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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Rubin criticizes Gingrich

U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin lashed out at House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), condemning as "appalling and outrageous" a comment Gingrich made earlier this month calling U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright an "agent for the Palestinians."

Rubin also criticized what he called "rather stunning" reports of comments Gingrich made during his visit to Israel.

Rubin said that if reports of the speaker's "willingness to provoke the Israeli government to disagree with his own government" were true, Gingrich's statements "would undermine the efforts we're trying to make to advance America's national interest."

Mordechai accepts redeployment

Israel's defense minister said for the first time that Israel would have "no choice" but to agree to a double-digit redeployment called for in the latest U.S. proposal to break the deadlock in peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

But Yitzchak Mordechai did not say he accepted the 13 percent called for in the American plan, a figure that has been rejected by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. [Page 1]

Jews demand compensation

Jewish officials demanded that Switzerland give more compensation in return for assets seized during the Holocaust era.

The calls came a day after a report released by an international panel of historians said Switzerland's central bank made no effort to ensure that it was not receiving Holocaust victims' gold when it purchased \$280 million in gold from the Nazis.

Solution for praying women

The committee charged with finding compromises to the crisis over religious pluralism in Israel is considering four possible solutions to the controversy regarding women praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City.

The Reform and Conservative movements and a group known as Women of the Wall have reportedly agreed to a proposal under which there would be an alternative prayer plaza at the southern end of the wall.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Moderate coalition partners not willing to challenge premier

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — "Netanyahu and Mordechai trying to persuade Sharon," proclaimed the headline of the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot.

An outsider completely unfamiliar with the peace process players would naturally assume from the story that Sharon is the prime minister and that two of his more moderate Cabinet members, named Netanyahu and Mordechai, are urging him to come to terms with the Clinton administration's proposal for a further Israeli redeployment from 13 percent of West Bank lands.

The outsider would assume, moreover, that there is no one in the Cabinet taking more moderate positions than Netanyahu and Mordechai. Or at any rate, no one who matters.

And indeed, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu marks the second anniversary of his election victory this week, he can look with contempt at the pundits who predicted that as time passed, dissent among the moderates would weaken or even destroy his Likud-led coalition.

There are indeed relative hard-liners and relative moderates within the coalition who are vying constantly over the drawn-out negotiations with the Clinton administration.

But it is not the self-proclaimed moderates of the Third Way Party, with four Knesset seats, nor the purported moderates of the Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party, with eight, who are leading the leftward swing.

The real debate is conducted within the Likud itself, among the leading Likud ministers and Knesset members.

Indeed, the Third Way and Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, though committed in their election platforms to advancing the Oslo process, have been vacillating on peace issues.

This week was significant because it was Netanyahu's midterm — a milestone that has promoted the question of how his continued hold on power might be affected by the new electoral law that went into effect for the 1996 elections.

Under one of the terms of that law, if a majority of Knesset members vote no-confidence in the government, they would in effect also force themselves out of office since they would have to face new parliamentary elections along with a separate, direct vote for prime minister.

Political observers, seeking to understand the effects of the new law, believed that the motivation of small parties and individual Knesset members to toe the coalition line would wane as the Knesset term wore on.

The logic was that keeping one's seat — individually or collectively — becomes less important as the next election approaches.

As a consequence, according to this logic, coalition partners could be expected to begin hanging tougher against the prime minister as time passed.

But there is no evidence that this political theory is working in practice.

Even on his right, where threats and pressures on Netanyahu have been far more persistent than from his left, no one is anxious to abandon ship.

Granted, there is talk of a new rightist party being set up by religious and secular settler leaders if the Israeli premier does eventually go ahead with the further redeployment.

But signals emanating from the National Religious Party, which has opposed a

MIDEAST FOCUS

Hamas predicts Israel's demise

The founder of Hamas predicted that Israel would be destroyed and a Palestinian state established during the first quarter of the next century.

"The strong will not remain strong forever and the weak will not remain weak forever," Sheik Ahmed Yassin told a news conference in Damascus after meeting with Syrian leaders and the heads of radical Palestinian groups. Yassin, released from an Israeli prison last year, has made frequent calls for the destruction of the Jewish state during a tour of eight countries in the Middle East and Persian Gulf.

Arab legislators walk out

A group of Israeli Arab legislators walked out of the Knesset before U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich addressed the Israeli legislature.

During his speech, Gingrich drew applause when he declared Jerusalem the "united and eternal capital of Israel."

One soldier dies in Lebanon

At least one member of the Israel-allied South Lebanon Army was killed in shelling in the southern Lebanon security zone.

Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the assault, which was followed by Israeli attacks.

Israel bans Viagra sales

Israelis suffering from sexual impotence can no longer look to Viagra for answers.

Israel's Health Ministry ordered doctors in the Jewish state this week to stop selling prescriptions of the drug, which is reputed to reduce sexual impotence.

The order came after Pfizer Inc., the company that sells the drug, reported six deaths among Viagra users in the United States.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is investigating whether there was any link between Viagra use and the six deaths.

further redeployment, indicate that its leadership would in fact swallow a redeployment of 9 percent, 11 percent — or even, at the end of the day, 13 percent.

The NRP, say political observers, is not behaving like a movement seriously contemplating secession from the coalition.

Moreover, within the moderate wing of the government, this stay-put syndrome is even more pronounced.

The Third Way, at least on paper, is the least hard-line component of Netanyahu's coalition.

But it seemed visibly to shrink back this week from its own threat to pull out of the government unless there is a further West Bank withdrawal.

The party claimed last week it was ready to forgo some of its own power in order to bring about a government of national unity.

But no sooner had the threat been issued than party leader Avigdor Kahalani, the minister of public security, stepped in to shoot it down.

And even the most dovish of the Third Way's four legislators, Yehuda Harel, took care to explain that the party's pressure for movement with the Palestinians did not entail "an ultimatum" to Netanyahu.

Plainly, the Third Way is less than confident of repeating its success at the ballot box next time around.

That would explain its desire to postpone an encounter with the voters for as long as politically possible.

Meanwhile, Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, the other supposed moderate weak link in the coalition, has become in recent weeks Netanyahu's most reliable ally.

The ill will that reportedly emerged last year between the two old personal friends, Netanyahu and Trade Minister Natan Sharansky, who heads Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, seems to have vanished completely.

Cynics say the premier's dangling the vacant Foreign Ministry portfolio before Sharansky's eyes has hastened the departure of such feelings.

Even now, though holding the relatively junior Trade Ministry portfolio, Sharansky is a permanent member of Netanyahu's Inner Cabinet, which also includes Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Ariel Sharon, the infrastructure minister.

After a meeting of the Inner Cabinet on Sunday night before the prime minister's departure for a four-day visit to China, Sharansky was quoted as accusing the United States of reneging on its commitment to let Israel be the sole arbiter of its own security needs.

Washington delivered this promise, according to Israel, in a side letter to the January 1997 Hebron Agreement.

In that letter former U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher said it would be up to Israel to define the specified military locations to which its forces would redeploy under the Oslo accords.

This is the kind of hard talk that Netanyahu needs and wants from his ministers now, when his negotiations about the redeployment with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and her Middle East peace team are poised on the cusp of success or failure.

What he presumably did not want was Mordechai trumpeting later in the week, to a visiting group of French politicians, that there must be a double-digit pullback — this despite Sharon's insistence that anything more than 9 percent would imperil Israel's security.

Nor, presumably, does he appreciate it when his science minister, Likud moderate Michael Eitan, proclaims the urgent necessity of establishing a national unity government with the Labor Party.

Eitan confronted the premier during Sunday's Cabinet session.

He demanded to know why Israel was sliding into a confrontation with the United States while the Cabinet was being kept in the dark regarding the details of the redeployment negotiations.

Eitan demanded a debate among all the Cabinet members.

Netanyahu promised there would be one before any commitments on redeploying Israeli troops were made.

The Third Way and Yisrael Ba'Aliyah ministers quietly watched. □



Daily News Bulletin

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JEWISH WORLD

Senate adopts U.N. resolution

The U.S. Senate unanimously adopted a resolution calling for Israeli membership in a United Nations regional group.

Of the 185 U.N. member states, Israel is the only state barred from such groups, making it ineligible to sit on the U.N. Security Council.

Chinese minister makes pledge

China's prime minister reiterated that Beijing would not help Iran acquire nuclear or missile technology. The promise came as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continued his four-day visit to China.

Holocaust education proposed

South Africa's Yad Vashem Memorial Foundation proposed the introduction of Holocaust education into government-run schools.

The proposal came after students shouted anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi slogans at two school sporting events. A book by Franz Auerbach, the vice chairman of the memorial foundation, is being touted as a tool to educate non-Jewish children about the horrors of the Holocaust.

Europeans round up suspects

Five European countries arrested at least 89 suspected Islamic militants in an attempt to prevent terrorist attacks during the upcoming soccer World Cup.

More than 50 of the arrests were made in France, where the World Cup is scheduled to be held from June 10 to July 12.

Far-right deputy stirs protest

A deputy from the far-right German People's Union gave the opening speech in the new Parliament in the eastern German state of Saxony-Anhalt.

About 60 protesters gathered outside with a banner that read "Nazis Out."

The 68-year-old deputy gave the speech following a tradition that the oldest member of the house declare the state Parliament open. The People's Union scored a surprise showing in recent state elections, winning 16 seats in the 116-member house.

Chief Nuremberg prosecutor dies

The chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg war crimes trials died.

Telford Taylor, who was a U.S. Army colonel during the trials — which prosecuted, among others, Nazi official Hermann Goering — was 90. In later years, Taylor spoke out against the Communist witch hunt led by Sen. Joseph McCarthy and against the war in Vietnam.

U.S. Supreme Court takes case involving El Al Airlines

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear a case involving El Al Israel Airlines that could affect the way the airline conducts security measures.

The court will decide whether an international treaty bars a New York woman from suing for emotional trauma that she claims stemmed from a stringent El Al security search.

The justices said they will review an appeal by the airline, which says it is not liable because an international treaty known as the Warsaw Convention covers all injuries sustained during international air travel.

The immediate issue before the high court is the viability of the Warsaw Convention — and not El Al's security practices, which are known as among the most effective in the world.

The incident occurred in May 1993, when Tsui Yuan Tseng, a clinical nutritionist at Beth Israel Medical Center, went to John F. Kennedy International Airport to board a flight to Tel Aviv.

After presenting her ticket and U.S. passport to a security guard, Tseng was taken to a security area and classified as a "high risk" passenger based on her answers to routine questions about her destination, according to her lawsuit.

She was confined for more than an hour, questioned and subjected to a security search for explosives or detonating devices.

A female security guard conducted a search of her entire body, including her breasts and groin area, according to her lawsuit.

After the search, security personnel decided she presented no risk and allowed her to get on the flight.

Tseng sued for \$5 million, accusing El Al of false imprisonment, inflicting psychological and emotional injuries and damaging or losing some of her personal belongings while searching her baggage.

She testified during that trial that she was "really sick and very upset" during the flight because of the search and that she was "emotionally traumatized and disturbed" throughout the rest of her month-long trip to Israel and thereafter. She did not allege any physical injuries.

A federal judge ruled that Tseng's injuries were not covered by the Warsaw Convention — which imposes a \$75,000 cap on any passenger's damages — because she did not sustain any physical injury.

But a U.S. appeals court overruled the lower court and reinstated the lawsuit in 1997, saying that Tseng was free to sue under New York personal-injury law.

El Al, along with a trade association representing the U.S. airline industry and the Clinton administration urged the Supreme Court to take the case, El Al vs. Tseng.

An El Al spokeswoman declined to address the specifics of the case. She said only that "El Al is well known for its strict security. Sometimes it inconveniences passengers, but we're proud of our procedures, our record and our reputation."

Lawyers for El Al said the appeals court ruling is at odds with decisions by other federal appeals courts. Disregarding an international treaty and allowing Tseng to sue, they argued, "effectively subordinated the supreme law of the land to the common law of the several states."

For its part, the Clinton administration got involved in the case because it felt the Warsaw Convention's jurisdiction needed to be re-evaluated. It asked the high court to rule on what it said was a "recurring and important" legal issue.

Although it is coincidental that the case involved El Al rather than another airline, legal scholars said, the case could bring scrutiny to some of the security measures taken by El Al.

If the airline becomes subject to liability, said Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department, it may cause El Al and other carriers to reconsider some of their practices. □

Reform Jews embrace tradition of Shavuot holiday Torah study

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Shavuot will be about more than eating the traditional dairy foods — blintzes and cheesecake — for Jonathan Eisenthal this year.

Eisenthal, the father of a 4-year-old daughter and newborn son in St. Paul, Minn., will for the first time be devoting the night of the Shavuot festival to studying Torah in a traditional practice known as "Tikkun Leil Shavuot."

Shavuot, originally an agricultural festival, is now a celebration of the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people.

On the night of May 30, Eisenthal and as many as 150 other members of Mt. Zion Hebrew Congregation will be studying Exodus 19, the biblical passage in which God first approaches the Israelites to become partners in a divine covenant, and, through Moses, gives them the Torah.

Traditionally observant Jews stay up the whole first night of Shavuot studying texts related to revelation, the giving of the Torah and the Book of Ruth.

But among Reform Jews like Eisenthal, staying up the whole night, or even part of it, to study is a relatively new practice.

"This seems like a neat tradition to get hooked into," said Eisenthal, 34, who in the last year has begun studying the Torah portion of the week and discussing it through e-mail with a half-dozen other members of Mt. Zion. "Studying for several hours at once should be fairly intense," he said.

He described himself as grappling with the nature of what revelation means to him as a Reform Jew. "I'm looking forward to contemplating that whole issue more during the night of study — that's what Shavuot is all about, right?"

Eisenthal is doing just what the head of the Reform movement, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, hopes to inspire among more of his constituents. Last November, in his first speech as president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the umbrella organization for Reform synagogues, Yoffie declared that "Torah is at the center" of his movement.

Hebrew literacy, and a knowledge of core Jewish texts, was, he said, to be the focus of a new campaign. The Shavuot night study program is a key part of it, he said in a telephone interview.

"The tikkun serves to bring the entire movement together in an affirmation of these principles, and points us toward the future," he said.

This year, for the first time, the UAHC put together a national program of study for Shavuot that it is encouraging its member temples to use.

Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman, associate director of religious living at the UAHC, assembled a workbook of suggested programs and complementary texts to study, as well as a video of five Reform scholars discussing revelation. The book and tape are titled "The Voice Still Speaks: A Study Program for the Night of Shavuot."

Some 550 of the movement's 875 congregations will have some formal study program in place using the materials, said Wasserman.

Though some Reform congregations have held Shavuot night study sessions in recent years, the UAHC package has inspired many congregations to make it a more organized and widely attended event.

"We've been overwhelmed by the response," Yoffie said. "It says that the message of this program is resonating with our members and leadership, that there is a hunger for Jewish study and learning."

For Eisenthal, the study of Torah is resonating in a way that it didn't two decades ago when he was confirmed at his family's Reform congregation in Sharon, Mass.

The confirmation ceremony, a uniquely Reform practice, was established in Germany in the early 19th century.

In 1927 the Reform movement's rabbinical organization in the United States recommended confirmation as a movement-wide practice. Tenth graders participate in the ceremony at congregations around the country each year.

Though learning and understanding the biblical text "was emphasized in the confirmation year, it still didn't stick with me then," said Eisenthal. "I'm just now really coming back to it," he said, and "finding more in it that's sustaining and interesting that involves me, that speaks to me." □

Israelis, Palestinians clash over construction in Old City

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Clashes over building in Jerusalem's Old City have marred a festive atmosphere marking the anniversary of the city's reunification.

Israeli police clashed with Palestinian demonstrators Tuesday who had torn down one of nine tin shacks erected overnight by members of Ateret Cohanim in the Old City's Muslim Quarter.

Several members of the Palestinian legislative council, who had left a meeting in Ramallah to join the protesters, were caught in the melee. "The Israeli government and the United States should know that the Palestinian people's patience is running out," said Ahmed Karia, the council's speaker. "We won't accept a peace that comes at the expense of our land and our rights."

Ateret Cohanim, a group that seeks to bolster the Jewish presence in eastern Jerusalem, said it owns the plot where its members had set up the shacks after pouring concrete foundations to build permanent structures. The move was intended as a response to the murder earlier this month of Haim Kerman, who was a student at the group's yeshiva.

"We decided the only way left to show how we are fighting for Jerusalem and its unity is to build," said Klila Har Noi, a spokesperson for Ateret Cohanim.

However the settlers stopped construction work at midday, after police presented a temporary court injunction. The court had issued the order, at the request of the Israel Antiquities Authority, on the grounds that the construction was taking place without a permit and was causing damage to the Old City's ancient walls.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert said any construction must be within the framework of the law. "I expect Ateret Cohanim to tear down the structures, otherwise, we will have to do it on our own," he told Israel Radio.

After the violence, Israel's public security minister, Avigdor Kahalani, phoned Karia to discuss ways to restore calm and reduce the tensions. Two days earlier, Israel staged its largest military parade in years to mark the capture of eastern Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War. □