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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Report: Settlement imminent

Representatives of Switzerland's largest banks are meeting in New York with Jewish officials and lawyers representing Holocaust victims in a renewed effort to reach a settlement of Holocaust-era claims.

The meeting comes amid reports that an agreement for a "global settlement" is imminent.

Iranian diplomats accused

A group of Iranian dissidents said Tehran's top embassy officials in Kenya and Tanzania had links to terrorist groups in the Islamic republic.

The embassy officials were recalled by Iran two weeks before last week's deadly blasts at the U.S. embassies in the two east African countries.

The dissidents also claimed that some of the same officials had been posted in Argentina at the time of a deadly car bombing of a Jewish site in Buenos Aires.

Swiss number to be announced

New York Gov. George Pataki is expected to join Jewish officials Aug. 17 to describe how Holocaust survivors in the United States can apply for payments from a Swiss humanitarian fund.

They are expected to announce a toll-free number for those seeking an application.

Some \$32 million of the \$170 million fund created last year by Swiss banks is slated to be distributed in the United States. The World Jewish Congress has said that if half of the estimated 120,000 Holocaust survivors in the United States certified are eligible, one-time payments of about \$500 would be distributed.

Reimer takes the stand

A man accused of helping the Nazis murder Jews took the stand in his own defense at a U.S. federal court in New York.

Jakob Reimer stated that he would never kill anyone because he is religious.

His testimony contradicted a statement he made in 1992 to federal investigators that he had killed a Jew at an SS camp in Poland during World War II.

The U.S. Justice Department is seeking to denaturalize Reimer for allegedly lying about his actions during the war when he applied in 1952 to immigrate to the United States.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Opposition leader's appeals fail to move U.S. Jewish groups

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Ehud Barak came away from a weeklong visit to the United States having learned a hard lesson: when it comes to issues of security, American Jewish groups do not publicly criticize the elected government of the State of Israel.

"The majority of Americans, Jewish and otherwise, are not willing to take the responsibility of what is and what isn't security," said Abraham Foxman, director of the Anti-Defamation League.

In the company of three Knesset members from his Labor Party, Barak had come to delineate his strategy for advancing the deadlocked peace process and to detail the dangers he foresees in protracted negotiations with the Palestinians.

But the impassioned speeches of the Israeli opposition leader neither aroused enthusiasm nor provoked fear among Jewish leaders, who historically have shied away from questioning the Israeli government's position on security and from being drawn into the country's political infighting.

The Labor delegation's visit to Washington and New York came just days after the Knesset gave preliminary approval to a bill to dissolve the legislature and hold new elections.

But even as Barak pushes his candidacy for prime minister, he was roundly criticized in Israel this week by some of his party colleagues for holding talks with Netanyahu on forming a national unity government.

Such seemingly conflicting developments highlight the quagmire of Israeli politics that American Jewish groups, from the traditional center to the liberal left, want to avoid.

The Labor delegation did cause some controversy at an Aug. 3 meeting with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in Washington, when Knesset member Yossi Beilin reportedly called the pro-Israel lobby "an extreme right-wing organization."

By the time the group arrived in New York, however, Barak was distancing himself from the insults, but maintained the charge that AIPAC does not go far enough to represent the spectrum of political views in what he called Israel's "vibrant democracy."

Foxman, who had called Beilin's remarks "an attack" on the American Jewish community, said Barak had satisfactorily smoothed over the slight while the former Israeli army chief of staff in New York.

Foxman also said the delegation "got the attention of a segment of the American Jewish community" that did not fully understand the distinctions between the Labor and Likud parties' approaches to the peace process.

So far, the organized Jewish community — including factions that have formed a vocal opposition to some Israeli government actions in the past — has maintained a seemingly united front, holding out for Netanyahu to reach an agreement with the Palestinians on a further redeployment from the West Bank.

The United States has suggested a pullback of 13 percent, a figure accepted by the Palestinian Authority.

Israeli-Palestinian talks were suspended last week after the murder of two Jewish settlers in the West Bank, but at the time Israeli officials said they were near an agreement — a claim the Palestinians deny.

In speeches delivered to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and to lay leaders from the ADL, the American Jewish Committee and

MIDEAST FOCUS

Did Israel downplay threat?

Israel had advised the United States to ignore a warning prior to last week's attack on the U.S. Embassy in Kenya, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The Prime Minister's Office refused comment on the report, which cited a security official as saying that Israel downplayed the reliability of the person who gave the warning. Meanwhile, Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin said the United States had brought the bombings of its embassies in Kenya and Tanzania upon itself because it had imposed "sanctions and sieges on Muslim countries."

High Court approves compromise

Israel's High Court of Justice authorized a compromise under which the Religious Affairs Ministry would provide a subsidy of some \$77,000 to the Conservative movement's rabbinical seminary.

The subsidy given the Schechter Institute for Jewish Studies was calculated at 85 percent of the subsidies the ministry gives to Orthodox institutions. Israel's Conservative and Reform movements had petitioned the court to receive subsidies at the same rate as those given Orthodox schools.

Peres, Barak confer

Former Israeli Labor Party leader Shimon Peres told his successor that he favors early elections over a national unity government. Peres' meeting with Ehud Barak came after Barak held a series of discussions about a unity government with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The premier reportedly offered Barak the Defense Ministry portfolio.

Cabinet approves budget

Israel's Cabinet approved a draft of the 1999 state budget. The minister of labor and social affairs, Eliyahu Yishai, stormed out of the meeting after charging that the budget would not solve the country's growing unemployment.

the American Jewish Congress, Barak painted what one participant in the meeting described as a "bleak picture of Israel's current regional and international situation."

With the peace talks now deadlocked for almost a year and a half, Israel has become isolated in the world, Barak said, and relations with the United States have been damaged.

And while Netanyahu has hinged the entire peace process on issues of security with the Palestinians, Barak focused his addresses to Jewish leaders on threats from Iraqi and Iranian weapons development programs and from Hamas and other extremist Palestinian groups.

According to David Harris, the executive director of the American Jewish Committee, Barak told an assembly of lay leaders from the AJCommittee, the AJCongress and the ADL: "I fear we're headed for a prescription for disaster if we continue down this road. If you join me in this conclusion, I hope you will act accordingly."

Beilin was even more pointed in his remarks to the group last Friday. Speaking with Jewish reporters after the meeting, Beilin said he told the lay leaders, "The majority of you are more open, moderate and dovish than what seems to be. The only thing you can do to help us is to express yourself."

But it will take more than a prediction of violence to move the American Jewish community as a whole.

The executive director of the American Jewish Congress said that only if Israel were on the brink of "an overwhelming disaster" would there be a reconsideration of unified support for Israel's elected leadership.

At the present time, Phil Baum suggested, "there is not a sufficiently imminent danger to force the American Jewish community" to tell Israel what to do.

Stressing his group's eagerness to see a revitalized peace process, the AJCommittee's Harris said, "I think the American Jewish community's role is important, but frankly it is not a role that can avert catastrophe. We have to be realistic about the role we can play and the claims we make about our own work."

So long as Israel and the Palestinians maintain diplomacy, be it "table or telephone diplomacy, if the parties are engaged with one another, and America is playing a useful facilitating role, you're less likely to hear vocal static," Harris said.

Some Jewish leaders faulted the Labor Party itself for failing to deliver a clear message to American Jews.

"Why haven't you seen a more active American Jewish community, especially among those who have been on the liberal side of the spectrum?" said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

"Part of it has to do with the ineptness of the opposition in Israel. When there are alternative voices emerging from the Israeli political scene, clearly outlining issues and suggesting alternatives, that tends to mobilize the American Jewish community," he said.

Just the same, rumblings are beginning to be heard, with some planning a break from the overall consensus.

"There are a lot of concerned American Jews who I think are scared to death about the collapse of the peace process" and the establishment of a Palestinian state, Yoffie said.

He added that conversations have begun among those Jews about what possible action to take if there is no breakthrough in peace talks.

But even those groups who are strong supporters of the Oslo accords, including the Israel Policy Forum, say it is too soon to speak out against the Netanyahu government.

"Everyone agrees on one thing: to give the negotiations every possible chance to work," said Tom Smerling, the IPF's Washington director.

"Everybody across the board in our community, I believe, will applaud the Netanyahu government if they reach an agreement" on a redeployment, he said.

With the longevity of Israel's government now in question, as a result of calls for early elections, few American leaders are eager to join the fray. "Everybody's waiting for the Israeli political process to shake itself out, and when the dust settles, then groups here are more likely to be taking positions," Smerling said. □



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JEWISH WORLD

HIAS officials to investigate

Leaders of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society are traveling to Moscow to investigate reports that officials at the U.S. Embassy there have been denying refugee status to Jews from the former Soviet Union at a high rate this year.

The HIAS delegation plans to meet with American diplomats and with members of the Jewish community during their 10-day visit to Russia and Ukraine.

Sakic will not fight extradition

An alleged former female guard at a Croatian concentration camp said she would not oppose that country's request to extradite her.

Esperanza Sakic, who has been living in Argentina, is accused of having been a guard at the Jasenovac camp, where up to 500,000 people died during World War II.

Sakic's husband, Dinko, who was a commander at the camp, was extradited to the Central European nation in June.

Glomp statement applauded

Jewish leaders applauded Poland's top Catholic cleric for calling on followers to stop putting up crosses at the site of the Auschwitz death camp.

The director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Jerusalem office, Efraim Zuroff, said Cardinal Josef Glomp's statement was a "positive development" that was "long overdue."

Catholic fringe groups, urged on by an author of anti-Semitic pamphlets, have erected some 90 crosses near the camp.

Court orders CBS probe

The Federal Communications Commission must reconsider whether CBS intentionally distorted the news when it aired a segment about life in Ukraine, a U.S. federal appeals court ruled. A viewer wants to have the FCC turn down CBS's broadcast license for a station in Detroit.

The viewer claimed that the popular news magazine show "60 Minutes" intentionally gave the impression that all Ukrainians are anti-Semitic.

Bus driver apologizes

An Argentine bus driver accused of trying to throw a Jewish youth off his bus issued a public apology and denied he was anti-Semitic.

Witnesses said the driver said, "No Jews get on my bus," before hitting the youth and pulling off his skullcap.

The head of Argentina's anti-racism unit said he helped obtain the apology to prevent the driver from losing his job.

Peace Now: 2,900 houses in settlements stand empty

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli settlers and Peace Now members came to blows as the dovish activists attempted to count empty houses in one West Bank settlement.

The clash occurred Wednesday after three Peace Now activists arrived in the settlement of Itamar, escorted by a press photographer, in order to count empty houses there.

The photographer was beaten up by local settlers and as the team tried to leave the settlement, four local cars blocked its way out. The settlers insisted that the Peace Now car would have to first pass a security check.

The Peace Now team was eventually allowed to leave after an Israel Defense Force officer arrived on the scene.

Aharon Domb, secretary general of the Yesha Council of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, condemned the behavior of the settlers and said they should have shown hospitality to the Peace Now activists — despite their political differences.

The trip to Itamar was part of Peace Now's investigation into empty houses in the territories. Extensive building is continuing there even though some 2,900 apartments stand empty in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Peace Now claimed at a news conference Wednesday. The group said that despite the empty houses, thousands of new homes were being built in several settlements.

Domb said there was no truth to the claim. He said there were only several hundred empty buildings, which would soon be occupied.

Meanwhile, Israeli security forces arrested Wednesday two Palestinian residents of the village of Madma, suspected of having been involved in the murder of two West Bank settlers at Yizhar last week.

The men arrested were identified as Thabet Masswar, 20, a medical student, and Ahmad Kamal, 28, a teacher. □

Clinton administration moves to end INS processing delays

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Crippling backlogs in the U.S. immigration system could come to an end if proposed changes at the Immigration and Naturalization Service are implemented.

Jewish groups actively involved in the resettlement of Jewish refugees in the United States welcomed a Clinton administration move announced last Friday to "rescue" citizenship applicants from a two-year wait for the INS to begin processing paperwork. Tens of thousands of Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union are among the newcomers who have been caught up in the bureaucratic delays.

Under the plan, which requires congressional approval, the INS would shift \$171 million into the citizenship process from other immigration programs. If all goes smoothly, the delay would drop to six months by October 1999, according to the INS.

But the administration has also proposed some restructuring of an INS department that has the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society crying foul.

"While we're pleased that the INS is directing its efforts at improving service and cutting the untenable backlog, we continue to have some concerns," said Leonard Glickman, executive vice president of HIAS.

Under the plan announced last week, a 1-year-old independent agency that has worked with some success to improve INS services would be folded back into the INS.

"Why go back to the old system, which was full of problems, when we're finally seeing reforms," Glickman said. Jewish officials are waiting to hear from the Clinton administration regarding their concern.

On a positive note, according to immigration advocates, the INS decided to ask Congress to postpone an increase in the fee for citizenship applicants until 1999. □

California Jews try to save forest from one of their own

By Noma Faingold

Jewish Bulletin of Northern California

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — The ongoing battle to protect the Headwaters Forest isn't only pitting environmentalists against industry — it's pitting Jewish leaders against one of their own.

The 60,000-acre forest in northern California is owned by the Maxxam Corp. and has the distinction of being the last remaining privately owned virgin redwood forest in the world.

Maxxam's chief executive officer, Houston financier Charles Hurwitz, is also a member of and a major contributor to Houston's Reform Congregation Beth Israel.

For more than a decade, environmentalists and others have been trying to protect the ancient forest and its wildlife, some of which is endangered.

Federal and state politicians have recently proposed to purchase 7,500 acres for \$380 million and to protect key areas from logging.

While the federal government has committed \$250 million, many California legislators currently are fighting against handing over the other \$130 million — unless Hurwitz is willing to permit more environmental protections.

"We're throwing up our hands and ready to walk away," Dan Reeves, chief of staff for state Assemblywoman Carole Migden, said last week.

Migden, who is Jewish, is co-chair of the state's Joint Committee on the Headwater Forest and Ecosystem Management Planning Committee.

Reeves added that Maxxam officials have "refused to negotiate in any real way on the conservation plan. The deal is falling through."

Nothing could be further from the truth, according to Maxxam spokesperson Bob Irelan.

"We have made a great many concessions and have cooperated with every entity — the state, the federal government — in preservation of a habitat and in resolving this issue," Irelan said in an interview from Houston last week. "Mr. Hurwitz thinks we are acting very responsibly and have shown enormous patience. After all, we are in business."

Many Jewish leaders who are passionate about saving Headwaters expect more from Hurwitz.

"The Jewish point of view relates to spiritual and ethical limits as to how people are permitted to make their money," said Rabbi Margaret Holub of the Mendocino Coast Jewish Community in Caspar, Calif.

"The whole world is not his oyster."

Irelan contended that preserving the entire forest is unrealistic, unnecessary — based on the company's scientific studies — and will prove disastrous for the economy in Humboldt County, where Maxxam's Pacific Lumber Co. is the No. 1 employer in the area, providing 1,500 jobs.

"If we close up shop, an already economically distressed area would be extremely distressed," Irelan said.

Holub doesn't agree. "He's taking the trees hostage. It's as if he's saying, 'I'm going to kill them unless the government pays this ransom.'"

Jewish leaders in the environmental movement say they are

troubled that Hurwitz has consistently dismissed all pleas, protests, negotiations and requests on behalf of preserving more of the Headwaters land.

"A core Jewish value is stewardship of the earth," said Rabbi Stephen Pearce, spiritual leader of San Francisco's Congregation Emanu-El and a founder of the Interfaith Coalition to Save the Headwaters Forest.

"It's sad," Pearce said. "Here's a Jew that should somehow be [driven] by higher Jewish values and doesn't seem to care. This is a guy who could be a hero and go down in history along with John Muir," he said, mentioning the name of one of America's most famous naturalists.

"But, instead, he's going to go down as one of the devils of environmental catastrophe."

The Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis overwhelmingly passed a resolution at its annual meeting in June in support of "protecting and restoring the ecological integrity of the Headwaters Forest."

Other Jews involved with Headwaters supported the rabbis' stance.

Hurwitz "makes no connection between his faith and his actions," said Ted Nordhaus, a Jew who is executive director of the Oakland-based Headwaters Sanctuary Project.

According to Nordhaus, 96 percent of California's redwoods have already been cut down.

To mourn the forest's destruction, student rabbi Naomi Steinberg of B'nai Ha-Aretz near Garberville, Calif., and Barak Gale of San Francisco's Congregation Sha'ar Zahav led a group of 25 people, mostly Jews, in a hike in the Headwaters in observance of Tisha B'Av on Aug. 2.

Tisha B'Av, a remembrance of the destruction of the First and Second Temples, was appropriate for honoring nature, said Gale.

"Where is there a greater temple than in an ancient forest?" Gale asked.

Several people fasted at the event, which drew people from as far away as Phoenix.

The day was spent mourning, hiking, praying and sharing Torah commentaries. □

Hezbollah bursts into Israeli post

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A senior Israeli army official has called for an inquiry into how a Hezbollah member infiltrated a military post in southern Lebanon.

Israeli soldiers were caught by surprise Sunday when a Hezbollah unit attacked their outpost and one gunman managed to enter the base in Israel's security zone.

No serious injuries were reported in the incident, in which the gunman who actually entered the outpost got into a fistfight with an Israeli soldier before escaping.

Senior Israeli army officers said the Hezbollah fighters may have wanted to steal weapons in addition to harm some Israeli soldiers.

They also raised the possibility that the Islamic fundamentalist group wanted to kidnap an Israeli soldier, an oft-stated desire of Hezbollah.

One senior army official called for an inquiry into the incident.

"It is unacceptable that the Israeli force was unable to overcome the attacker or kill him," said the officer. □