said Rabbi Michael Lerner, who is the spiritual leader of Beit Tikkun, a Jewish renewal congregation in San Francisco.

"There's a lot to celebrate," said Lerner. "Israel has accomplished a lot in 50 years."

But he also maintained that there is widespread ambivalence among American Jews toward Israel because of such issues as the peace process and religious pluralism.

"A very small percentage of Jews will be participating [in Israel at 50 events]. A much larger percent participate in holidays like Chanukah and Passover," he added.

But for the vast majority of American Jews, unity in support of Israel's achievements has been the main theme of celebratory events.

"People get focused on the tensions of the moment," said Spiegel. Israel's jubilee is "an opportunity to look beyond the moment." □