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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Palestinians set deadline

Top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said the Palestinian Authority was giving Israel one week to conclude the talks that began Sunday between Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's deputy, Mahmoud Abbas.

Erekat's deadline reflected the pessimism of Palestinian officials, who said Mordechai had brought no substantive proposals to the meeting. Meanwhile, Mordechai said he hoped that Israel would conclude an agreement with the Palestinians "very soon."

Israel opposes international court

Israel said it opposed the creation of a permanent war crimes tribunal because the resolution creating the court made Jewish settlement building in the territories a war crime.

Israel accused Arab countries of politicizing the court's creation. The United States, China, Libya, Algeria, Qatar and Yemen also voted against the resolution, but the court was established at an international meeting in Rome last Friday.

Flatow meets top U.S. official

The U.S. national security adviser, Sandy Berger, met with the father of Alisa Flatow, an American student killed in 1995 by an Islamic Jihad suicide bomber in the Gaza Strip.

Stephen Flatow is trying to collect damages against Iran, which funds the terrorist group. Berger did not respond to his attempt to convince the White House to drop its efforts to block a U.S. federal court decision that would lead to the sale of Iranian assets in Washington to pay part of a \$247.5 million judgment against Iran.

AMIA blast remembered

The Jewish Community Relations Council of New York sponsored a memorial service to mark the fourth anniversary of the July 1994 bombing of AMIA, the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. Vice President Al Gore sent greetings to those attending the service, at which candles were lit for the 86 people killed.

The service also honored the 22 people killed in the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Will Clinton recognize 'Palestine'? Many are trying to figure that out

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It took President Truman only 11 minutes to recognize Israel's declaration of statehood in 1948.

How long will it take President Clinton to recognize "Palestine" if Yasser Arafat follows through with his promise to declare statehood next May?

The question is significant because the U.S. reaction to such a controversial declaration could affect the future of all Middle East peace negotiations as well as severely sour U.S.-Israel relations.

Israel, most American Jewish groups and many members of Congress want Clinton to wait for the Jewish state to agree — if it does — to Palestinian statehood at the negotiating table. But the Clinton administration has refused to make such an explicit statement. Instead, the White House, State Department and the president himself have adopted a position opposing unilateral actions and stating that statehood is an issue for final-status talks between the Israelis and Palestinians.

The issue, for many, is not the merits of a Palestinian state.

Israel's Labor Party has formally dropped its opposition to statehood, and even hawkish Cabinet minister Ariel Sharon has said a Palestinian state is inevitable. The important thing, says Sharon, is that Israel be involved in shaping it.

Instead, the debate focuses on how a state would emerge. Allowing Arafat to declare statehood without negotiations would take away a major Israeli bargaining chip in the final-status negotiations, which under the Oslo peace accords were intended to focus on Jerusalem, settlements, refugees — and borders.

Such a move, though likely to be supported by a host of nations, would be widely regarded as a gross violation of the Oslo process. The accords, which placed a deadline of May 4, 1999, on the interim period, prohibit both sides from taking steps to change the status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip "pending the outcome of the permanent-status negotiations."

Such a move could, in the view of many analysts, trigger widespread violence.

"We will face a potentially very explosive situation," Martin Indyk, U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, said in a speech to American ORT here last week, referring to a unilateral Palestinian declaration.

Feeling the clock ticking down to next May, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is said to have asked the United States for a letter of assurance that Washington would not recognize a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state. Such a guarantee would come as part of a presumed Israeli agreement to the U.S. peace plan that is the subject of negotiations this week between senior Palestinians and Israelis.

The plan calls for a further Israeli redeployment of 13 percent from the West Bank, coupled with concrete steps by the Palestinians on security matters.

The question of Palestinian statehood, long in the background, has percolated out in the open since May, when first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton voiced support for the Palestinian quest for statehood in a televised address to a group of Arab and Israeli teenagers. Her statement prompted 63 members of the House of Representatives to write to Clinton, urging the president to "publicly reaffirm" U.S. opposition to any unilateral declaration.

Foreshadowing probable world support for a declaration of statehood, the United Nations voted overwhelming this month to give the Palestinian observer mission many

MIDEAST FOCUS

Court to hear conversion case

Israel's Supreme Court agreed to hear a petition to recognize as Jewish adopted children who were converted by the country's Conservative movement. The hearings were delayed to allow a government appointed commission time to reach a compromise. No date has been set for the hearings. The petition was originally submitted three years ago by the Conservative movement and by the Na'amat women's organization.

Mordechai warns against cuts

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai warned a Knesset committee against making cuts in the defense budget.

Mordechai said the army had insufficient resources to cope with future military threats. Mordechai, like many a defense minister before him, asked for an increase in military spending.

Australian report targets Israel

The leaders of Australia's Jewish community lambasted a parliamentary report that accuses Israel of stalling the Middle East peace process.

The report, written by a delegation of Australian legislators after it returned from a fact-finding mission to the Middle East, called for international pressure on Israel to accept a U.S. proposal under which Jerusalem would implement a further 13 percent redeployment in the West Bank. The report also said the Israeli government was solely responsible for delays in implementing the Oslo accords.

Syria, Iraq agree on pipeline

Syria and Iraq recently agreed to reopen a pipeline that has been closed since 1982. The agreement also called for a second pipeline that would pump Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean. The two countries re-established trade links last year after a break of almost 20 years.

privileges afforded to states, minus a vote. Only the United States, Israel, Micronesia and the Marshall Islands opposed the resolution.

The first lady's words, however, may not translate into U.S. recognition.

Many analysts doubt that Clinton would recognize a unilaterally declared Palestinian state.

For one thing, Clinton is a signatory to the Oslo accords and is unlikely to participate in a diplomatic move that would effectively lead to their demise.

Such a move would be "inconceivable" said Joel Singer, an Israeli architect of those accords.

"The only way to do it is to say that the entire Oslo process is terminated," said Singer, who is now an attorney in Washington.

Many also believe that Clinton would not support Arafat for domestic political reasons.

By next May, Vice President Al Gore is expected to have begun his campaign for the Democratic nomination for president. It is unlikely that Gore would want to seek Jewish votes and financial support on a platform endorsing Palestine without Israel's support.

What many are trying to figure out is whether the U.S. view on a Palestinian state has changed.

Before Israel and the Palestinians launched the Oslo peace accords in 1993, the United States had a clear policy against the establishment of a Palestinian state — as did Israel.

But as the sides came closer together, U.S. policy shifted to declaring that statehood is an issue for negotiations. Some Middle East analysts believe that the United States has again shifted policy and has not ruled out recognizing a unilaterally declared Palestinian state. U.S. officials have denied such a change.

After a detailed analysis of recent official U.S. statements on the issue, Rob Satloff, the executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, concluded in a recent article in *The New Republic* magazine: "The United States strongly prefers a negotiated outcome of final status issues between Israel and the Palestinians and will work to achieve that goal. However, if the two sides do not reach agreement by May 1999 and the Palestinians issue a unilateral declaration of statehood over Israeli objections, the U.S. may or may not recognize that state."

"Opening the door to recognition only makes unilateralism more likely," Satloff wrote.

In a June 23 letter to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Clinton wrote that the issue of a Palestinian state, like all other final-status issues, "can only be settled through negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians." Clinton underlined "only" in his letter, which responded to correspondence from the umbrella group of 55 Jewish organizations.

At the State Department, spokesman James Rubin recently criticized those who have claimed that there has been a shift in U.S. policy.

When asked if there has been a change in policy, Rubin said, "No. I know there are some people who are using their microscopes to try to change a word here or change a word there. But certainly since I've taken my practice course in what to say on this question, it's always been the same."

Rubin added, "We do not believe it would be wise for us to state our view of this issue. This is something that is to be determined in the final status."

Last week, Indyk echoed Rubin's comments.

"Our position is clear: Neither party should take unilateral steps that would be perceived as pre-empting the outcome of the permanent-status negotiations," he said.

But this has not satisfied many in the Conference of Presidents who originally wrote to Clinton asking him to "make clear to Chairman Arafat that any unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state would be a gross violation of the Oslo accords, and would not be recognized by the U.S."

"A clear declaration, 'We would not recognize,' has not been articulated," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents.

"It's needed for the Palestinians to understand that there isn't going to be a wink and a nod." □



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Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
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JEWISH WORLD

Gore, Sharansky discuss trade

Vice President Al Gore discussed ways to stop Russian missile trade with Iran during a meeting with Natan Sharansky, Israel's minister of trade and tourism.

Sharansky briefed Gore about last week's meetings in Israel with the head of Russia's security service, Nikolai Kovalev. Gore is scheduled to visit Russia and other former Soviet republics later this week.

E.U. officials conclude Iran trip

A delegation from the European Union wrapped up two days of talks in Tehran. E.U. officials said the talks marked the start of a gradual improvement in ties with Iran. The discussions involved human rights, arms control and the war against drugs, according to Iranian state radio. Ties between Europe and Iran reached a low point last year after a German court ruled that Iranian leaders had ordered the 1992 slayings of Kurdish dissidents in Germany.

Swiss leader to discuss response

Switzerland's president plans to meet in September with the country's business leaders and bankers to discuss threats by U.S. financial officers to impose sanctions if negotiations to settle Holocaust-era claims break down. Flavio Cotti will use the meeting to plan a Swiss response to threats, according to a spokeswoman at the Swiss Foreign Ministry.

Germany marks plot

Germany honored a group of army officers on the 54th anniversary of their unsuccessful attempt to kill Hitler.

Rita Sussmuth, the president of the lower house of the German Parliament, said at a Berlin military ceremony that the assassination attempt was a reminder of the opposition to the Nazi regime that existed within Germany.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl issued a statement saying the anniversary should remind Germans of the need to protect their democracy from any challenge by political extremists.

Chief rabbi kept wedding secret

South African President Nelson Mandela made special arrangements for the country's chief rabbi to attend a ceremony one day before Mandela was married because the wedding ceremony took place on the Sabbath. As a result, Cyril Harris was privy to the best-kept secret in South Africa — Mandela's marriage Saturday to Graca Machal, widow of the former president of Mozambique, Samora Machel. At last Friday's special pre-nuptial ceremony, Harris bestowed the blessing of the Kohanim on the couple.

Syrian leader's visit to France yields little for advancing peace

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — There were toasts and vows of "indestructible" friendship, but it remains doubtful whether Syrian President Hafez Assad's controversial visit to France has done anything to advance the Middle East peace process.

Assad, who visited July 16-18 — his first trip to France in 22 years — sought to muster support from France and its European Union partners to play a wider role in the peace process, especially in helping Syria regain the Golan Heights, captured by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War. But Chirac's red-carpet reception of the Syrian leader was sharply criticized by the French media as well as by human rights activists and Jewish groups who branded Assad a "dictator" amid charges that Syria is harboring an alleged war criminal wanted in France.

Assad has repeatedly maintained that Jerusalem's acceptance of a Golan withdrawal is a precondition for the resumption of Israeli-Syrian peace talks, prompting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's response that Israel would not accept any preconditions for restarting bilateral talks. Israel broke off the talks in March 1996 after Syria refused to condemn a series of terror attacks that took place at the time.

At a state dinner in Assad's honor, where he was received warmly by members of the French government and business leaders, the Syrian leader blamed what he called Netanyahu's "intransigence," saying the "peace process has been reduced to zero."

Jewish leaders accused Assad of hypocrisy. "Syria occupies Lebanon and has no intention of leaving. So anyone who comes to teach a lesson that they themselves cannot apply is not really credible," said Michel Zaoui, vice president of CRIF, the umbrella group of secular French Jewish organizations.

While Assad stressed during his stay that a greater European role in the peace process would not undermine American efforts, it is widely known that he has been frustrated with the U.S. failure to press Israel to make concessions on the Golan. Assad harbors a profound distrust of American policy in the Middle East, say observers.

"Damascus fears a U.S. policy that would isolate it," said Bassma Kodmani Darwish, a specialist on Syria at the French Institute for International Relations. "They know that the U.S. administration and Congress are deeply imbued with Israeli points of view and are hostile toward Syria."

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's words showed that France has a different position.

"France recognizes the right of Syria to regain its total sovereignty over the Golan. Negotiations with Israel should not stress the principal of this sovereignty but the ways to restore it," he said.

The timing of Assad's visit provoked protests from French Jews.

Nazi-hunter Serge Klarsfeld, who heads an association of Holocaust survivors, led a demonstration outside the Syrian Embassy during Assad's visit, which fell on the anniversary of a mass roundup of more than 13,000 Jews in 1942.

The visit also prompted charges that Syria is providing haven for a leading Nazi who played a central role in the deportation of Jews from France. Klarsfeld accused Assad of sheltering former Nazi official Alois Brunner, who was condemned to death in absentia by two French courts in 1954.

Brunner, who served during World War II as personal secretary to Adolf Eichmann, Hitler's chief aide, was commander of the infamous Drancy transit camp outside Paris, where some 62,000 of the 76,000 Jews deported from France were detained before being sent to Auschwitz.

Brunner disappeared at the end of the war, but resurfaced in the 1950s and 1960s in Egypt. He then moved to Syria, where the government used him to train secret police.

When Chirac raised the question of Brunner's presence in Syria, Assad told the French leader that as far as he knew Brunner was not in the country.

Assad, who has refused to allow French officials to investigate Brunner's whereabouts in Syria, told Chirac he would "examine the issue," according to Chirac's spokeswoman. French press reports published during the visit portrayed Assad as a man who rules his country with an iron fist and with little concern for human rights. □

Vandals break headstones in Moscow Jewish cemetery

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Some 30 Jewish headstones have been desecrated in a cemetery here.

The vandalism, discovered July 16, occurred at the Vostryakovo cemetery, the only cemetery in Moscow that has a Jewish section. It was the latest incident in a series of recent attacks on Jewish targets in and around the Russian capital city.

A local prosecutor said the vandalism was most likely the work of teen-agers, but he added that investigators are considering the possibility of neo-Nazi involvement in the attack.

Jewish groups said they suspected anti-Semitism was behind the attack, which comes after the bombing of a Moscow synagogue in May and the desecration of a Jewish cemetery near the city last month. "I'm confident that this was no childish naughtiness," Alexander Osovtsov, executive vice president of the Russian Jewish Congress, said in an interview.

Last week's attack — which received surprisingly extensive coverage in leading newspapers and television channels here — left 22 headstones toppled and eight others broken into pieces. Most of the toppled stones were set upright last Friday, and the cemetery's director promised to replace the damaged stones with new ones.

Osovtsov said his group will demand that the city step up security around Jewish sites. Most Moscow cemeteries do not have security guards and are rarely patrolled by police. □

Sales of Superman tale soar as groups seek action

By Eric Greenberg

New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK (JTA) — The people who present the continuing adventures of Superman have apologized publicly for censoring the word "Jews" from a Holocaust plot.

But some Jewish defense groups said the apology isn't enough. Rhonda Barad, eastern region director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, called on DC Comics to write a letter of apology and explanation on its Web site and in the upcoming letters section of the comic book.

"I don't like their apology," said Barad. "I think it is incumbent on them to get a Holocaust scholar or Art Spiegelman [the Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist] to explain how they made this mistake and why there is no excuse for it."

Myrna Shinbaum, a spokeswoman for the Anti-Defamation League, agreed.

"These comics books are already in the hands of untold numbers of young people," she said. "While we accept their apology that there was no intent to offend, we believe it would serve their readership to clarify the situation by explaining that Jews were the target of the Final Solution, which resulted in the death of 6 million, including 1 million Jewish children."

The apology by DC Comics editor-in-chief Jenette Kahn on July 3 followed a report in *The Jewish Week* in which Holocaust experts criticized the Time Warner-owned publishers for fostering

a "Judenrein Holocaust" by deleting the ethnic identity of the victims and perpetrators.

The story, marking the 60th anniversary of Superman's first appearance, finds the Man of Steel traveling back in time to see Nazi atrocities firsthand and to battle alongside Warsaw Ghetto resistance fighters. "It was a lapse. It was a mistake. I'm sorry," Kahn said of the deletions.

She said Superman editor Joey Cavalieri had good intentions when he decided to excise the word "Jews" from the July and August issues of the monthly comic "Superman: Man of Steel."

The comic did have numerous graphic references, like men wearing yarmulkas, and characters had Hebrew names.

Writer-artist Jon Bogdanove said he meticulously researched the Holocaust, even contacting the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. He had included the word "Jews."

In apologizing for Cavalieri, Kahn said: "He was worried about having Nazi characters use Jewish slurs. He was concerned that young kids would repeat the slurs and that young Jewish kids would read it and be given a negative stereotype."

Instead, awkward phrases were used to replace "Jews." For example, when reporter Lois Lane discovers Hitler's secret plan to exterminate Jews, she refers to it as "The Nazi Final Solution to ridding the world of peoples they hate."

In another case, Jews are referred to as the "target population of the Nazis' hate." In a third reference, they are called the "murdered residents" of a bombed-out city called Shtetl.

"It was not the intention of DC Comics to imply that Jews did not suffer during the Holocaust, and we apologize to those people that came away with that impression," said DC spokeswoman Martha Thomases.

It became clear last week that the editing of the word Jewish from the Superman story was not a DC policy.

A recent issue of "The Batman Chronicles" quarterly comic book includes an imaginary story that envisions Batman's secret identity to be a wealthy Jewish artist living in Nazi-controlled Berlin under the name "Baruch Wane" rather than Bruce Wayne.

"Wane was yet a boy when he tragically learned how he and the other Jews were hated by their neighbors," the story explains.

Meanwhile, sales of the issues have taken off in light of the controversy, as several comic book shops sold out of the issues of "Superman: Man of Steel," one of four monthly titles starring the world's first superhero.

"We've had to reorder, which means other shops have had to reorder," said Gary Gladston at Midtown Comics in Manhattan. "People are coming in who don't normally read it."

Gareb Shamus, publisher of *Wizard* magazine, which reports on the comics, said that "The Man of Steel" title sells 75,000 to 100,000 copies per month. The Superman plot was commissioned to help celebrate the debut of the Man of Tomorrow, created by two Cleveland Jewish high-schoolers, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, during the mid-1930s. The flap is ironic, considering that Superman's Kryptonian name is Kal-el, which in Hebrew could mean "voice of God" or "God is all."

Siegel's widow, June, in a 1996 interview with *The Jewish Week* said she never heard her husband deny Superman's Jewish connection. He, like the Jews after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, were forced to live in a strange world, keeping their true identities secret — like Clark Kent hiding behind glasses and a felt hat. □