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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu denies progress

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied an Israel Radio report that he had agreed to a redeployment from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank on condition there be no further redeployments prior to launching final-status negotiations.

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright concluded a meeting in London with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat without reaching a breakthrough, according to a U.S. State Department spokesman. [Page 1]

Controversy erupts over singers

A controversy erupted over whether female singers should perform at Israeli President Ezer Weizman's swearing-in ceremony.

Weizman, who is beginning his second term, first suggested that female singers in an army choir not perform at the ceremony in deference to religious Knesset members.

But that idea drew strong objections from secular lawmakers.

This prompted Weizman to cancel all performances at the ceremony.

High court to hear El Al case

The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear a case involving a New York woman who sued El Al Airlines for emotional trauma after she was subjected to a body search before being allowed to board an El Al flight.

The woman brought her suit before a New York court, but El Al claims that an international treaty bars claims brought under state laws.

Lack of consensus cited

Americans for Peace Now sent a letter to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations saying there was no real consensus among American Jewish groups over American proposals to advance the peace process.

While AIPAC and the Presidents Conference are asking the Clinton administration to back the policies of the Netanyahu government, the letter maintained that the majority of American Jews support the U.S. efforts.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Netanyahu calls on U.S. Jews to help make the Israeli case

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Striking an emotional and fiery tone, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ended his U.S. visit this week with a call to pro-Israel activists to support his brand of peace with security.

But Netanyahu, in a Sunday evening speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and in numerous other public appearances during his five-day visit, went out of his way to praise the United States in spite of disagreements regarding the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

"President Clinton is a friend of Israel, make no mistake about it," he said.

The tone was very different from the defiant one that many expected from the prime minister, whose visit came against the backdrop of tensions between Israel and the United States.

The Clinton administration has been pressing Israel to accept a U.S. plan to restart the long-stagnant Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. The U.S. proposal calls on Israel to withdraw from a further 13 percent of the West Bank in exchange for a series of Palestinian steps to crack down on terrorism. Acceptance of the proposal would then open the way for the two sides to begin final-status talks, which would address the issues of borders, refugees, settlements and Jerusalem.

But even as he called the president a friend, Netanyahu not so subtly reminded the president that he believes that Israel must determine its security interests.

"All successive American administrations have agreed with us that it is Israel and Israel alone that must determine its security needs, and Israel and Israel alone that must determine its redeployment," he said.

Continuing efforts by U.S. officials to reach an agreement produced no reported progress. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright concluded a series of meetings with the Israeli premier last week without any signs that the two sides had bridged the gaps.

Albright then summoned Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to brief him in London on Monday on the latest developments, apparently without any progress.

"I cannot say that we have a breakthrough," State Department spokesman James Rubin said in London after the Monday meeting. "On the contrary, we are working very hard to overcome differences."

Meanwhile, upon his return to Israel on Monday, Netanyahu denied an Israel Radio report that he had accepted the U.S. proposal.

In what evolved as a stump speech during his visit, Netanyahu stressed repeatedly that Israel could not agree to the U.S. demand because of security considerations.

In several appearances, including a news conference in New York on Sunday prior to leading the city's Salute to Israel Parade, Netanyahu said the concerns for security were based on what would happen to early warning stations, Israel's water supply and approaches for Israel's airports.

The prime minister also said the safety of Israeli schoolchildren traveling on West Bank roads would be jeopardized by a 13 percent withdrawal.

"These are not abstract or tactical or stratagems that we use in order to build up some number," Netanyahu told some 2,000 cheering AIPAC delegates. "It is a real consideration for real security."

The AIPAC delegates showered Netanyahu with almost two minutes of cheers and

MIDEAST FOCUS

Knesset votes on extraditions

The Israeli Knesset passed a preliminary reading of a bill that would permit the extradition of citizens to stand trial for crimes that are committed in another country.

Under the legislation, a suspect would be handed over on condition that if found guilty, he or she would serve out the sentence in an Israeli jail.

Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi said the bill would have no bearing on the fate of Samuel Sheinbein, an American teen-ager wanted for murder in Maryland who has been resisting U.S. extradition efforts.

Syria targeting Israeli sites

Syria recently deployed two units of Scud-C missiles that are for the first time targeting Israel's nuclear facility at Dimona, all of Israel's airfields and most of its major cities, according to the London-based newsletter Foreign Report.

The Scuds have been moved to a site near Damascus, according to the newsletter, which cited an Israeli military intelligence source.

Israel launches Lebanon raid

Israeli troops wounded several members of Hezbollah during an overnight operation north of the security zone in southern Lebanon, according to an army spokesman.

An elite commando unit and attack helicopters took part in the operation, according to Israel Radio.

Swiss chief criticizes settlements

The president of Switzerland said his country viewed Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a violation of international law.

Flavio Cotti, who is currently visiting the Jewish state, cited the 1949 Geneva Convention, which bars countries from settling its citizens in areas captured during war.

shouts of support as he took the podium. That reception stood in marked contrast to the one he received at an American Jewish Committee gathering here last week, when activists offered Netanyahu a polite but not enthusiastic reception.

In New York, he was greeted warmly when he addressed the Salute to Israel Parade and when he called for Jewish unity at New York's Park Avenue Synagogue.

It was his first address before a Conservative congregation since becoming prime minister.

But it was for the activists at AIPAC that Netanyahu seemed to save his greatest passion.

Netanyahu slammed Arafat's government.

He accused it of orchestrating last week's riots in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and eastern Jerusalem.

"These were riots that were sponsored and organized by the Palestinian Authority to protest the actual existence, the founding of the State of Israel," he said of the clashes that resulted in the deaths of at least five Palestinians.

"We cannot ignore such riots because they are not isolated incidents," Netanyahu said.

"They follow a pattern of total disregard of the Palestinian Authority for the commitments and obligations of the Oslo process," he added.

Netanyahu called on the pro-Israel community to "help make our case" that the Palestinian are not in compliance with their accords with Israel and that only Israel can determine what is in its security interests.

"We're counting on you," he said. □

British court convicts student for aiding Iran's nuclear program

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A British Customs undercover operation has resulted in the conviction of an agent for Iran's nuclear weapons program.

Ali Asghar Manzarpour, 37, an aerospace engineering student, was sentenced last week to nine months in jail for attempting to illegally export three-quarters of a ton of super-strength steel.

The material was believed to have been destined for the construction of centrifuges that are used to enrich uranium for nuclear warheads.

His conviction came as the world reacted strongly to India's detonation of at least five nuclear devices in underground tests.

The Iranian plan involving Manzarpour was foiled two years ago, when the first shipment of a \$400,000 order for the steel arrived at London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports from the United States.

It was considered unusual that the consignment was flown at great expense, rather than shipped across the Atlantic, raising suspicions that the Iranians were desperate for the material.

Manzarpour, who had been under surveillance for two years, was arrested in March 1996 as the steel was being loaded onto trucks, which were to transport them to Austria before being flown to Iran.

He had set up an export-import company called Eurotrade.

Eurotrade initially dealt in men's suits and transistor parts before moving into the fields of capacitors and circuit boards.

The court was told that Manzarpour, who settled in Britain in 1980, was initially approached by experts at the Ya-Mahdi missile base near Tehran and an order was later placed by the Iranian Defense Ministry.

He was paid \$350,000 in advance to acquire the steel and was to receive a similar sum on completion of the contract.

Using his wife's maiden name, he ordered the material from Teledyne All Vac, a company in South Carolina.

British Customs sources said they believed Manzarpour had been working with the Iranian government for at least a decade. □



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JEWISH WORLD

G-8 addresses peace process

Leaders of the world's major industrialized states expressed "deep concern" at the continuing stalemate in the peace process.

"We encourage all efforts to help revive the peace process," the leaders of the G-8 nations declared in a communique at the end of their summit in England.

Lileikis trial postponed again

A Lithuanian judge granted a second postponement of the trial of an alleged Nazi war criminal.

The trial of Aleksandras Lileikis, 91, was slated to begin this week in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius. But a judge in the case granted an adjournment of one month to allow investigators to finish examining recently obtained documents.

Swiss refuse to pull banknote

The Swiss National Bank refused to withdraw a new 1,000-franc note that critics charge honors an anti-Semite.

Bank officials said plans for the note, which features a picture of 19th-century historian Jacob Burckhardt, had been made public in 1989, long before the country became the target of criticisms from Jewish groups regarding its financial dealings during World War II.

The officials also said that Burckhardt's works should be examined in their totality before issuing criticisms of him.

Fight against extremism urged

A German official urged all political parties to unite to defeat the threat posed by right-wing extremism.

The remarks come after the German People's Union garnered 13 percent of the vote in state elections last month, the largest by an extremist right-wing party in Germany since World War II.

U.S. may attend Iran trade fair

Iran said it would allow American companies to attend an upcoming trade fair in Tehran even though they would not be officially invited.

Iranian officials plan to invite all nations to participate in the October fair except the United States and Israel.

Cannes applauds Holocaust film

A comedy dealing with life in a Nazi concentration camp received a 10-minute standing ovation when it was screened at the Cannes Film Festival.

"Life Is Beautiful," which has been described by critics as a "Chaplinesque fable," stars Italian comic Roberto Benigni, who also directed and co-wrote the film.

Synagogue bombing prompts outrage, conspiracy theories

By Lev Krichevsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — The bombing of a Moscow synagogue has prompted an unprecedented outcry from Russia's political and religious leaders.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin and the Foreign Ministry called the bombing an act of "barbarism" and said he expected the police to work actively in order to find those responsible for the attacks, according to a presidential spokesman.

Leaders of Russia's two largest faiths — Russian Orthodoxy and Islam — also condemned the attack, with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexei II calling it a "sinful and criminal affair." But Russian Jewish leaders voiced concern that the police investigation of the bombing was moving slowly and not focusing on the activities of Russian neo-Nazi groups. No arrests have been made stemming from two previous attacks on the synagogue, which occurred in 1993 and 1996.

"We don't feel that what is being done is enough," said Rabbi Berel Lazar, the Lubavitch movement's chief emissary in the former Soviet Union and the rabbi at the synagogue.

Jewish leaders said they were concerned that authorities would present the attack as an isolated case carried out by a single extremist rather than an incident linked to Moscow's rising neo-Nazi movement.

In fact, the explosion at the three-story Marina Roscha synagogue was not the only act of anti-Semitic violence in the Russian capital last week.

A burning container was thrown at the Darchei Shalom synagogue the same night the Marina Roscha synagogue was attacked, said David Karpov, a Lubavitch rabbi at Darchei Shalom. The container caused a small fire near the building's outer wall.

Three days later, the rabbi's car was burned outside Darchei Shalom, the newest of Moscow's four synagogues, which was dedicated three months ago.

The Marina Roscha bombing occurred May 13, just minutes after some 70 children and their teachers had left the three-story synagogue building after celebrating the Jewish holiday of Lag B'Omer.

Two workers at a nearby construction site of a Jewish community center were lightly injured by the blast. The bomb, equivalent to more than a pound of TNT, partially destroyed two floors of the building, causing \$100,000 worth of damage, Lazar said.

A neo-Nazi group, Russian National Unity, allegedly claimed responsibility for the attack. But the group's leader, Alexander Barkashov, denied that it was involved.

Several nationalist leaders, however, said the attack could have been a reaction to the prominence of Jews in the Yeltsin government. Several senior government figures, including Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko, Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov and Economics Minister Yakov Urinson have Jewish ancestries.

Viktor Ilyukhin, a prominent Communist legislator who is chairman of the security committee in the Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, said such attacks on the Jewish community may occur again as a reaction to the fact that the priority for appointments in the government "is bestowed on one nationality, Jews."

Another prominent Communist lawmaker said the bombing might have been instigated by the Jews themselves. "They may have organized the explosion themselves. Now they are inviting their relatives from Israel to take part in the investigation of the incident," said Albert Makashov.

Despite such statements by influential political figures, Russia's Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Security Service have promised to put all of the synagogues in Moscow under constant surveillance.

Hundreds of Moscow Jews were flocking to the synagogue this week to show support to the congregation, and some 500 pupils from Moscow's Jewish day schools marched from the synagogue one day after the blast took place. The march was a part of the Lag B'Omer celebration.

The synagogue's board, meanwhile, has decided to expedite the construction of a nearby Jewish community center rather than restore the damaged building. The new center, the first such Jewish facility in Moscow, will also house a large synagogue. □

Leader of Agudath Israel, Moshe Sherer, dies at 76

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of Agudath Israel of America and an ardent defender of Orthodox interests, has died at 76.

He passed away Sunday at New York Hospital/Cornell Medical Center in Manhattan after suffering a relapse of the leukemia that he thought he had beat.

Sherer was in Israel in February, leading a delegation of fervently Orthodox Jews to meet with government leaders to convince them that the Orthodox way was the only viable course to support in the war over religious pluralism, when he learned that the cancer had returned.

It was to be his last overseas trip.

On returning to New York, Sherer went straight from the airport to the hospital, said Rabbi Haskel Besser, a member of the Agudah presidium and a friend of Sherer's for more than 50 years.

Sherer had been president of the influential group, which represents the interests of the fervently Orthodox community, both its Chasidic and its non-Chasidic branches, for some 30 years.

But he had been attracted to politics and worked to represent the concerns of the fervently Orthodox community to lawmakers for two decades before that.

When he was in his 20s and studying in a Baltimore yeshiva, he would often visit Washington, D.C., to try to meet with members of Congress and staffers at the White House.

In those days he was almost turned away by the White House, recalled Vice President Al Gore as he received Agudah's humanitarian award at the group's 76th anniversary dinner, held in Manhattan on Sunday, the very night that Sherer died.

Over the years, respect for Sherer grew — both within and outside Orthodox circles. More recently, the rabbi was welcomed at the White House with his choice of kosher meals when he came to the White House, according to Gore, who said of Sherer's death: "A giant has passed from our midst."

Dignitaries at his funeral, held in the fervently Orthodox Borough Park section of Brooklyn, N.Y., on Monday, where he had lived, included the mayor of New York City, Rudolph Giuliani, and New York Gov. George Pataki. Lawmakers from both sides of the political spectrum — from Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) to Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) — issued statements of sorrow.

"He did great things in terms of showing non-Jews what Torah means, the beauty and integrity of it," Blima Ziemba, a yeshiva high school teacher, said as she left her Brooklyn home to attend Sherer's funeral. Ziemba, who heard Sherer speak at the Agudah's national conventions, said, "People were really in awe of what Torah means based on his behavior."

Sherer became a leader of the Agudah in 1941, at a time when the organization was regarded, in the group's own words, as "a sickly weed" by some in the Jewish establishment.

He took a small group of like-minded Orthodox Jews and built the Agudah into a political powerhouse. In some ways, Sherer seemed an unlikely choice to lead the Agudah, whose culture and policies reflect total reverence for the world of European Jewry that was destroyed by Hitler.

While many of Agudah's constituents dress in Chasidic garb,

wear beards in the Orthodox fashion and learn to speak Yiddish before English, Sherer did not fit that mold.

Though he shared the same values, Sherer, unlike much of his leadership, was American-born and clean-shaven.

He was, say those who knew him, a man with a deep appreciation for the American way of doing things, who believed that the community he represented needed to keep a foot in the grandeur of its European days, but also deserved to have its religious values and practices protected by American law.

Under Sherer, the Agudah, from its offices in New York and Washington lobbied so that the rights of Orthodox Jews — in the workplace, in its dietary practices and in school — were guarded.

He helped establish principles enshrined in federal and state law that permit children in private schools to receive government benefits and services equal to their public school counterparts.

He also worked with the leaders of other religious faiths, like New York's Catholic archbishop, John Cardinal O'Connor, to convince the city not to accept advertising on billboards in subway stations and at bus stops that were deemed morally offensive.

Sherer's earliest work on behalf of the Jewish community — the efforts that first provoked the non-Orthodox Jewish establishment's opprobrium — was the grass-roots, and largely illegal, transport of food to starving Jews in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe in 1941.

Through his efforts, affidavits were also provided to help European Jews immigrate to the United States.

After the Holocaust, Sherer and his staff aided the Jews in the displaced persons camps in Europe by providing food and religious articles, and helped facilitate their immigration to American shores.

Sherer continued his work with oppressed Jewish communities later, aiding those behind the Iron Curtain and in places such as Syria and Iran. He was deeply involved with reclaiming Jewish cemeteries now owned by governments and private hands in Eastern Europe, and in retrieving Jewish assets held by the Swiss and others after the war.

The issue closest to his heart, perhaps, was that of Jewish education. Under his leadership, the Agudah promoted and organized the daily study of a page of Talmud, in which tens of thousands of Orthodox men now participate.

Some 70,000 people came together under the Agudah's aegis at Madison Square Garden and other venues last September to honor the completion of a cycle of the Talmud readings.

Sherer was unfailingly genteel and courtly, except when he had stinging things to say about non-Orthodox Judaism and its leaders.

Non-Orthodox Jews, he believed, were leading Jews down a dangerous path. He initiated a \$2 million campaign last winter called Am Echad, or One People, to convince the public that there can be no "multiple Judaisms," but that only the Orthodox way is the correct path. It has been a campaign to "counteract" the "lies being spread about Orthodoxy" by the Reform and Conservative movements, he said at the Agudah's convention in November 1997.

Although several Reform and Conservative leaders declined comment on Sherer's passing, Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, said: "I think he was a very skilled leader who was very committed to the Agudah and its program. We had large differences of opinion in our approach to halachah and to Jewish life in general, but I think he was a very forceful and articulate leader."

Sherer is survived by his wife, three adult children, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. □