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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu may reject invitation

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he might turn down an invitation to attend talks in Washington if the United States insisted that Israel agree to redeploy from 13 percent of the West Bank. [Page 3]

Israeli, Palestinian die in attacks

A yeshiva student was stabbed to death in Jerusalem while on his way to pray at the Western Wall. Police blamed Palestinian militants.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank settlement of Eli, a settler shot and killed a Palestinian who had stabbed him in the chest, slightly wounding him.

Sharon, Indyk meet

Israeli Cabinet minister Ariel Sharon met at the U.S. State Department with the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, Martin Indyk. No details were released.

Ne'eman discusses aid cuts

Israeli Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman and top U.S. State Department officials agreed in Washington to move ahead with his proposal to phase out Israel's \$1.2 billion in annual U.S. economic aid over the next 10 years. The plan also calls for adding \$600 million to Israel's current \$1.8 billion in annual U.S. military aid. A statement released by Israeli officials said both sides had stressed that the discussions had no connection to the U.S.-mediated Middle East peace talks.

Clinton to address Arab group

President Clinton is scheduled to address an Arab American leadership conference Thursday evening. Clinton's speech would mark the first time that a sitting president has addressed the Arab American Institute, the group sponsoring the conference.

Gingrich blasts American stance

U.S. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) lambasted the Clinton administration for pressuring Israel to accept the latest U.S. proposal for further redeployment from the West Bank.

"The Clinton administration says, 'Happy Birthday. Let us blackmail you on behalf of Arafat.'" Clinton denied that he was trying to impose an agreement on Israel or dictate security to Israel.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Dance troupe controversy spurs fears of cultural war

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's jubilee celebrations were held under the official slogan, "Together in Pride, Together in Hope," but Israelis emerged from the festivities even less together than usual.

All over the country, people are speaking of a "kulturkampf," a cultural war — and even a civil war — in the wake of a controversy that erupted between the religious and secular over last week's "Jubilee Bells" gala that served as the climax of the 50th anniversary celebrations.

The controversy brought the issue of Orthodox influence in the Jewish state into the headlines, sparking intense debate over the nature — and future — of the country.

The episode also had political implications, resulting in a new contender for the premiership — the popular Likud figure Roni Milo.

It is doubtful whether the guest of honor at the event, U.S. Vice President Al Gore, fully realized the import of what was happening as he and the rest of the audience — along with millions of television viewers across the country — were informed that the Batsheva Dance Company would not be appearing.

Sitting beside Gore at the Jerusalem stadium where the event was held April 30, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu probably tried to make light of the change of program, which arose because of Orthodox objections to the partial nudity involved in one of the troupe's performances. As the premier said later, Netanyahu had both hoped and believed that daylong, behind-the-scenes negotiations between the company and the organizers would result in an acceptable compromise.

Batsheva, Israel's premier modern ballet company, has won prizes at home and abroad for its show "Anaphase," part of which was to be performed at the jubilee extravaganza. The performance was to focus on the text "Echad Mi Yodea," the popular "Who Knows One?" song from the Passover Haggadah.

Orthodox objections focused on the dancers' stripping down to their underwear just as they are reciting, "One is for our Lord, God of Heaven and Earth."

A deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Haim Miller of the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc, threatened to bring out 30,000 demonstrators to disrupt the "Jubilee Bells" event unless the act was omitted from the program.

The minister of education and culture, Rabbi Yitzhak Levy of the National Religious Party, joined other leading figures in the Zionist-Orthodox camp in siding with the fervently Orthodox, arguing that the performance was bound to offend religious viewers and therefore had no place in a state-sponsored gala.

In the artistic world, and among the political parties of the left and the liberal center, a cry of state censorship erupted.

President Ezer Weizman tried to mediate, and at one stage the company's artistic director, Ohad Naharin, appeared to agree that his dancers would wear body stockings as a compromise. But Naharin himself set the fuse for the eventual explosion when he announced that while he accepted the compromise, he was resigning in the interests of the company's future.

Then, a half hour before the gala event began, the dancers announced that they were going home.

Last Friday, the day after the jubilee event, matters grew worse as hundreds of actors, playwrights, musicians, singers and others demonstrated against Levy at a jubilee

MIDEAST FOCUS

Knesset rejects marriage bill

Israel's Knesset rejected a bill that would have legalized civil marriages and divorces.

Knesset member Naomi Hazan, a member of the left-wing Meretz Party who introduced the bill, criticized Labor Party members who voted against the measure.

The bill was defeated 46-22.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu voted against the measure.

Labor leader Ehud Barak was absent from the vote.

Weizman hails righteous gentiles

Israeli President Ezer Weizman met with 50 righteous gentiles who traveled to Israel to take part in last week's jubilee celebrations.

The group was due to meet with Jews they saved during the Holocaust who are now living in the Jewish state.

They are also slated to attend a ceremony at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, where righteous gentiles are honored.

Prison doctor killed in bombing

An Israeli prison doctor was killed by a car bombing in an attack believed to have been carried out by supporters of a Yemenite Jewish activist.

Police said Dr. Ya'acov Siegelboim had apparently been targeted because he had refused to recommend Uzi Meshulam's release from prison.

In 1994, the self-proclaimed Yemenite leader and armed followers barricaded themselves in a house in Tel Aviv for six weeks.

The group took the action in order to press demands for a new investigation into the fate of Yemenite children the group claims were kidnapped by the state in the early days of the Jewish state.

Meshulam was seized in a shootout with police and is serving a 6 1/2-year prison term.

reception he was to host for the cultural elite at the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv.

Many of the artists who had appeared the night before claimed that had they known of Batsheva's last-minute decision to withdraw, they, too, would have pulled out of the jubilee event.

Others argued that to quit at that stage would have been wrong. But they also wholeheartedly supported the dancers' contention that they, the audience and the country as a whole had been the victim of a religious power-play that was threatening to take over cultural life in Israel.

The demonstration looked ugly at times. Levy's NRP colleague in the Cabinet, Transportation Minister Shaul Yahalom, had to be escorted by the police from the premises for his own safety.

Adding fuel to the fire of the dance episode was another religious-secular clash that took place a day earlier, when Israel held Remembrance Day observances for its war dead. Rabbi Meir Porush, the leader of United Torah Judaism and the deputy housing minister, was heckled and pelted with plastic bags of water by irate demonstrators at a military cemetery in Holon, near Tel Aviv, where he sought to represent the government at the memorial service.

The government sends ministers, deputy ministers and Knesset members to all military cemeteries on this annual solemn commemoration.

Some bereaved families objected to Porush's participation because although he himself did a brief stint in the army, he represents a fervently Orthodox, or haredi, constituency — most of whom never perform army service.

But he insisted on going anyway, and the result was a religious-secular altercation.

The waters were further roiled by two subsequent incidents involving extremist fringe groups in Jerusalem: A soldiers' memorial site was vandalized, apparently by fervently Orthodox vandals, and a nude photo composite of the late Yitzhak Rabin was posted in a Jerusalem playground operated by Dor Shalom, a peace group chaired by the late premier's son, Yuval.

The photo was circulated by unknown people purporting to represent the outlawed racist Kach movement.

Against this backdrop, the Israeli media were full this week of passionate articles exhorting the secular majority to take up arms — figuratively, but literally if the need arises — against Orthodox censorship and coercion.

Politicians on both sides of the divide are warning that, given the present mood, the cultural war could turn violent if a controversy erupts over a Shabbat observance issue or some other volatile question.

Meanwhile, the still-raging controversy over the canceled dance performance has triggered the creation of a new, openly anti-clerical political party.

Tel Aviv's popular mayor, Roni Milo, announced Monday that he would form a new centrist party and run for the Knesset and the prime ministership in the next election, slated for 2000. Milo, a political protege of the late Menachem Begin who served as a minister in the government of Yitzhak Shamir, has been moving steadily toward the center in recent years and has long contemplated setting up a new party.

He said Monday that he announced his move now because he was "shocked and shattered" by the controversy over the dance performance and the worsening of secular-religious strife.

"I shall not be seeking haredi votes," he said. "I shall not pander to them."

Political pundits said Milo would sap support from Labor and the left-wing Meretz, but would also siphon away voters from Netanyahu.

Such a scenario could require a second round in the next prime ministerial election, which could primarily hurt Netanyahu, who will be depending on the haredi vote. The haredim, who will come out to vote for their own parties in the general Knesset election, might not bother to turn up again for a second-round runoff for the premiership.

Meanwhile, in an effort to avoid future clashes like the Batsheva furor, Levy announced Monday the creation of a religious-secular forum at which leading intellectual figures would thrash out some of these issues.

But the bitterness already engendered by that episode ensured that the education minister's initiative received a cool response in secular, intellectual circles. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Israelis send mixed signals about coming to Washington

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Suspense shrouds the possibility of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks moving to Washington next week.

After two days of inconclusive talks in London, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to come to Washington — on the condition they were able to agree on a plan to move the peace process forward before then.

To make an agreement more palatable to Israel, American officials said they would begin accelerated final-status talks next week in Washington — something Netanyahu has been seeking for months.

Before Netanyahu and his entourage left London on Tuesday, a high-level Israeli official was optimistic that the talks would proceed. But by Wednesday, Netanyahu was saying that he might turn down the invitation to go to Washington on May 11 if it were contingent upon Israel's acceptance of an American proposal.

That proposal, widely reported but never officially expressed by U.S. officials, calls for Israel to redeploy from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank in exchange for specific Palestinian steps to live up to security guarantees in already-signed accords.

"We will not accept American dictates," Netanyahu told Israel Radio. "As a sovereign state, we have the sole authority to determine our security needs."

Much of the suspense hinges on whether Netanyahu's tough comments reflect his actual thinking or are designed to appease his hard-line constituency, even as he has already resolved to pack for Washington.

The Palestinian Authority, which initially demanded a transfer of as much as 30 percent of additional West Bank lands, has accepted in principle the U.S. proposal.

Netanyahu, who held consultations with members of his Inner Security Cabinet on Wednesday about the London talks, said Israel was currently discussing a further redeployment of between 9 percent and 11 percent.

The full Cabinet is expected to decide on the extent of the redeployment Sunday, one day before the Washington talks are slated to convene.

In the Knesset, there was a mixed reaction to Netanyahu's discussions in London. Opposition members charged Netanyahu with putting Israel on a road to confrontation with the United States. Labor Knesset member Yossi Beilin criticized Netanyahu for rejecting the American proposal in London.

"The prime minister is leading us toward disaster by not accepting the American plan, which is much closer to the Israeli plan than the Palestinian one," Labor Knesset member Yossi Beilin, an architect of the Oslo accords told Israel Radio. "I think [Netanyahu] should prefer the security of our country over the security of his coalition."

In a sign of the resistance Netanyahu faces from his right-wing coalition, 10 legislators from the Land of Israel bloc boycotted Knesset proceedings Wednesday, instead taking an aerial tour of the West Bank to symbolize their opposition to handing over more territory.

Legislator Michael Kleiner, a member of Gesher and the head of the hawkish bloc, threatened that he had enough backing to bring down the Netanyahu government — "and we will if he makes any withdrawal."

"We believe that if Netanyahu cannot withstand the American pressure he must call new elections," he added.

But there were also more moderate voices emanating from the governing coalition.

Knesset member Alex Lubotzky of the Third Way Party said Netanyahu had achieved greater success in London than is generally being attributed to him.

He said the prime minister succeeding in getting the United States to agree that the third further redeployment — slated to take place by the end of the year under the terms of the 1995 Interim Agreement — be subsumed under the final-status talks. He also said Netanyahu gave no commitment regarding a freeze on settlements.

Lubotzky urged the prime minister not to throw away an opportunity for progress by staying away from Washington next week. □

Albright to give briefing

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was scheduled to brief by phone the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations on the latest developments in the U.S.-mediated Middle East peace process.

Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Dore Gold, was scheduled to address the group in person.

Sakic maintains innocence

A former Croatian concentration camp commander maintained he is innocent of any wartime crimes and wants to be extradited as soon as possible to prove it.

Dinko Sakic's comments came as an Argentine judge approved an extradition request from Croatia, which wants to try him for crimes he allegedly committed while he was commandant at the Jasenovac camp from 1942 to 1944.

According to some estimates, more than 500,000 Jews, Serbs and Gypsies were murdered at the camp, run by Croatia's Nazi puppet regime.

Neo-Nazi party to run in elections

A Hungarian court permitted a neo-Nazi party to run in next week's parliamentary elections. The court ruled against Jewish communal leaders, who sought to ban the Hungarian People's Welfare Federation Party.

The party is led by Albert Szabo, who has proclaimed his allegiance to the Hungarian fascists that ruled the country during World War II. Another party led by Szabo had been outlawed by Hungary, but Jewish leaders argued unsuccessfully that Szabo had merely renamed the old party.

Extremist attacks increase

Racist and anti-Semitic attacks by German far-right extremists rose by more than a quarter in 1997 over the previous year, according to government statistics.

In its annual report on militant groups, Germany's internal security service said there were 790 such attacks last year, a 27 percent increase over 1996.

Recent German newspaper reports had estimated an even higher number of racist attacks last year.

Maryland rabbi gets papal honor

A Maryland man became the first rabbi to receive a prestigious papal honor.

Mordecai Waxman, 81, was named Knight Commander of St. Gregory the Great, an honor that dates back to 1831 and was originally given to defenders of the Papal States.

The award was presented at a meeting of Catholic bishops and Reform and Conservative rabbis.

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Blacks, Jews see relations improving despite differences***By Rebecca Segall*

NEW YORK (JTA) — The often-tense relationship between blacks and Jews may be looking up.

But the two communities remain sharply divided over such issues as affirmative action and anti-Semitism in the black community.

A national survey of blacks and Jews, released last week, revealed that some 43 percent of Jews and 54 percent of blacks believe that relations between the two groups have improved during the past year.

And recalling the days of cooperation during the civil rights movement, a majority of both groups would like to see a partnership formed on civil rights issues.

"Blacks and Jews are feeling more positive this year than others because it has been a remarkably calm one," said Murray Friedman, the author of a book, "Why the Black/Jewish Alliance Failed."

Five years after violent clashes between blacks and Jews in the New York neighborhood of Crown Heights brought relations to a nadir, the survey may indicate a turning point in the relationship between the two minority groups.

"In recent years, there has been a lot of publicity about the conflict between black and Jewish Americans," Martin Luther King III said in his keynote address to a conference last week where the survey was released.

But despite those tensions, Jews and blacks have continued to work together in hundreds of towns across the country, King added.

The New York-based Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, which commissioned the survey, was one of the co-sponsors of the conference.

The forum was held at Yeshiva University and attended by 200 black and Jewish intellectuals.

The foundation's president, Rabbi Marc Schneier, said the survey's results contradict the general perception that relations between the two minority groups are in a state of decline.

But the survey findings also made clear that affirmative action and anti-Semitism in the black community remain divisive issues — and a tension lingered at the Yeshiva University conference when either of the two subjects was raised.

The poll demonstrated that "racial preference policies and black leaders such as Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, who preach anti-Semitic views, are the two issues that continue to splinter blacks and Jews all over the country," said Friedman.

Jews have never liked racial preference policies, and they are fearful of a powerful leader who espouses anti-Semitic views, said Friedman, who is director of the American Jewish Committee's regional office in Philadelphia.

Indeed, about 49 percent of blacks and 27 percent of Jews surveyed in the poll said they approve of racial, ethnic, or religious quotas for hiring and college education.

On the controversial Nation of Islam leader, some 49 percent of blacks said they have a favorable opinion of Farrakhan, compared to 19 percent of Jews.

But more than 60 percent of the Jews and more than a quarter

— 27 percent — of the blacks said they have an unfavorable opinion of the black Muslim figure.

Some black participants remarked that most Jews do not fully understand the complex symbol of Farrakhan.

"Many Jews don't understand that we see Farrakhan's ability to mobilize 1 million people," said Denise Richardson, a local television talk show host who moderated the conference discussion on the poll.

"We see a leader who has positively influenced thousands — and who also has unfortunate anti-Semitic views," she said. "We can't throw away one of the only ones that can lead based on one flaw."

But perhaps as a comment on Farrakhan, the poll found agreement among a majority of both groups that "members of the African American community can do more to silence those African Americans who preach or promote anti-Semitism." About 61 percent of blacks and 69 percent of Jews agreed with this statement.

The telephone survey of 563 African Americans and 556 Jews was conducted by Kieran Mahoney & Associates. The findings have a margin of error of 4 percent.

Disagreement about affirmative action also was aired in the conference discussions.

A Jewish panelist caused a quiet stir when he argued that affirmative action policy should be based on economic disadvantage rather than on skin color.

"What better way is there to make racism obsolete than to stop making race distinctions?" said Nathan Diamant, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs.

Some African Americans at the conference felt that some of the Jewish participants lack an understanding of the purpose of affirmative action programs.

Michael Meyers, executive director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition, said the idea behind affirmative action programs, to rectify the historical wrongs perpetrated against African Americans, has been "lost."

King appealed to the Jewish community to be more sensitive to black concerns about affirmative action.

"American Jews can play an important role in explaining to white America some of the complexities and the subtleties of institutional racism and prejudice," said King.

"In turn," he continued, "African Americans can fight anti-Semitism by expressing our understanding and condemnation of all expressions of bigotry towards Jews, even when it comes from within our community."

Because both blacks and Jews deeply understand discrimination, they have a responsibility to help each other, King said.

And in a certain way, the poll backs up his contention, that despite differences both blacks and Jews see eye-to-eye on some important issues.

For example, both groups believe that much more can be done to educate American children about the past sufferings of their peoples.

About 49 percent of Jews and 72 percent of blacks said the same about teaching about slavery.

Some 59 percent of Jews and 61 percent of blacks agreed that public schools do not teach enough about the Holocaust.

Indeed, only approximately 67 percent of Jews and some 31 percent of blacks knew that 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. □