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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Progress in talks downplayed

Israel and the Palestinians "are not" on the verge of a peace agreement but they have made significant progress in their negotiations, said State Department spokesman James Rubin.

His comments came as U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross returned to the region for separate meetings with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Meanwhile, Israeli and Palestinian officials said it is up to the other side to take the steps needed to wrap up a long-delayed agreement.

Aliyah inquiries increase

The economic crisis in Russia has created a dramatic increase in interest among the country's Jews in making aliyah, said Jewish Agency for Israel emissaries in Moscow.

There were 100 such inquiries on Tuesday alone, compared to the daily average of 10, according to Jewish Agency reports.

D'Amato seeks deadline

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) challenged the Clinton administration and U.S. lawmakers "to give more than lip service" when it comes to punishing Palestinians accused of killing Americans.

At a news conference organized by the Zionist Organization of America, the senator suggested that the United States set a deadline for Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to extradite terrorists involved in the deaths of 11 American citizens.

Failure to comply, D'Amato said, should result in a suspension of U.S. financial aid to the Palestinian Authority.

Gold commission ends work

The Tripartite Gold Commission is wrapping up more than five decades of work.

The panel, run by the United States, Britain and France, has finished distributing the 336.5 tons of gold Nazi Germany looted from European countries and will turn its archives over for storage to the French Foreign Ministry.

The World Jewish Congress has been pressing the commission to open its archives in hopes that the documents may shed light on how much of the gold was stolen from individuals.

FIVE YEARS AFTER OSLO

U.S.-Israel relations reflect ups, downs of peace process

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When Yitzhak Rabin grasped Yasser Arafat's extended hand five years ago, observers from around the world tried to describe the sea change in Israeli-Palestinian relations that took place on the White House lawn.

Almost all agreed that no superlatives adequately characterized that moment. Exuberant guests, including American Jewish and Arab American leaders, who gathered for the Sept. 13, 1993, signing of the Declaration of Principles bubbled with hope that negotiators had solved one of the seemingly intractable conflicts of the 20th century.

After decades of bloodshed, the Palestinians and Israelis had committed themselves to negotiate a peaceful solution to their conflict. And they had achieved their initial agreements through direct talks without the assistance of the United States.

Five years later, the nature of the American role in the peace process has shifted dramatically — U.S. officials are actively involved in the talks and an American plan for advancing the process is on the table. At the same time, the warming in U.S.-Israel relations that followed the 1993 agreement has chilled considerably since the peace process deadlocked some 18 months ago.

Few anticipated the dramatic impact the signing ceremony would have on this relationship. Struck in Oslo one month earlier, the Declaration of Principles laid the road map for the historic reconciliation between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

"These accords were not intended to affect the Israel-U.S. relationship," said Joel Singer, the primary author of the Declaration of Principles. Singer, an Israeli attorney who lives in Washington, called the initial boost in relations "a fringe benefit."

But as the hope generated by a series of Israeli-Palestinian agreements, the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty and the launching of Israeli-Syrian peace talks eventually gave way to terrorism, assassination and stalemate, Israel's relations with the Palestinian Authority regressed — and the rocky road in the Middle East did not spare relations between Washington and Jerusalem.

Many analysts argue that there are in fact two chapters in the Oslo process: the one written by Rabin and Peres, in which Washington played the role of a friendly observer; and the second, which began after Benjamin Netanyahu became prime minister in 1996 and the United States became directly involved.

The Oslo accords caught the Clinton administration off-guard. American officials did not learn of the agreement until after a small group of Palestinians and Israelis concluded secret talks in the Norwegian capital.

Rabin called then-U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher in August 1993, told him that "something important has developed" and asked him to meet with Peres, according to Singer, who was in Rabin's office at the time. Christopher cut short his vacation and, at an army base in California, received Peres, Singer and the two senior Norwegian officials who sponsored the secret talks.

"Christopher is a person whose face never reveals his emotions. For the first time, he showed complete surprise," Singer said in a telephone interview this week, recalling the moment the secretary of state heard that the two sides had reached an agreement.

Two weeks later, the accords were signed and Rabin and Clinton began a closeness that an Israeli premier and an American president had never before shared.

Rabin was a father figure to Clinton. In meetings he was known to interrupt

MIDEAST FOCUS

More joint exercises planned

Israel said it is planning a joint naval exercise with Turkey and would invite Egypt and Jordan to participate. The move, announced during Turkish premier Mesut Yilmaz's visit to Israel, comes after the two countries held joint exercises in January. Arab states called the earlier exercises an act of aggression.

Teachers strike ends

A night of marathon negotiations brought an end to Israel's teachers strike. The agreement between teachers' unions and the Finance Ministry will allow teachers' salaries to keep pace with inflation. The pact enabled some 2 million children to return to the classroom after the weeklong strike delayed the start of the school year.

Settlers number nearly 170,000

Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip number nearly 170,000, an increase of 3.3 percent during the first half of the year, according to Israel's Interior Ministry. Half of the increase resulted from natural growth and the rest from the absorption of new immigrants.

Hussein said to be doing well

Jordan's King Hussein is responding well to cancer treatment at a U.S. hospital, Jordanian officials said. Suffering from lymphatic cancer, Hussein is undergoing a cycle of six chemotherapy treatments that began in late July. His brother, Crown Prince Hassan, is acting as regent in his absence.

Spy satellite suspected

Israeli intelligence officials reportedly believe that Iran is developing a spy satellite as part of its ballistic missile program. The officials said they reached the conclusion after analyzing Iranian television pictures of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei visiting the missile development site.

Clinton, treating him with a brash intimacy that shocked many veteran Israeli and American diplomats.

After Rabin was struck down by an assassin's bullet in November 1995, Clinton emerged puffy-eyed from the Oval Office to eulogize his friend in the Rose Garden.

Peres lost the 1996 election despite unofficial support from the White House, and Netanyahu's administration has been marked by periods of open strife with Washington over the peace process.

Some blame the dynamic on the Oslo accords themselves.

"At this five-year point" the accords "appear to have made the relationship more difficult rather than the reverse," said Daniel Pipes, the director of the Middle East Forum, a think tank.

"Things go along swimmingly when Israel makes concessions," Pipes said.

But when Israel says "enough," Pipes said, the relationship grows "more sour."

In fact, Clinton is known to have told friends that he blames Netanyahu for nearly destroying the peace process.

According to one friend of the president, Clinton once became animated during a conversation and said he's not going to allow Netanyahu to scuttle an agreement that he personally signed.

But in spite of the ups and downs, which saw Clinton close the White House doors to Netanyahu, there is no impact on the overall relationship between the two allies, most pro-Israel activists say.

"The peace process has always been an essential ingredient of the U.S.-Israel relationship since the time of Camp David," said Howard Kohr, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which is marking the anniversary by hosting a Capitol Hill briefing on the accords.

"The bedrock of the relationship has withstood the ups and downs of the peace process," Kohr said. "The tone of the relationship is affected."

Pipes, who is critical of the Clinton administration's policy, said that since Netanyahu came to power, "there has been a sense of increasing sourness" and "annoyed relations."

But unlike Kohr, Pipes believes that there has been damage to U.S.-Israel relations.

Because America senses that something has been given and then retracted, it has "created long-term problems."

The relationship between the two allies has deteriorated since Netanyahu invited the United States to take a greater role in the peace talks.

For the first time American negotiators sat between the Palestinians and Israelis, mediating their differences. Now the parties are negotiating over an American peace plan, a far cry from the secret talks conducted directly between the Israelis and Palestinians in Oslo five years ago.

"Does that raise problematic questions? Yes. But the alternative to America not playing that role is the end of Oslo," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Saperstein is scheduled to speak at a pro-Oslo-accords rally here Sunday that has been endorsed by leaders of many Jewish groups.

Oslo is still "a process that holds the best chance for peace in the Middle East," he said. Of course, not everyone in the Jewish community agrees with the rally's premise.

The Zionist Organization of America this week published a scathing 52-page report of Palestinian violations of the Oslo accords.

"We see very little evidence that Arafat has transformed himself from the terrorist that he always was," said Morton Klein, ZOA's president.

"Is Israel better off on the five-year anniversary of Oslo than on the day that Oslo was signed? Most of us would say that Israel is not."

But with negotiators on the brink of a breakthrough agreement on the transfer of additional West Bank land to the Palestinians, Sunday's rally could turn into a celebration.

Israeli and American officials in the United States have begun to make arrangements for a possible summit meeting between Clinton, Netanyahu and Arafat at the end of this month. Both Arafat and Netanyahu plan to speak around Sept. 23, which is the opening of the U.N. General Assembly. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Lileikis trial to resume

The war crimes trial of a man who headed the Lithuanian secret police during World War II is scheduled to resume in the capital of Vilnius.

The trial of Aleksandras Lileikis, 91, has already been postponed three times this year.

In 1996, Lileikis was stripped of his U.S. citizenship for lying about his wartime activities on his application to immigrate to the United States.

Meanwhile, Lithuania created a commission to investigate war crimes committed in the Baltic nation during the Nazi and Soviet occupations.

The commission will be headed by Julius Smulkstys.

Smulkstys, a personal friend of Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, was named government liaison to the Jewish community in June.

Austria plans artwork bill

The Austrian Parliament will soon be voting on a bill to return Nazi-looted artworks to their rightful owners, a government spokesperson said.

The bill is expected to be submitted this week to Austria's Cabinet for preliminary discussion.

A preliminary report shows that hundreds of looted artworks are now owned by the Austrian government.

History project releases CD-ROM

A group that has been interviewing Holocaust survivors released a CD-ROM of the videotaped sessions of four survivors' testimonies.

The Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation said "Survivors: Testimonies of the Holocaust" will give students immediate access to the victims' memories. "To learn history, you have to look in history's eye," said director Steven Spielberg, the founder and chairman of the foundation.

Court rules against ads

Germany's far-right Republican Party cannot run ads claiming that the country's first postwar chancellor would vote for the party if he were alive today, a court ruled.

Several television stations have refused to air the ads, claiming that they are racist and defame the late Konrad Adenauer.

Satmar leader dies

Rabbi Sender Deutsch, a leader of the Satmar Chasidic community and longtime editor and publisher of the widely read Yiddish newspaper *Der Yid*, died Sept. 2 at the age of 76.

The noted orator and historian — who was also a vice president of the Satmar school system — was buried in the upstate New York village of Kiryas Yoel.

Extremist black leader's rally fails to attract mass gathering

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Khalid Muhammad's Million Youth March failed, in the end, to attract the legions of young people promised by its name.

Black leaders threatened to sue New York City because the march, which drew just 6,000 people, ended in a melee that erupted when police officers attempted to halt the rally after it went on beyond its court-imposed deadline.

For their part, New York City officials said they were considering bringing criminal charges against Muhammad for what they said were statements that incited the crowd to riot at the rally, which was held in Harlem on Saturday.

While Muhammad spent most of his 10 minutes on stage lashing out at the mayor and police, he also managed to target Jews with such comments as:

- "Stop asking me about the Jews being the bloodsuckers of the black nation. The no-good bastards, they are the bloodsuckers of the black community. How many say they are the bloodsuckers of the black community? Let me see your fists in the air!"

- City officials "never would have gone to the God-damned Jews in Crown Heights and told their youth that they couldn't march on Utica Avenue or Eastern Parkway, but they told you you couldn't march here today."

- His chief aid, Malik Zulu Shabazz, said in his own speech that "I don't care what the Jews say you are. The only people who have been in bondage for over 400 years, you are the true chosen people of God. It is not the so-called Jews."

The rally also attracted nationwide attention both for the rabidly anti-white, anti-Semitic rhetoric on which the former Nation of Islam official has built his reputation and for New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's unsuccessful effort to prevent the gathering from taking place.

Some intergroup relations professionals in New York say the controversy that surrounded the march is having a negligible effect on black-Jewish relations.

"I don't think that the march had a dramatic impact on black-Jewish relations," said Adam Segall, New York regional director for the Anti-Defamation League.

"In some ways outreach to the African American community in Harlem, and the positive relationship with certain political leaders has been strengthened" by the two groups working together to respond to Muhammad, said Segall, referring to black politicians and organizational leaders who condemned Muhammad before the rally.

"To a larger extent than I've ever seen before, there was a dramatic consensus as to who this man was and that he shouldn't be the one to lead black youth."

Michael Miller, executive vice president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, said, "I don't expect to see implications for black-Jewish relations" from the rally.

But Dennis Walcott, president of the New York Urban League, which advocates for the black community, disagreed.

The march "has had an impact on black-Jewish relations," he said, and the concerns of the Jewish community about Muhammad's rhetoric and the "inconsistent reactions on the part of black community leaders and politicians" are prompting the need for discussion about it between the two communities.

"I don't think the relationship is beyond repair, but just frayed around the edges," Walcott said.

"We can't allow someone like Khalid Muhammad to interfere in productive relations that have been developed."

Meanwhile, Muhammad vowed to hold another Million Youth March next year in the heart of the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

It was there, seven years ago, that a mob of rioting blacks surrounded and fatally stabbed a young Chasidic man in the neighborhood where blacks and Jews live side by side. Muhammad threatened to hold his event in Crown Heights this year, but changed his mind after a request from the chief organizer of the famed Caribbean Day Carnival, a massive parade filled with colorful costumes and calypso music that takes place in the neighborhood on Labor Day. □

Nova Scotia Jews helping crash victims' relatives cope

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — On Sunday morning, about nine people climbed the picturesque rocks near the Nova Scotia coast where Swissair Flight 111 crashed last week.

The relatives of some of the tragedy's Jewish victims chanted Hebrew prayers, many from the Book of Psalms.

No words or prayers can completely console the families of the victims, but those who participated in the service appeared to derive some comfort, said Rabbi Mendel Feldman, who led the service. One of the relatives, said Feldman, the Lubavitch emissary in Nova Scotia, came up to him after the prayers and said, "You can't imagine how reassuring it was."

Initial reports said as many as 50 Jews might have been among the 229 victims of the crash near Peggy's Cove, which created some worries that the small Jewish community in the province's capital of Halifax would be unable to accommodate the relatives of the Jewish victims.

But that initial fear proved to be unfounded.

As of Tuesday, only seven Jewish victims could be confirmed and it is unlikely that more than 20 Jews perished in last week's crash, according to Jon Goldberg, the executive director of the Atlantic Jewish Council, the Jewish umbrella organization for eastern Canada.

Among the Jewish victims of the crash, which appears to have been the result of electrical failure, was Jonathan Mann, the first director of the World Health Organization's AIDS program.

Local volunteers provided kosher meals, and six rabbis made themselves available to grieving families.

Investigators have identified just one of the bodies so far, which makes it unlikely that traditional Jewish burial rites will be performed for any of the victims.

According to halachah, or Jewish law, a burial service cannot be performed without a body.

Instead, a non-denominational burial service will likely be held for any body parts that are retrieved.

A memorial service for victims was held at the Beth Israel Synagogue in Nova Scotia's capital of Halifax on Sunday.

In the meantime, relatives of the victims have begun sifting through the personal remains that have been recovered from the icy Atlantic waters.

According to Feldman, the family of one of the victims, Stanley Klein, has claimed an empty bag that contained his Jewish prayer shawl. That, said Feldman, has led to speculation that "when the plane was going down and he had no idea if he would live, he put on his tallis and davened." □

Senator urges U.S. to seek extradition of Arab terrorists

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — A leading U.S. senator has joined with the parents of terror victims in urging Washington to press for the extradition of Palestinians suspected of killing 11 American citizens.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) said Tuesday that the United States should set a deadline for Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to turn over 12 Palestinians for trial here.

Failure to comply should result in the loss of U.S. financial aid to the Palestinian Authority, D'Amato said at a news conference organized by the Zionist Organization of America.

The news conference took place outside a federal building in lower Manhattan, only blocks from the courthouse where two suspected terrorists will be tried for the Aug. 7 bombings of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

Twelve U.S. citizens were among the more than 250 people killed in the explosions.

The anti-terrorism act of 1996 permits the prosecution on American soil of individuals who allegedly kill U.S. citizens abroad.

"What about the Americans killed in the Middle East?" New York state Assemblyman Dov Hikind asked the crowd of about 40 people.

"Are they less American than those killed in Africa?"

D'Amato announced that he would send a letter to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright demanding that she seek action to extradite and try Palestinians identified by the Israeli government as having been involved in the deaths of American citizens during the past four years.

Also speaking at the news conference were Stephen Flatow, Joyce Boim and Vicki Eisenfeld, the parents of three of the Americans killed in terrorist attacks.

"I will not rest until justice is done," said Boim. "My son's blood is as good as any Americans wherever they were killed."

The news conference attracted some local media coverage and a few curious passers-by — an illustration, some in attendance said, of the lack of attention the call for U.S. prosecution of Palestinian terrorists has generated.

But in May, the House of Representatives unanimously supported, in a vote of 406-0, a bipartisan resolution calling on President Clinton to address the matter.

Earlier that month, 62 congressional representatives sent a letter to Attorney General Janet Reno calling on the Justice Department to "investigate, indict, and prosecute any individual who kills, attempts to kill, or engages in a conspiracy to kill a U.S. national in a foreign country pursuant of a terrorist act."

D'Amato's involvement in the cause follows his successful campaign on behalf of Holocaust survivors to wrest payment from Swiss banks and an Italian insurance firm.

His appearance at the news conference also comes amid his reelection campaign.

Noting that the Palestinian Authority receives \$100 million in U.S. aid annually, D'Amato said that it was "not acceptable" to allow Arafat "to continue business as usual." □

Michigan candidate apologizes

NEW YORK (JTA) — Michigan Democratic gubernatorial candidate Geoffrey Fieger apologized for a 1996 interview in which he likened Orthodox rabbis to Nazis.

In a letter to the Anti-Defamation League, Fieger expressed "deep regret for any pain or offense" that his past statements may have caused Jews or other religious groups.

Fieger is running against Republican incumbent John Engler in the general election. □