



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 163

Thursday, September 3, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clinton makes peace calls

President Clinton telephoned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat.

The phone calls were described as an attempt to urge both the Israelis and the Palestinians to take the final steps on a further Israeli redeployment from the West Bank.

"We're closer than we ever were before," one U.S. official was quoted as saying. [Page 3]

Israel prepares for new influx

Israel began to prepare for a possible new wave of Russian Jewish immigrants. Israeli officials in Russia say there has been a flurry of inquiries in recent days about immigration visas.

The reports came as President Clinton said he was concerned about the possible ramifications the current instability in Russia could have on the country's Jewish community. [Page 4]

Yeltsin attends shul dedication

Russian President Boris Yeltsin paid tribute to Soviet Jews who perished during World War II at a dedication ceremony for a new Moscow synagogue.

Jewish leaders said they were pleased Yeltsin was able to attend the ceremony at Russia's World War II memorial despite the country's deepening economic and political crisis. [Page 2]

Million Youth March set

A U.S. federal appeals panel ruled that New York City must allow a controversial Million Youth March to take place Saturday in Harlem.

But the panel reduced the scope and duration of the march, which is being organized by Khalid Muhammad, the anti-Semitic former spokesman of the Nation of Islam, and opposed by New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

Steps taken on weapons

President Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin agreed to create working groups in an effort "to halt the spread of dangerous weapons."

At the end of their two-day summit in Moscow, Clinton also hailed Russia for taking "important steps" to tighten export controls on missiles and weapons of mass destruction.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish groups shift to offense in final weeks of 105th Congress

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Most Jewish activists on Capitol Hill have been devoting their energies to damage control since the 105th Congress opened nearly two years ago.

The defeat of a constitutional amendment that would have allowed for prayer in schools and the restoration of some welfare benefits to legal immigrants stand as some of the Jewish community's achievements on the domestic agenda in a legislative session that, by and large, has had the community on the defensive.

Now, in the final weeks before Congress adjourns, Jewish activists are hoping that their advocacy efforts will score positive achievements on:

- enhancing protections for religious practice in this country;
- punishing foreign countries for religious persecution; and,
- strengthening the federal hate crimes statute.

Some in the Jewish community also would like to see the Senate follow the House's lead on campaign finance reform.

But with a tight legislative calendar, it is unclear whether lawmakers will have time to take up those measures, especially if independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr's report to Congress prompts presidential impeachment proceedings.

Campaign finance reform efforts have shifted to the Senate since the House approved a bipartisan campaign finance reform bill in August.

The bill would end the unlimited and unregulated donations to the political parties, known as soft money, which have been used as a way around limits on contributions to individual candidates. It would also tighten the regulations on ads taken out by independent groups that attack or support a candidate.

The issue strikes at the core of the American Jewish community's influence on Capitol Hill. Campaign contributions have played a key role in acquiring and maintaining the access that is necessary to being effective in Congress.

No one disputes that the Jewish community has long benefitted from the current system, wielding influence that is disproportionate to its numbers. But most Jewish organizations have not taken a position on the bill because the issue is so divisive in the community. Some Jewish activists point to what they see as a critical need to clean up the system and restore faith in government.

"I think it's short-sighted at best to focus on today's questions of political influence rather than worrying about how this system is really eroding and undermining our democracy," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, one of the few Jewish organizations that has endorsed campaign finance reform legislation.

On the other side of the debate, however, are political action committees and some lobbyists for pro-Israel interests who argue against changing the rules of a game in which the Jewish community is doing well.

For any group "that involves itself disproportionately like the Jewish community," campaign finance reform "is a negative, it affects their clout," said Morris Amitay, a longtime Jewish activist who heads the pro-Israel Washington PAC.

The Republican-aligned National Jewish Coalition has vigorously opposed the reform, saying it would make it illegal for the coalition to communicate lawmakers' voting records to the Jewish community and restrict the organization from criticizing

MIDEAST FOCUS

China assures Israel

Israel's defense minister said he had received assurances that China would not pass on technology to Iran that could be used for weapons of mass destruction. Yitzhak Mordechai made his comments after a 90-minute meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Beijing. Mordechai is in Beijing to build defense ties between Israel and China.

Israeli court to rule on teen

An Israeli court is expected to rule Sunday on the possible extradition of a U.S. teen-ager to stand trial on murder charges. Samuel Sheinbein fled to the Jewish state last September after he allegedly viciously murdered another teen-ager in suburban Maryland.

Mordechai: Missile 'dangerous'

Korea's recent firing of a ballistic missile was a "dangerous development," Yitzhak Mordechai said the move by Pyongyang was particularly disturbing because of the ties North Korea has with Syria and Iran. Mordechai made his comments in Beijing after meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

Israel to oversee restitution

Holocaust survivor groups in Israel welcomed the establishment of a government committee to oversee the distribution of funds for survivors in the Jewish state. The move came after two Swiss banks agreed to a \$1.25 billion settlement of Holocaust-era claims, and as insurance companies are making offers to resolve claims against them.

Greece uses Israeli model

Greece is creating a new border-guard unit based on an Israeli model. The idea for the unit dates back to 1994, when Greek officials visited Israel to study Israeli border-patrol procedures. The new unit will attempt to prevent the illegal immigration of Albanian refugees.

Democratic candidates on their voting records or positions.

In the area of religious liberty, Americans' ability to practice their religion free of government intrusion took a big hit last year when the Supreme Court struck down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act as unconstitutional.

Since then, a coalition of groups from across the political and ideological spectrums, including all major Jewish organizations and the Christian Coalition, has been working with lawmakers to meticulously craft new legislation to restore the broadest possible protections for religious liberty.

"The difficulty for religious practice today is sort of thoughtless government regulation, not intentional persecution," said Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department, who helped draft the bill.

The Religious Liberty Protection Act relies on three technical powers of Congress — its ability to regulate spending, interstate commerce and the 14th Amendment's protection of citizenship rights — to extend new protections to religious freedoms.

The House Judiciary Committee approved the bill last month, but — in a move that caught the coalition supporting the act by surprise — lawmakers removed one of the three prongs, the commerce clause.

Activists consider that element key to protecting certain freedoms, such as the ability of a Jewish or Muslim woman to obtain a driver's license if a state attempts to deny her one because she refuses to uncover her head for a photograph. Because denial of a driver's license could affect interstate commerce, the government would be forced to make accommodations under the commerce clause of the proposed bill.

Lawmakers, however, struck the clause after several right-wing groups outside the coalition argued that the commerce clause should not be used to expand the federal government's power. They also said it was inappropriate to link religion and commerce.

Activists are now looking to the Senate to pass a stronger bill.

Looking overseas, the House overwhelmingly approved in May the Freedom From Religious Persecution Act, which seeks to impose sanctions on countries that persecute religious minorities. The Senate later took up a different bill that most proponents, including Jewish groups, now see as a better, more flexible, approach.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, however, dealt a setback to the effort during the summer when it decided not to consider the bill because, Republican and Democratic committee members argued, the measure would alienate diplomatic friends and economic partners. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) has promised a vote on religious persecution before Congress goes home, but it remains to be seen if enough time remains to work out differences between the two versions.

Meanwhile, Jewish activists involved in the fight against racism, bigotry and prejudice have been urging lawmakers to pass a tougher hate crimes statute. A measure pending in Congress would give federal prosecutors new authority to prosecute hate crimes against women, the disabled, and gays and lesbians. Current federal law applies only to crimes motivated by race, color, religion or national origin. □

Yeltsin mourns Jewish dead

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin bowed his head in memory of the Jewish victims of World War II at the dedication of a synagogue commemorating these victims.

In a surprise speech at the ceremony at the World War II memorial complex here, Yeltsin paid tribute to the hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews who perished during the war. Yeltsin, who joined Russian and world Jewish leaders, war veterans and city officials at the ceremony, also condemned anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism in modern Russia.

Jewish leaders said they were pleased that Yeltsin was able to find time to participate in the ceremony despite Russia's deepening economic and political crisis.

Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov presented the new synagogue with a 19th-century Torah scroll. The synagogue inside the Poklonnaya Gora park houses Russia's first-ever permanent exhibit about the Holocaust.

The complex in the popular park also includes a mosque and a Russian Orthodox church. At least 20 million residents of the Soviet Union died during the war. □



Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*
Lisa Hostein, *Editor*
Kenneth Bondler, *Managing Editor*
Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

JEWISH WORLD

Clinton meets Bronfman

President Clinton pledged continued support on the restitution of Holocaust-era claims. Clinton's comments came in a meeting with World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman in Moscow, where Clinton completed a summit with Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

The last time Clinton and Bronfman met was at the White House in 1996, when Bronfman asked the U.S. president to press the inquiry into European nations' World War II financial dealings.

Religion keeps teens off drugs

Teen-agers who attend religious services are less likely to use drugs, according to a recent study.

Only 8 percent of the 1,000 teens in the survey by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University who attend religious services at least four times a month smoked cigarettes, as opposed to 22 percent of those who attend once a month or less.

Some 13 percent of the survey's respondents who attend services weekly have smoked marijuana, compared to 30 percent of those who go less than once a month.

Religion "is a key factor in giving our children the moral values, skill and will to say 'no' to illegal drugs, alcohol and cigarettes," said the study's authors.

Berezovsky speaks out

One of Russia's leading businessmen said anti-Semitism prevents him from taking part in a future Russian government.

"A Jew cannot run for top posts in Russia at the moment. It would contribute to the strengthening of nationalist forces," said Boris Berezovsky.

ADL condemns Democrat

The Anti-Defamation League joined the national Republican Party and the Christian Coalition in condemning statements by Michigan's Democratic candidate for governor.

The ADL called on Geoffrey Fieger to apologize for a 1996 newspaper interview in which he likened Orthodox rabbis to Nazis.

Women's league signs Israeli

A professional women's basketball team in the United States signed an Israeli player.

The New England Blizzard of the American Basketball League signed Limor Mizrahi, a 5-foot-7-inch point guard who has been named MVP of the Israeli women's basketball league three times.

The ABL begins its 44-game season in the beginning of November.

Clinton phones Netanyahu, Arafat to press redeployment

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In a sign that the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks may move off of life support, President Clinton has personally urged the sides to conclude an agreement on an Israeli redeployment from the West Bank.

Clinton called both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat from Moscow on Wednesday to express his disappointment that no agreement has been reached. The president made the calls after completing his summit with Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

Netanyahu told Israel Television that Clinton said "he intends to begin aiding the political process with the Palestinians" after he returns from Russia.

According to Netanyahu, Clinton did not pressure Israel during their "extensive" conversation. "He said he intends to work together with me to reach an agreement that answers the needs of both sides," the Israeli premier said.

Netanyahu spoke to Clinton for about 25 minutes. The Arafat call lasted more than 15 minutes.

A senior U.S. official told reporters traveling with the president that the continuing stalemate in the peace process is "very frustrating."

"We need to get closure," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

"They're as close to agreement as they've ever been," the official said. "The president continued to press both the chairman and the prime minister to move the peace process forward."

If Clinton becomes involved in the talks, as Netanyahu said, it would mark a shift in U.S. policy.

In recent months, the United States has told the Israelis and Palestinians that they must negotiate directly to resolve their differences. In fact, the State Department has rejected numerous requests from both sides to intervene.

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have been deadlocked for 18 months.

In an attempt to head off expected reports that Clinton criticized the Israeli leader, Netanyahu spokesman Avi Bushinsky said in a statement that Clinton's expression of disappointment does not imply the president was "putting the blame on Israel. The prime minister was very satisfied with the conversation."

Arafat recently sent Netanyahu a letter in which he agreed to an Israeli plan that a portion of the lands included in a U.S.-sponsored proposal for a 13 percent redeployment in the West Bank be considered a nature preserve. This would prevent the Palestinians from launching any construction projects in the area, which makes up some 3 percent of the proposed pullback.

But in his letter, Arafat rejected most of the Israeli conditions for bringing the talks to a successful conclusion.

A major stumbling block is who will have responsibility for security in the preserve. Israel is demanding total security control. Arafat wants to share in these responsibilities.

On Tuesday, Netanyahu said Israel and the Palestinians had been "very close" to completing negotiations on the redeployment, but that the Palestinians had pulled back.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat denied Netanyahu's claim.

Speaking in South Africa on Wednesday at the summit of the 113-nation Non-Aligned Movement, Arafat blamed Israel for the impasse in the negotiations.

"This Israeli government is determined to destroy the peace process, to create an atmosphere of terror, anarchy and instability in the region and to violate international legitimacy," he said.

In Moscow, the U.S. and Russian leaders signed an agreement to create seven working groups on export controls "to halt the spread of dangerous weapons," Clinton said.

Clinton hailed Russia for taking "important steps" to tighten export controls on missiles and weapons of mass destruction and penalize offenders. □

Russian economic crisis spurs Israel to prepare for aliyah wave

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has begun to dust off emergency absorption plans to prepare for a possible new wave of Russian Jewish immigrants.

In light of the economic crisis ravaging Russia, Yuli Edelstein, Israel's minister of absorption, is preparing plans that take into account a potential immigrant increase of at least 10 to 20 percent, according to an aide.

Before the current crisis, Israel expected about 50,000 to 60,000 Jewish immigrants from states in the former Soviet Union this year.

According to Edelstein's assessments, the number of Russian immigrants could even double if the economic crisis worsens and there is an outburst of anti-Semitism against Jews in Russia.

The economic crisis has not yet driven large numbers of Russian Jews to apply for immigration visas from the Israeli Embassy. But Israeli officials in Russia say there has been a flurry of inquiries in recent days about the visas.

A sharp increase in Russian immigration would likely have a dramatic effect on the Israeli economy.

The more than 800,000 Jews from former Soviet Union who immigrated to Israel since 1989 have played a key role in fueling Israel's rapid economic growth of about 6 percent a year during the early 1990s.

But massive immigration also demands an increase in government spending on absorption — at a time when the government is committed to cutting the budget deficit.

Next week, Edelstein will present his projections to a government committee on immigration and absorption headed by Natan Sharansky, who, like Edelstein, is himself an immigrant from Russia.

Sharansky, Israel's minister of industry and trade, was in Russia this week to participate in the dedication of a synagogue in memory of victims of the Holocaust. On Wednesday, he held meetings with Jewish community leaders, who told him that the economic crisis has already sparked an increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric.

In a related development, one of Russia's leading businessmen said anti-Semitism prevents him from taking part in a future Russian government. "A Jew cannot run for top posts in Russia at the moment. It would contribute to the strengthening of nationalist forces," said Boris Berezovsky.

Meanwhile, President Clinton expressed his concern about instability in Russia and its possible ramifications for the country's Jewish community. Clinton made his remarks in Moscow at a meeting with American Jewish leaders who came to the Russian capital for the commemoration of the new synagogue.

"He understands the dangers of the Jewish community," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and one of the participants in the discussion.

Clinton was in Moscow for two days of talks with Russian President Boris Yeltsin. □

(JTA correspondent Lev Krichevsky in Moscow contributed to this report.)

Knesset committee convenes in bid to move early elections bill

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A key Israeli legislator has warned that if a majority of Knesset members support early elections, he will ask legislators to return from their summer recess to vote on the issue.

The warning came from Hanan Porat, chairman of the Knesset Law Committee, after the committee held a stormy session Wednesday on two bills — one to dissolve the Parliament and hold early elections, and the other to abolish the direct election of the prime minister.

The early elections bill, which 60 legislators backed in a preliminary Knesset vote July 29, just before the body began its recess, still must pass three more votes — the first of which is expected to take place after the legislature reconvenes Oct. 19.

The law committee met this week to prepare the legislation for that vote, but no action was taken.

Labor Knesset member Haim Ramon expressed confidence Wednesday that a majority of the 120-member house would be on record supporting the measure after the two Moledet lawmakers decide to support early elections, a move that Ramon said he expects to occur Sunday.

But coalition chairman Meir Sheetrit disagreed, saying that there was no chance of gathering at least 61 votes if Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu goes ahead with a further redeployment from the West Bank.

"The only chance for the government to fall is if there is no progress in the peace process," Sheetrit said.

That view does not seem to be shared by Porat, whose National Religious Party is one of the coalition members that remains opposed to yielding any more territory to the Palestinian Authority. In fact, Porat's suggestion that he might speed up the legislative process that could bring down the government was seen as a warning to the premier to not go ahead with the redeployment.

Netanyahu left no doubt where he stands on both bills. He has said repeatedly in recent weeks that elections will be held in 2000, as originally planned. And, unlike some key members of his own Likud Party, Netanyahu is also strongly opposed to election reform.

Likud Knesset member Uzi Landau is one of the co-sponsors of the bill to amend the election system, which passed the Knesset in a preliminary vote in May. Landau insisted Wednesday that if there are early elections, they should be held with a different system for electing the premier.

Netanyahu is the first premier elected under a new system that went into effect for the 1996 elections. Israeli voters cast two ballots, one for prime minister and the other for a political party's list of Knesset candidates. Before the change in the election system, voters cast only one ballot for the Knesset list under the assumption that the head of either Labor or Likud, the nation's two major parties, would become premier.

Election reform advocates from across the political spectrum have charged that the new system actually has weakened the powers of the prime minister because the separate ballot system strengthened the presence of smaller parties in the Knesset and, therefore, in the governing coalition. □