



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Confusion surrounds talks

Confusion surrounded the status of Israeli-Palestinian talks. Just hours after Palestinians announced that the talks had collapsed, Israel said a new meeting between its defense minister and a top Palestinian official would take place Thursday. But that official, Mahmoud Abbas, quickly denied that a new meeting would occur. President Clinton's spokesman accused the parties of not making a "good-faith effort" to continue the peace process. "They ought to try harder," Mike McCurry added.

Hussein treated for cancer

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wished Jordan's King Hussein a "full and speedy recovery" after the monarch disclosed that he was being treated for suspected lymphatic cancer.

Netanyahu told Israel Radio that he spoke in the name of all Israelis, who he said are "committed to peace with Jordan and all of whom value the important and courageous steps the king has taken over the years in relations with us."

Gold accord hearings begin

Key players in the effort to resolve Holocaust-era claims rejected the latest appeal from the Clinton administration to show "calm" in dealing with Switzerland. Stuart Eizenstat made the appeal at a U.S. Senate Banking Committee hearing to examine the 1946 Washington Accord, under which Switzerland returned to the Allies \$58 million in gold it received from Nazi Germany. The committee's chairman, Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), said the Swiss government had lied about the amount of German gold they had after the war.

Argentine Jews divided

Three separate ceremonies were held in Buenos Aires to commemorate the 1994 attack on the city's Jewish community center. The separate ceremonies reflect a growing rift in the Argentine Jewish community over how to respond to the government's inability to bring to justice those responsible for the AMIA bombing, which left 86 dead and some 300 wounded. The Argentine government has also been unable to solve the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires that killed 29 people and left more than 200 injured. [Page 3]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israel activists faced dilemma as Clinton tried to avert conflict

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — An 11th-hour White House move last week to avert the second veto override of Bill Clinton's presidency put pro-Israel activists in a bind.

Would they support Clinton or members of Congress, whom they had successfully courted for almost a year to gain the necessary two-thirds majority to override the veto?

At issue was a measure, aimed primarily at Russia, that would impose sanctions on companies, institutions and governments selling technology that aid Iran's missile program.

So successful was the Jewish community's yearlong lobbying campaign that only 26 members of the House and Senate combined voted against the measure, all but guaranteeing that Clinton's veto would be overridden.

The legislation, the Iran Missile Proliferation Sanctions Act, was sent to the White House in May and vetoed by the president last month. But only hours before a scheduled House vote to override the veto on July 15, the White House announced a coordinated a move with Moscow aimed at heading off the veto override.

As Russia began an investigation into nine institutions and companies, some state-owned, the United States cut off all funds and trade with those very institutions.

The Kremlin has always denied providing any official help to the Islamic republic's plans to design weapons of mass destruction, but admits that some Russian companies may be involved in privately selling sensitive technologies to Iran.

Russia vowed last week to press criminal charges against any company involved in the illegal transfer of such technology.

Clinton administration officials hoped the Russian move, combined with immediate U.S. sanctions, would stop the push for the legislation that they vehemently opposed.

The bill, the administration argued, would tie the president's hands in dealing with Russia, trigger sanctions with too little evidence and alienate the Russian officials they were coaxing to stop the trade with Iran. But the White House move would not work unless the pro-Israel lobby, led by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, agreed to stop pushing Congress for an override vote.

Key members of Congress wanted the nod from the Jewish community, which had made this issue a top agenda item, before backing away from their battle with the White House. With Iran aggressively pursuing the supplies and technology to build medium-range missiles that would bring Israel into firing range, activists called the matter a question of life and death.

During the past year, Israeli and American intelligence reports have found extensive Russian cooperation with Iran that Israelis have said puts Tehran only 18 months away from deploying such missiles. But the intelligence assessments said the program would fall short of its goal if Russia stopped the flow of parts and knowledge.

When they began their lobbying campaign last year to find a way to halt Iran's ability to develop missiles, Jewish groups said legislation was not necessarily their primary goal.

Instead, they said, the goal was to end Russian support for Iran's missile program. In the absence of unilateral action from the Russians, they said, legislation seemed to be the best way to attain that objective. Last week, when Russia moved to take concrete action, the moment of truth had arrived for the Jewish activists.

A series of conversations between Clinton's national security adviser, Sandy

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinian lawmakers visit U.S.

A group of Palestinian legislators met with U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and other American lawmakers in Washington.

Ahmed Karia, the head of the Palestinian legislative council, said he hoped the talks would lead to closer ties with the staunchly pro-Israel Congress.

Golan bill clears hurdle

The Israeli Knesset gave preliminary approval to a bill that would require a referendum before any Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The bill, which must still pass another three legislative votes, would also require that the Knesset approve a Golan withdrawal by at least a 61-59 vote. The move came as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied that his government is involved in secret negotiations with Syria. The premier issued the denial after Golan settler leaders said Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon had told them earlier in the week about the secret talks.

Labor squabbles over proposal

Sixteen Israeli legislators from the Labor Party signed a petition calling on their colleagues not to initiate a no-confidence vote against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for several months.

After party leader Ehud Barak blasted the proposal, initially suggested by former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, the Labor Knesset faction agreed to discuss the petition again if and when Netanyahu reaches an agreement with the Palestinian Authority.

Mt. Sinai in Israel?

An Italian archaeologist claims that the biblical Mount Sinai is located in Israel, not in Egypt as is commonly believed.

The archaeologist based his findings on ancient shrines unearthed at Mount Karkoum in southern Israel, where he has been excavating for 19 years. Other archaeologists disputed his claim.

Berger, and Howard Kohr, executive director of AIPAC, sealed the deal.

AIPAC would support the White House's campaign to postpone the vote to override Clinton's veto, according to sources close to the discussions. White House officials also sought out leaders of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations to brief them on the moves, according to Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the umbrella group of 55 Jewish organizations.

Hoenlein had traveled to Russia late last year with a delegation from the National Conference on Soviet Jewry to urge officials to stop companies from exporting to Iran goods that could contribute to their weapons program.

By the time Hoenlein ran into Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) on July 15 at a 90th birthday celebration in Detroit for Jewish leader Max Fisher, the speaker of the house had already postponed the vote.

After initially delaying the override for only two days, Gingrich last Friday pulled the measure from the House floor and agreed to give the Russian-American initiative a chance to work. Congress has until the end of its session, currently scheduled for the first week in October, to revisit the issue.

Kohr called the Russian move to investigate its institutions "unprecedented" and a "major decision," but he vowed that AIPAC would press for a veto override "if there is not significant progress."

AIPAC will be closely monitoring a visit to Russia this week by Vice President Al Gore, who is expected to raise the issue with Russian officials.

Before Gore left on Tuesday, Israel's point man on the issue, Natan Sharansky, the trade and industry minister, was in Washington. He briefed Gore on last week's visit to Israel by Nikolai Kovalev, the head of Russia's security service.

It was the first known visit to the Jewish state by a head of the Russian security service. The meeting focused on issues that included Russia's relations with Iran. □

Mandela lets chief rabbi in on his secret marriage

By Suzanne Belling

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — For several weeks, South Africa's chief rabbi was privy to the best-kept secret in South Africa — the marriage of President Nelson Mandela.

While clerics from the Christian, Muslim and Hindu faiths gave their blessings during the marriage ceremony in Mandela's Johannesburg home on Saturday, the president made special arrangements for Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris and his wife Ann to be present the day before.

"He has real 'derech ertz' — respect for every religion and for young and old alike," the chief rabbi said in an interview, adding that Mandela "accommodated my Jewish observance instead of expecting me to fall in with his plans."

Mandela married Graca Machel, widow of the former Mozambican president, Samora Machel, in a wedding that coincided with his 80th birthday.

Speculation was rife among the media regarding a possible marriage up until the actual event, with vehement denials by the official presidential spokesman. But two months ago, Mandela called Harris — with whom he has a close personal relationship — and asked the rabbi to hold the date of July 18 to attend a special meeting.

"I checked my 'luach' (calendar) and realized it would be Shabbat, so I called back Mandela and told him that, while I had to respect him as president of our country, I owed higher respects to the good Lord," said Harris. "He laughed and said he would try to make alternative arrangements for the previous day."

One month later at a meeting of religious leaders in Cape Town, the president took Harris aside and said, "Cyril, I am getting married on July 18 and would like you to give us a blessing."

On Friday, the rabbi bestowed a blessing on the couple, wishing them "deep contentment." On Sunday, Harris was among a host of local and international celebrities — including the singers Michael Jackson and Stevie Wonder — to attend the president's birthday bash. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Clinton vetoes education bill

President Clinton vetoed an education bill that included provisions to enable families to maintain tax-free savings accounts for private, parochial and higher education.

Officials at the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs said they are "deeply disappointed" by the president's decision. Other Jewish groups praised Clinton and criticized the legislation as a back-door attempt to use taxpayer dollars to fund parochial schools. The House and Senate are not expected to muster the necessary two-thirds majority to override Clinton's veto. Instead, Republicans plan to focus on the issue during November's congressional elections.

Swiss leader presses Clinton

The president of Switzerland called on President Clinton to block threatened sanctions against Swiss banks.

In a letter to Clinton, Flavio Cotti said sanctions were "unjustified, unlawful and counterproductive." Several U.S. states and cities are calling for the sanctions if the banks do not settle Holocaust-era claims against them.

Holocaust memorial questioned

The man considered the favorite to become Germany's next chancellor called for renewed discussion about whether a national Holocaust memorial should be built in Berlin.

Gerhard Schroeder said the controversy should be reopened days after his cultural affairs adviser, Michael Naumann, spoke out against the oft-delayed project. In an interview with a German radio station, Naumann said the current plan for the memorial reminded him of the grandiose schemes envisioned by Hitler's favorite architect, Albert Speer.

Swiss denier sentenced

A Swiss court sentenced an author and his publisher for publishing books that denied the existence of Nazi gas chambers. The author received a 15-month sentence and the publisher one year. They were also fined some \$5,500 apiece and forced to turn over the more than \$38,000 in proceeds from the books. The judge said the pair's lack of remorse contributed to their sentences.

Librarian suspended

A Paris librarian was suspended for two years without pay after he removed books about Muslims and the Arab world from the shelves. The man was disciplined for forging library cards with Arab-sounding names. Colleagues said he had made anti-Muslim comments at work and told them he belonged to a Christian fundamentalist group.

Argentine Jewish activists feud four years after deadly bombing

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — The fourth anniversary of the bombing of a central Jewish community building is being marked by a divided Argentine Jewish community.

As evidence of the divisions, three separate ceremonies were held here in the past week to commemorate the July 18, 1994, attack on the Argentina Israelite Mutual Aid Association, or AMIA, which left 86 dead and close to 300 wounded.

The AMIA attack was the second major attack against a Jewish target in Buenos Aires this decade. The first, against the Israeli Embassy in 1992, claimed 29 victims and wounded more than 200.

Last Friday, the Argentine Jewish umbrella organization DAIA sponsored a commemoration without the participation of the grass-roots group Memoria Activa, which includes relatives of the bombing victims.

DAIA's president, Ruben Beraja, said he would not "give a space to people who insult us and denigrate our work."

The growing rift in the Argentine Jewish community over how to respond to the government's inability to bring to justice those responsible for the bombing exploded last year during the ceremonies marking the third anniversary of the attack.

As more than 30,000 people paid homage to the victims, the ceremony soon turned into a demonstration against the government and against Jewish community officials.

The crowd booed and interrupted Beraja, who represents the Jewish community with the government.

Several Cabinet members present at the ceremony were also booed, particularly Interior Minister Carlos Corach, who is Jewish.

This year, several Jewish youth organizations gathered 3,500 people at their own memorial demonstration on Saturday. On Monday, Memoria Activa had its own, small ceremony marking the anniversary.

Unnoticed amid the ongoing feud was the fact that this year's ceremonies all told gathered only a fraction of the 30,000 who attended last year's unified memorial.

Meanwhile, the bombing was also commemorated in the United States.

Memorial ceremonies were held in several American cities and the American Jewish Committee released a report examining the investigation into the Buenos Aires attack.

The report details what has been learned from the investigation and why some believe the bombing remains unsolved.

"Agents of the state are implicated in the bombing," says the report, "Still No Justice — Four Years After the Bombing of the Argentine Jewish Community Headquarters in Buenos Aires."

"The investigation of the AMIA case exposed an advanced state of corruption in Argentina's largest police force," it adds.

"Eleven provincial policemen, including high-ranking officers, remain under arrest on charges related to the bombing."

Another obstacle in the investigation, according to the report, is the fact that the Argentine judiciary system is inadequately prepared to handle international terrorist attacks.

"Even if conclusive proof is found of Iranian involvement, it is hard to find an Argentine, particularly an Argentine Jew, who believes that the local accomplices of the terrorists — will be punished," the report says.

On Monday, the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York marked the anniversary with a "call for justice" for the victims of the bombings.

Candles were lit as the names of the victims were read.

Public officials and civic and religious leaders called on the Argentine government to take increased action to apprehend the perpetrators of the attacks. Gedale Horowitz, president of the JCRC, called upon Argentine President Carlos Menem to "do everything that can be done" to punish those responsible for the crimes. □

(JTA intern Julia Strongwater also contributed to this report.)

Key players in Holocaust claims reject Eizenstat's appeal for calm

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — An appeal by the Clinton administration's point man on Holocaust restitution issues for a period of "calm" and "reflection" in dealing with Switzerland is going largely unheeded by the key players trying to resolve Holocaust-era claims.

In testimony before the Senate Banking Committee on Wednesday, Stuart Eizenstat reiterated a plea to U.S. public finance officers not to threaten Swiss banks with sanctions, saying that such steps would damage American financial markets, hurt U.S.-Swiss relations and delay justice for Holocaust survivors.

"It is our feeling that we will get more by a non-confrontational approach at this point," said Eizenstat, the U.S. undersecretary of state for economic affairs.

"Swiss opinion has been so hardened by threats of sanctions and other allegations that flexibility to achieve a settlement will be further complicated" by punitive measures, he said.

Eizenstat called on the lawyers representing Swiss banks and Holocaust survivors to return to the negotiating table to try to reach a settlement to Holocaust-era claims. Talks broke down last month after the banks said \$600 million was their best offer, and Jewish groups rejected the offer as "insulting" and in "bad faith."

The appeal for restraint appeared to carry little weight with the Jewish leaders and elected officials who appeared before the committee. Michael Hausfeld, one of the lead attorneys representing Holocaust survivors in a class-action lawsuit against Swiss banks, rejected Eizenstat's appeal, saying of the administration official's efforts to bring the two sides together: "He's had three periods of calm. Under American baseball rules, he's out."

Israel Singer, secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress, struck a fiery tone when he told the committee: "We are ashamed of the lies that have been used to scuttle the talks. These talks didn't break down by mistake. They were broken down by an absence of good faith, by an absence of fair play, by an absence of attempting to deal with the question of moral restitution."

He said the banks made a settlement impossible "when they took the money and threw it on the table and told us, 'Take your money and go, all you people want is money and more money.'"

"The issue is not one of money, but moral restitution," Singer said, adding that the Jewish side is ready to return to the negotiating table.

New York State Comptroller H. Carl McCall told the committee he "respectfully" disagreed with the State Department's opposition to sanctions, saying Holocaust survivors "are exhausted, their patience is spent and they are rapidly running out of time."

"Sanctions are extreme actions," he said. "I do not want to impose them. But I will do so if a settlement is not quickly reached, knowing we are on the right side of the moral plumb line."

Several states, including California, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Florida, have already taken punitive measures against Swiss banks, but New York state and New York City have set a deadline of Sept. 1 for implementing a gradual series of sanctions if a settlement is not reached by that date.

Wednesday's wide-ranging hearing was intended to re-examine a 1946 accord signed with Switzerland on the return of

Nazi-looted gold. Switzerland agreed to return \$58 million to the Allies in the 1946 Washington Accord despite records which showed that Switzerland had accepted several times that amount.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), chairman of the Senate committee, threatened to reopen that accord in light of the standstill in settlement talks.

D'Amato said Switzerland must be brought back to the table and held accountable for its "deceitful conduct and apparent fraud."

No decision was made about reopening that agreement.

Switzerland did not send an official government representative to the hearing, saying that the government has already testified before Congress on several occasions and that the country had already taken sufficient steps to address its wartime past.

But a member of the Swiss Parliament, Jean Ziegler, delivered testimony that was critical of recent Swiss actions.

In addition, Fredy Rom, the Swiss correspondent for JTA, offered the committee insight about the current atmosphere in Switzerland, citing a rise in anti-Semitic letters and threats against Swiss Jews.

Meanwhile, Switzerland's ambassador to the United States, Alfred Defago, delivered a letter to President Clinton on Wednesday urging him to block sanctions against Swiss banks. □

Israel, Palestinians cooperate in investigation of failed bombing

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli and Palestinian security officials are working together to apprehend those responsible for this week's failed car-bombing in Jerusalem.

It marks the first time the two sides have cooperated on security in months, according to Israeli news reports.

Israel has blamed Hamas for Sunday's attempted terror attack, which occurred just hours before senior Israeli and Palestinian officials met in Tel Aviv to resume peace talks.

The Palestinian Authority has interrogated Hamas activists in the West Bank refugee camp where the driver of the explosive-laden van lived.

Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani said Tuesday that the driver, Jallal Rumaneh, a known Hamas activist, had not acted alone. "It is safe to assume that one does not mount that amount of material on a car all by his own. He must have partners," said Kahalani.

Police and firefighters discovered the explosives after they were called to Zion Square, where the van had caught fire.

The driver, who was severely burned in the fire, was being treated at a Jerusalem hospital and has been unable to talk to interrogators.

Israeli police do not yet know how the van entered Jerusalem, but the investigation has found that the vehicle was rented and fitted with fake Israeli licence plates, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

Hamas officials in the Gaza Strip have denied any knowledge of the planned attack and Israeli security observers voiced doubt that the operation was an attempt by the fundamentalist group's leader, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, to challenge Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat. □