



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 178

Tuesday, September 29, 1998

81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Agreement remains elusive

"Substantial" work still needs to be done "to reach a comprehensive agreement" on the Middle East peace process, President Clinton said during a joint White House news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Clinton invited the two sides to return to Washington in October to hammer out an agreement. Neither Netanyahu nor Arafat spoke to reporters at the news conference. [Page 1]

### Arafat addresses U.N.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat said Israel still rejects the American proposal that would have the Jewish state withdraw from a further 13 percent of the West Bank in exchange for security guarantees.

In remarks warmly received at the U.N. General Assembly, Arafat said Tuesday's meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Clinton at the White House was "an important step to save the peace process." While Arafat asked the world body for help in achieving "the national goal" of the Palestinian people, he did not explicitly say that he would declare statehood on May 4, 1999, when the interim period of the Oslo accords ends. [Page 1]

### Premier may tap Sharon

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is planning to appoint Ariel Sharon as foreign minister, according to Israel Television. Netanyahu spokesman David Bar-Illan said the premier was mulling the appointment of the hawkish Sharon, who currently serves as infrastructure minister. Netanyahu has held the Foreign Ministry portfolio since David Levy resigned the post in January.

### Far-right fails in elections

None of Germany's three leading far-right parties got enough votes to enter Parliament. The National Democrats, Republicans and German People's Union each received less than 2 percent of the vote in the country's national elections.

In a separate regional election also held Sunday, the People's Union was shut out of the state legislature in the former East German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Clinton prods Israel, Palestinians, but breakthrough remains elusive

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — After putting the full diplomatic weight of the United States behind the Middle East peace process, President Clinton once again came up short in his effort to seal an elusive Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

Instead, at the end of dozens of hours of meetings and a handful of sleepless nights, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat agreed only to more talks.

Initially Clinton, flanked by Netanyahu and Arafat, sounded an optimistic note Monday, telling reporters gathered in the Oval Office that there has been a "significant narrowing of the gaps" while acknowledging that a "substantial amount of work" remains to be done to break the 18-month deadlock in the peace process.

But less than two hours later, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright emerged from a meeting between Clinton and Netanyahu and sought to downplay the amount of progress obtained earlier during 90 minutes of talks involving Clinton, Netanyahu and Arafat — and a second hourlong session between Clinton and Netanyahu.

"The term 'breakthrough' I think gets overused," Albright told reporters.

Arafat was scheduled to return to the White House for more talks with Clinton on Tuesday. Netanyahu returned to Israel late Monday for Yom Kippur.

Netanyahu and Arafat were both in the United States to address the U.N. General Assembly. Before coming to the White House on Monday, the two leaders met with Albright over the weekend in New York in an effort to close the gaps that have blocked progress in the peace process.

The two sides have been unable to agree to an American plan under which Israel would redeploy from 13 percent of the West Bank in stages as the Palestinians took specific steps against terrorist groups in territories they control.

"We are very close on a number of subjects," Albright said, including the proposed 13 percent.

But U.S. and Israeli officials say there is no general agreement on the security package.

Before leaving for Israel on Monday afternoon, Netanyahu told reporters, "we agreed on quite a few things, and so that, at least, is a good start."

But, looking ahead to the another round of meetings in Washington next month, Netanyahu added: "We'll see if the Palestinians are prepared to shoulder their responsibilities and to agree to implement them, to carry out their obligations in a concrete way, in a specific time schedule."

Arafat, addressing the U.N. General Assembly after the White House meeting, charged that "the Israeli side still rejects" the American initiative.

Unlike the president, Albright did not claim significant progress.

Instead, she pointed to the meeting of the two Mideast leaders with Clinton as "important" because Netanyahu and Arafat "were here together and they agreed on the importance of the urgency" of coming to a conclusion.

The U.S. secretary of state had hoped to "lock in" partial agreement on an American plan that includes the redeployment, security arrangements, safe-passage routes between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as the opening of a Palestinian airport and seaport.

Meeting with Jewish journalists in New York on Sunday, Netanyahu said the aim

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Clashes resume for second day

Israeli security forces clashed for a second straight day with Israeli Arab demonstrators in central Israel. Monday's clashes occurred amid Israeli Arab protests over the confiscation of land from the town of Umm el-Fahm and the nearby village of Muawiya for use as army training grounds. Rioting a day earlier left some 80 protesters and 27 police injured.

### Israeli shot in Hebron

Palestinians fired on a group of Israelis visiting Hebron. An Israeli woman was hit in the leg by two or three bullets fired from the Palestinian-controlled portion of Hebron, Army Radio said. In response, several Jewish settlers later beat several Arabs walking past a Jewish enclave in the West Bank town.

### Iran criticizes sale to Israel

Iran criticized a U.S. decision to sell fighter jets to Israel. A spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry was quoted as saying that the decision to sell Israel 30 F-15 and 60 F-16 jets was an example of America's double standards regarding the Middle East.

### Two teens convicted

An Israeli court convicted two Jewish teen-agers of killing an Arab farmer who was hit with a plank of wood from a moving car. The driver of the car in the June crime was acquitted, according to a court spokesman. Sentencing of the two youths is scheduled for Oct. 20.

### Ambassador won't face lawsuit

Egypt's ambassador to Israel will not face a civil lawsuit on charges he raped an Israeli belly-dancer.

A Tel Aviv court ruled that diplomatic immunity protects Mohammed Basiouny from the suit, which stems from an August 1997 incident. Criminal charges were not brought against the ambassador because of what police said was insufficient evidence.

of the current talks is "to finish all the interim steps that lead to the launching of the final-status negotiations."

Netanyahu came into the White House meeting refusing to sign off on a partial settlement as Albright wanted, fearing that he would lose leverage in security talks if he publicly committed to a redeployment plan.

At least for now, Clinton is going along with Netanyahu's game plan.

"We have an operating agreement that we will all say that nothing has been agreed to until everything has been agreed to," Clinton told reporters.

Albright said she will travel to the Middle East next week for a series of meetings to work toward an accord.

Both Netanyahu and Arafat accepted the American president's invitation to return to Washington around Oct. 15 with their negotiators for another push for an agreement on the U.S. proposal.

According to officials, Netanyahu told Clinton that he would agree to a 13 percent redeployment — with 3 percent of the land designated as a nature reserve — if a security agreement can be worked out.

With this commitment, Israeli officials say that the tide has turned in the peacemaking equation.

Before Israel agreed to the 13 percent, Netanyahu was blamed for holding up progress. Now that Israel has agreed to the figure, the Israeli officials say the ball is in Arafat's court.

In addition to the security agreement, another major stumbling block is Arafat's promise to declare Palestinian statehood next May when the interim period under the Oslo accords is scheduled to end.

The question of statehood "has to be resolved in the final-status negotiations, as provided for in the Oslo accords," Clinton said.

When asked about First Lady Hillary Clinton's statement earlier this year endorsing Palestinian claims for a state, the president sought to distance himself from her remarks. "She's not the president and she's not trying to manage this peace process," Clinton said.

The issue is so sensitive that Arafat deleted references to a statehood declaration in a speech delivered Sunday in New York at an event sponsored by the Center for Middle East Peace and Economic Cooperation.

Arafat pleaded with a mid-morning assembly of about 200 Jewish and Palestinian representatives, as well as a host of U.N. ambassadors from European and Arab states, to "exert every possible effort to ensure the implementation of the agreements signed before May 4, 1999."

Speaking from the dais — where Palestinian officials sat next to Israeli legislators from both the Likud and Labor parties, and Israeli and Palestinian flags stood side by side — Arafat stopped short of reiterating his intended proclamation.

But he did say that the May date had "international legitimacy. It just cannot come and go like any other day.

"On that day we hope that our basic choice of reaching an agreement is realized, and that is why I am here," Arafat said.

Crossed out in a draft of his speech, however, the sentence continued, "or we will have no choice but to unilaterally declare the establishment of the Palestinian state."

Such a declaration, Israeli officials have said, would draw some form of retaliation and would signal the end of the peace process.

While Arafat refrained a day later from calling on the United Nations members to support a declaration of Palestinian statehood next May, he said, after referring to the deadline for concluding final-status talks that a "Palestinian state must be established as an embodiment of the right of all people to self-determination."

At the Sunday session, Arafat also addressed several specific Israeli concerns: the Palestinian Authority's stance on terrorism, which he described as "zero tolerance" and "without linkage to the peace process;" and a controversial children's program advocating terrorism against Israelis broadcast on Palestinian television.

Arafat said he was "personally angered" by the videotaped program, and promised, "This will not occur again." □

(JTA staff writer Julia Goldman in New York contributed to this report.)



## Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*

Mark J. Jaffe, *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](http://www.jta.org).

## JEWISH WORLD

### Holocaust project mulled

An international task force met in Washington to discuss a new international project dedicated to Holocaust education, research and remembrance. The meeting at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum involved Holocaust scholars and government officials from the United States, Israel, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany.

It was held in advance of an upcoming international conference in Washington on Holocaust-era assets. The officials discussed Holocaust education guidelines, archival access and adapting a Swedish Holocaust education booklet for international use.

### New wording for persecution bill

Senate lawmakers worked out a compromise on legislation aimed at fighting religious persecution abroad. The measure, which would punish any foreign government that persecutes its citizens for their religious beliefs, allows the president more flexibility in deciding those punishments than earlier versions. It could go to the Senate floor for a vote as early as next week.

### Far-right loses in Toulon

A candidate with France's far-right party was defeated in a race for a seat in the country's Parliament. Although it regularly garners about 15 percent in national polls, the far-right National Front lost the legislative race in the Mediterranean port city of Toulon, the largest municipality controlled by the anti-immigrant party.

### Tudjman defends archbishop

Croatia's president defended an archbishop with a questionable wartime record whom Pope John Paul II is set to beatify this weekend. Franjo Tudjman said Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac supported Croatia's right to have its own state but opposed the "fascist methods" of the Nazi puppet state that ruled Croatia during the war.

### New prayer book in Budapest

A new Hungarian-Hebrew prayer book was published for Yom Kippur in Budapest. The publication of the prayer book follows the printing of a similar book for Rosh Hashanah last year.

### Belarus leader backs Orthodoxy

The president of Belarus said the Russian Orthodox Church should become the former Soviet republic's "state ideology."

"We are an Orthodox country and we will always be devoted to Orthodoxy," President Alexander Lukashenko told the Russian Orthodox Church's Patriarch Alexy II, according to the Tass new agency.

## Netanyahu presents mezuzah to damaged Reform synagogue

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — When the Central Synagogue reopens the doors of its historic building two years from now, its congregation can expect Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to attend the rededication ceremony.

Together with his wife, Sara, Netanyahu presented the Reform synagogue's spiritual leader, Rabbi Peter Rubinstein, with a 14-karat gold, limited edition mezuzah by Israel artist Moshe Castel.

"We'd like to be here at the time you affix it," the Israeli premier said. "If not, we will come and worship" at another time.

Netanyahu came to the synagogue Sunday to pay his respects and to inspect the damage the 120-year-old building sustained in an August fire, which destroyed most of the roof. The interior of the Spanish Moorish Revival building also suffered extensive water damage.

During a visit to a Conservative synagogue in New York last spring, Netanyahu had vowed to attend a Reform service here some time this year.

But representatives from the Reform movement hesitated to draw a connection between that promise and Sunday's visit to the Central Synagogue.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said Netanyahu's appearance "was not expected, but appreciated" and offered an open invitation for Netanyahu to attend Shabbat or holiday worship at any Reform congregation.

Netanyahu, who visited the synagogue several times while he was Israeli ambassador to the United Nations from 1984 to 1988, called it "one of the greatest in the world."

"Here and in Israel, the synagogue is the fabric, the living tissue and life force of the Jewish people," Netanyahu told a gathering of about 50 synagogue members, many of whom were visibly sweating from heat under white hard hats, as they looked down into the ravaged sanctuary, currently under construction.

Rubinstein presented Netanyahu with one of the square, handmade nails that had secured the roof, which is now open to a blue sky above massive scaffolding.

The nail is symbolic of the congregation, which he has led for eight years, and its will "to rise up and rebuild," explained Rubinstein, who led the group in the Shehecheyanu prayer. □

## Israeli defense chief condemns idea of pre-emptive strike at Iran

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai has lashed out at a proposal that Israel launch a pre-emptive military strike against Iran.

The proposal was made Sunday by Knesset member Ephraim Sneh, the health minister in the former Labor government, after Iran made its first public display of its Shahab-3 missile during a military parade last Friday.

In July, Iran successfully tested the medium-range missile, which is capable of hitting targets in Israel, Saudi Arabia and most of Turkey. The missile, with a range of 800 miles, is for defensive purposes only, Iranian officials said at the time.

Sneh, who called Iranian leaders "insane," said a pre-emptive strike might be necessary because international efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring missile technology and developing a nuclear capability had failed.

Mordechai rejected Sneh's proposal during an appearance before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

In subsequent comments to reporters, Mordechai said Israel could defend its population and would continue to do so well into the future.

Adopting a conciliatory tone, he added that militant declarations against Tehran could only do harm. □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****Jewish Agency visits Russia to assess emigration desires**

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Will Russia's economic crisis lead to a dramatic increase in the number of Russian Jews wanting to make aliyah?

With a view to answering that question, top officials from the Jewish Agency for Israel visited here last week to assess the situation. While conceding that the emigration picture remains unclear, the officials said they want to be prepared.

Agency officials will do whatever is necessary "to make it possible for as many of these people to come [to Israel] if they want to," said Charles "Corky" Goodman, chairman of the Jewish Agency's board of governors.

After several meetings with members of Moscow's Jewish community, agency chairman Avraham Burg said "people are concerned" about the economic situation and its possible future consequences.

At one such meeting, Burg and Goodman heard numerous accounts of how the crisis has worsened people's lives.

"Emotions, psychology, economics and all the history of the Jews in this country came out" in the conversations, Burg said.

During one of the meetings, Jewish doctors, engineers and teachers complained that they had gone unpaid for months.

"This crisis was the last straw," said Alexander, a 45-year-old engineer. "I realized that my life here can never get better."

Burg said the Jewish Agency is urging the Israeli government to improve the absorption package given to immigrants, adding that a decision on this issue is expected by late next month.

While noting that agency officials will continue to monitor the situation closely, he made clear that they will not use Russia's economic woes as an opportunity to entice more Jews to emigrate to Israel.

Jewish Agency officials note that some Russian Jews are not just asking about emigration procedures but are beginning to get involved in long-term planning — such as enrolling in Hebrew courses, or ulpanim, in preparation for making aliyah.

In Moscow alone, more than 100 people applied for such classes on a recent day. The Jewish Agency office in Yekaterinburg, located in the Ural Mountains, reported that some 80 people have already registered for ulpanim — a marked increase from the 25 who registered a year ago.

The plunging ruble and virtual collapse of the Russian economy have led to an increase in inquiries about emigration to Israel, agency officials say.

While the inquiries do not necessarily translate into definite plans to make aliyah, they are "clearly a reaction to the situation, to the sense of hopelessness" pervading Russian society, said Alla Levy, head of the Jewish Agency in Russia.

"If the current interest grows into actual emigration, we will see it no earlier than the beginning of next year," Levy added.

She said if there is an immediate increase in the number of immigrants to Israel, it will come from Jews in Russia's eastern regions, such as Siberia and the Far East, where living conditions may worsen as winter approaches.

Levy said the social profile of people making inquiries about

aliyah is different from that of those who usually take part in the educational activities organized by the Jewish Agency.

"These are Jews whom we rarely met before — young people in their 20s and 30s, professionals, owners of various businesses — those who can be called middle-class Jews."

"Many of these people lost their fortune or savings because of the economic situation," said Burg.

Among those making inquiries was Alexei, a 40-year-old Muscovite who calls himself an "average Russian businessman."

"I came here to find out what should I do to apply" for making aliyah, he said during a recent visit to the Jewish Agency office in Moscow.

Alexei, who refused to give his last name, said he wanted to "make sure" that if the economic situation further deteriorates, "I have this chance" to go to Israel.

In addition to Israel, many Jews from Russia and other portions of the former Soviet Union have emigrated in recent years to the United States and Germany. But American diplomatic officials in Russia say there have been no signs of growing interest in emigration to the United States among Russian Jews.

The German Embassy in Moscow said the number of Jews applying for emigration to that country has actually decreased slightly in recent weeks. □

**Puerto Rico synagogue survives wrath of Georges**

NEW YORK (JTA) — Shaare Zedeck Congregation in Puerto Rico purchased a back-up generator following last year's electrical blackout on Yom Kippur.

Now, exactly one year later, that purchase will come in handy: The generator will allow Shaare Zedeck, San Juan's largest shul, to hold services this week.

Like the rest of the island, the congregation, which serves San Juan's Jewish community of about 1,800, suffered from the wrath of Hurricane Georges.

After services on Rosh Hashanah eve were held as scheduled Sept. 20, services the next morning were held at 7 a.m. so that residents had time to go home and prepare for the storm.

The rescheduling was a good idea. By 2 p.m. that day, Georges hit the island, and the storm continued all day and into the night.

The next day's services were canceled, the first time that Jewish residents of Puerto Rico can remember that happening.

Trees at the synagogue, which stands near San Juan's tourist district were uprooted "like toothpicks," according to the congregation's rabbi, Alfredo Winter, and there is damage to the roof, which now leaks. And, like much of the capital, the synagogue has been without electricity and water for more than a week.

But the building was spared some of the devastation that hit high-rise apartments across the street.

The synagogue's Torah, stored in the lower floors of the building, emerged unscathed.

"We consider ourselves really fortunate," said Winter.

And despite the destruction caused by Georges, which made its way to the U.S. mainland this week, Winter said there's a lesson to be learned: Cherish the present.

"Everything can be there — and gone the next minute," he said. □