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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Leaders prepare for summit

The Middle East peace summit scheduled for this weekend will be a success even if the Israelis and Palestinians do not wrap up all the issues left over from the 1995 Interim Agreement, said a senior U.S. official.

President Clinton met with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, National Security Adviser Sandy Berger and the Middle East peace process team for almost two hours to prepare for the talks.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made conflicting statements about the possibility of reaching a deal with the Palestinians at the summit, which is scheduled to begin Thursday at the White House before continuing at the Wye Plantation in Maryland.

Netanyahu said he would go a "long way" toward negotiating an agreement if the Palestinians agreed to crack down on terrorism.

On the heels of a suspected terrorist attack in the West Bank that killed one Israeli and wounded another, the Israeli premier had said earlier that there was no chance "at this stage" of reaching an agreement.

Berlin theater cancels play

A Berlin theater company dropped plans to stage a play that Jewish leaders there are calling "Goebbels-esque."

The director of the Maxim Gorky Theater said he backed off from staging "Garbage, the City and Death," which includes a negative portrayal of a Jewish businessman reportedly based on German Jewish leader Ignatz Bubis, in order to demonstrate a sensitivity to Jewish concerns. The theater's director said an Israeli theater troupe that is staging the play in Tel Aviv in March will be invited to perform the play in Germany.

Religious persecution act passes

The House of Representatives on Saturday passed by a unanimous voice vote a bill aimed at fighting religious persecution abroad.

Jewish groups hailed the long-awaited passage of the bill, known as the Freedom From Religious Persecution Act, which seeks to punish foreign countries that persecute religious minorities through sanctions and other measures. [Page 4]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israel optimistic on concluding redeployment deal at U.S. summit

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It is hard to imagine that Israeli and Palestinian leaders, having agreed to attend this week's summit in Maryland, will walk out without producing an agreement.

If either Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat remain stubborn over details and refuse to reach a long-delayed agreement, the problems they will be creating for President Clinton may well be reciprocated.

To be sure, Clinton is wounded because of his own domestic problems. But he is not so weak that he would not exact a price on whoever thwarts his drive for a much-needed foreign policy success.

The outlook in Jerusalem, therefore, is that this time the moment of truth is finally at hand, at least in terms of the further Israeli redeployment from the West Bank.

With the size of the pullback — 13 percent — no longer in dispute, the negotiators, who were slated to begin meeting Thursday, will be focusing on the security aspects of their evolving accord.

The goodwill hopefully being fostered in the relative seclusion of the summit site — the Wye Plantation in eastern Maryland — may help restore at least a modicum of confidence between Israelis and Palestinians.

Whether the agreement they are expected to reach will be carried out smoothly is less likely, in the eyes of many observers, given the many pitfalls and setbacks that can arise during its three-month implementation period.

If this optimistic scenario regarding the Wye summit does not pan out, then Netanyahu's purpose — as made very clear during the run-up period to the meeting by his aides — will be to convince American opinion that Arafat is the culprit, that his recalcitrance is the cause of the dashed hopes.

Indeed, focusing on the security issue, Netanyahu told reporters after meeting with Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan on Wednesday that he would go "a long way" toward negotiating an agreement if the Palestinian Authority takes steps to crack down on terrorism.

Netanyahu's visit to Jordan came a day after a suspected terrorist attack in the West Bank that killed one Israeli, Itamar Doron, 24, and wounded another, 27-year-old Ilan Mazon, in a drive-by shooting.

After the attack, the prime minister's office released a statement saying there was no chance "at this stage" of reaching an agreement.

A Knesset member from Netanyahu's Likud Party went even further.

Uzi Landau, the Likud chairman of the Knesset Security and Foreign Affairs Committee, urged Netanyahu on Tuesday to suspend his participation in the Washington summit.

Tuesday's statement by the prime minister echoed his stern comments last Friday in the wake of a fatal stabbing of a female soldier in the Jordan Valley.

"This brutal slaying only demonstrates the need for us to stand firm on the issues we are indeed standing firm on," Netanyahu said.

Cpl. Michal Adato, 19, was stabbed near the settlement of Tomer in the Jordan Valley.

Her attacker — labeled a Palestinian terrorist by the Israeli government — was shot

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel ends curfew, closure

The Israeli army ended a curfew on Palestinians in the Israeli-controlled section of Hebron.

The decision to end the curfew, prompted by a Sept. 30 grenade attack that wounded 14 Israeli soldiers and 11 Palestinians, came one day after the easing of a 10-day closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israeli Arabs confess to arson

Five Israeli Arab youths confessed to setting fires in central Israel near an Arab village where Israeli police and Israeli Arabs dashed recently in a land dispute. The fires are part of a four-day forest blaze that has burned out of control in northern and central Israel, causing thousands of inhabitants to evacuate the area north of Haifa. Unseasonably dry weather and heavy winds contributed to the fires, some of which were caused by Sukkot picnickers who left coals burning.

Jordanian students protest visit

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was met by an angry crowd of Jordanian students during his brief visit with Crown Prince Hassan.

Within sight of security guards, the group of about 150 students burned Israeli flags and chanted slogans and threats. Netanyahu met with the acting Jordanian leader prior to traveling to the United States for a summit with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and President Clinton.

Lebanon tries alleged informants

A Lebanese military court began proceedings against 20 people accused of having contacts with Israel. The defendants told the hearing that Israeli security forces had asked them to recruit people to serve as informants.

Lebanese law forbids citizens from having any contacts with the Jewish state.

in the legs by troops who witnessed the incident and was placed under guard at a nearby hospital.

With a special sense for political timing, Netanyahu combined his statement of outrage over the soldier's killing with a formal announcement that Ariel Sharon, champion of the hard-line camp, would be appointed foreign minister and would be accompanying him to the summit.

The appointment, approved by the Cabinet on Tuesday, is seen as a masterstroke designed to sow division and discomfort among the political right, which has been breathing fire and brimstone in advance of the summit.

Ministers from the National Religious Party, along with hard-line Knesset members from the Land of Israel bloc, have been threatening to bring down the government if Netanyahu makes unwarranted concessions. But these threats ring hollow against Sharon's apparent resolve that the present government is here to stay — with him as a central pillar of it.

Sharon, who accompanied Netanyahu to Jordan this week, told reporters that Israel would be "sufficiently resolute" in the Wye talks and would insist that the Palestinians fulfill their previously-signed security commitments.

But Sharon also cautioned that while peace with the Palestinians is possible, "it's not a short procedure.

"It will take time."

In what appears as another attempt to defuse the right, Netanyahu last week designated the West Bank settlement of Ariel a city.

At an Oct. 9 ceremony in Ariel, Netanyahu sought to soothe the settler community with a vow to continue expanding existing Jewish settlements.

"We are building and will continue to build," he said.

He added that the city of Ariel would "be part of Israel in any final-status agreement in the future."

In the days before the Washington summit, the prime minister seemed confident that he had taken the steps needed to shore himself up against any possible threats from the political right.

Adding to the prime minister's confidence is the clear signal emanating from the Labor leadership that, if an agreement is signed after the summit, Labor will make up for any defections in the coalition ranks when the accord comes up for Knesset approval.

The Labor "safety net" is not open-ended.

It will remain in effect only as long as the implementation period lasts.

Looking beyond that, Netanyahu's domestic political strategy is clear.

It is based on the unanimous findings of opinion polls over a lengthy period that a solid majority of Israelis want the redeployment agreement to be concluded and the peace process to continue.

If the right carries out its threat, once Labor's support is withdrawn, and brings down his government, Netanyahu will run in early elections as a center-of-the-road leader with a proven record of tough negotiation but eventual agreement with the Arab side.

And if the right backs down, Netanyahu will be greatly strengthened both by the agreement itself and by his having faced down his domestic political critics.

Seasoned observers warn, though, that this no-lose scenario could be marred by the restless personality of the new foreign minister.

Is Sharon's desire solely to attain a measure of "rehabilitation" on the national and international stage, 15 years after he was forced to resign from the Defense Ministry in the wake of the massacres at the Sabra and Shatilla Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut during the 1982 war in Lebanon?

If so, Netanyahu can look forward to a fruitful working relationship with a man of proven ability and ingenuity.

Or does Sharon still harbor the ambition to become prime minister?

The number of pejoratives and contemptuous insults he has flung at Netanyahu during the past two years could fill pages.

Are they all part of the past now?

Or will Netanyahu find himself riding a tiger? □



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JEWISH WORLD

Pope canonizes Jewish-born nun

Pope John Paul II encouraged Catholics to observe the saint's day of the first modern-day Jewish-born saint as an annual Holocaust memorial day. The pope made his comments Sunday during the canonization of Edith Stein, a German convert to Catholicism who died in Auschwitz in 1942 following a roundup of all converts in the Netherlands.

Jewish leaders criticized the move, which one called a "very public slap in the face to the Jewish community."

Lileikis fit to stand trial

A panel of Lithuanian doctors said a man who headed that country's security police in the capital of Vilnius during World War II is fit to stand trial. The war crimes trial of Aleksandras Lileikis, 92, has already been postponed four times this year. The court is expected to set a date for the trial to resume in the next several days.

Report: Firm knew about teeth

A German precious metals company knew that the gold it received from Nazi death camps included gold teeth, according to German television. Degussa has admitted that it melted down gold from the camps, but denied that the firm knew that gold teeth were involved.

The company, the target of a recent class-action law suit filed by Holocaust victims, has commissioned an independent investigation of its Nazi past.

Center calls for arrest of doctor

The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on the German state government of Bavaria to condemn and detain an admitted concentration camp doctor. In a recent interview with the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, Hans Muench, 87, boasted of his experiments on Jewish inmates at Auschwitz, spoke of Jews as sub-humans and praised the infamous Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele for his intelligence and convictions.

Arafat visit to school canceled

Students at Ohio State University canceled an appearance by Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to speak at the school this week when school officials insisted that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also be invited.

A school spokesman said the school's insistence that Netanyahu speak as well reflected a need for balance. The president of the Arab Student Association, Jad Humeidan, objected to what he called a double standard because the "balance seems to be only applicable when the speaker is a Palestinian figure."

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Emigre's anti-Semitic letter stuns Russian Jewish leaders

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Edward Topol's novels have been read by audiences all over the world.

Now a letter that the Russian Jewish emigre has published in a newspaper here has outraged Russian Jews.

The full-page letter, which was printed last month in the Moscow weekly *Argumenty i Fakty*, called on Russian Jewish bankers not to throw Russia into a "chaos of poverty and wars."

Topol, who emigrated to the United States 20 years ago and now lives in New York, also urged Jewish tycoons to "chip in a billion or two" to help Russia's economy.

The weekly's popularity — it has a print run of over 3 million copies and is especially popular in Russia's provinces — has prompted worries about how the letter will be interpreted by the paper's readers.

Many Jews said the letter implied that a Jewish conspiracy exists in Russia, and they are worried that it could therefore trigger an outbreak of anti-Semitism.

"The article made me feel very uneasy," said Lydia Tseitlina, an accountant. "All my Jewish friends were frightened."

"Those Jews who are active in business and politics act not as Jews but as Russians. Topol's letter provocatively alludes to the existence of some Jewish plan and that is why it is very dangerous," said Mikhail Chlenov, president of the Va'ad, the Jewish Federation of Russia.

In the letter, Topol implied that a small group of Jewish business magnates exert an enormous control over the Kremlin and eventually led the country to the economic and financial crisis that began earlier this year.

The 59-year-old author also claimed that the Jewish prominence in Russia could lead to Jewish pogroms and even to a new Holocaust.

One Jewish leader said he did not expect a Jewish author to write such a letter.

"I would rather expect such an article from Anpilov or from Zhirinovskiy," said Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, referring to Viktor Anpilov, the leader of the leftist group Working Russia, who is known for his anti-Semitism, and to Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the head of the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party.

During the Soviet regime, Topol's books were banned, but he gained international fame for a novel he published that focused on Soviet corruption.

After the fall of communism, he became famous throughout Russia. Some 15 of his novels have been published here.

Many of Topol's novels have Jewish characters.

Among the villains in his 1997 novel, "China Lane," is a character based on Boris Berezovsky, a Jewish media and oil tycoon who is one of the most influential people in Russian politics.

Berezovsky — along with Vladimir Goussinsky, a media baron and president of the Russian Jewish Congress, and other top Jewish bankers — was among the people to whom Topol addressed his letter.

None of them responded to the accusations contained in the letter.

"It is true that the number of Jews in the business and financial spheres are higher than their proportion in the population," said Goldschmidt.

"But to say that all the banks are controlled by Jews is completely wrong."

Goldschmidt said the Jewish reaction has a lot to do with historical experience. Under the Communists, he said, when such articles or letters appeared, they indicated a shift toward a more anti-Semitic governmental policy.

Because of that, "I think some of the older people are taking such an article more seriously than it deserves," he said.

Responding to the accusations that his article spurred anti-Semitism, Topol said last week that he only wanted to mobilize Russian Jewish tycoons for the "sake of saving Russia." □

Senate passes bill to protect religious minorities overseas

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The long-awaited passage of legislation aimed at stemming the scourge of religious persecution abroad came as a welcome development to American Jews, a community that knows all too well about the suppression of religious rights under oppressive foreign regimes.

The Senate on Oct. 9 voted 98-0 to approve a bill which directs the White House to take action against countries that engage in a pattern of religious persecution. It allows the president to choose from a list of options — ranging from diplomatic protest to economic sanctions — to use against offending countries.

But it also allows the president to waive sanctions if a country's record improves or if U.S. officials determine that a waiver is in the national security interests of the United States.

The House, which passed a more stringent version of the legislation earlier this year, passed the Senate measure by a unanimous voice vote on Saturday.

President Clinton, after warning lawmakers against passing legislation that would tie his hands in conducting foreign policy, indicated he will sign the bill into law.

"The bill advances the cause of religious freedom while giving the president the flexibility he needs and without undermining relations with important countries around the world," said Stuart Eizenstat, undersecretary of state for economic affairs.

The final version of the International Religious Freedom Act, sponsored by Sen. Don Nickles (R-Okla.), reflected a compromise reached between religious groups and business interests who had feared that punitive actions by the U.S. government would alienate valuable economic partners and hurt U.S. companies abroad.

The Senate's action marked the last hurdle in a legislative effort that began as an attempt by evangelical Christian groups to mimic the Jewish community's successful efforts in freeing Soviet Jewry in the 1970s and 1980s.

Most Jewish groups endorsed the idea from the outset, but came to support the religious freedom legislation only after painstaking negotiations were held over the course of a year and a half to assure that it would not hamstring U.S. foreign policy or exacerbate the situation in various countries where abuses are occurring.

"Just as the other communities helped us rescue hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews in the 1980s, so, too, must we act to ensure that all religious groups around the world have the right to practice their faith," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Indeed, Jewish activists said it was the Jewish community's experience in working to push through Congress legislation to help free Soviet Jews that helped guide and inform the process of drafting the bill.

Stacy Burdett, assistant director of the Anti-Defamation League's Washington office, called the bill a "good piece of human rights legislation," adding that Jewish groups were a leading voice in calling for the bill "to be more universal and not focus on any one group."

"We hope it will be a long-term approach to what is unfortunately a long-term problem," she said.

The American Jewish Committee and the National Jewish Coalition were also among Jewish groups that took a prominent role in pressing the issue. An array of religious groups, including the Southern Baptist Convention and the Christian Coalition, lobbied for passage of the legislation as well.

The bill's sponsors say most of the abuses are occurring within militant Islamic countries and the few remaining Communist nations. They have cited Sudan, China, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, Vietnam, Algeria and Vietnam as some of the worst offenders of religious freedom.

Somewhere, "right now, a man or woman languishes in prison, some on death row, because he or she did nothing more than choose faith in God," Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), an Orthodox Jew and a key supporter of the bill, said from the Senate floor. "It is a reminder to the executive branch of the American government, both now and in the future, that as it encourages human rights all over the world, it must consider freedom of religion."

Under the bill, the State Department would be required to actively investigate charges of religious oppression and report to Congress annually. The bill sets up an Office of International Religious Freedom in the State Department, whose head would have the rank of ambassador. It also sets up a four-year commission on religious freedom whose nine members would be appointed by Congress and the president.

Sanctions available to the president under the bill include public condemnation, cancellation of scientific or cultural exchanges, withdrawal, limitation or suspension of some forms of U.S. aid, cancellation of state visits, and a prohibition on new U.S. government contracts with that foreign government for goods and services. □

Jewish members of Congress, staffers fill Capitol Hill sukkah

By Mica Schneider

WASHINGTON (JTA) — More than 150 Jewish congressional staffers and at least five members of Congress celebrated Sukkot this week in a rain-beaten sukkah overlooking the National Mall.

For the third consecutive year, Lubavitch Rabbi Levi Shemtov hosted the event, which was held by the Capitol Jewish Forum. He stressed the image of Jewish unity when he explained the story of Sukkot and the reasons behind the lulav and etrog, the branch and citrus fruit shaken during Sukkot.

"Maybe they were shaking up Congress on opposite sides today, but they were shaking the lulav on the same side," Shemtov said, referring to the bipartisan attendance Thursday night.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) facilitated the event by allowing the forum to construct the sukkah on the Capitol plaza.

Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), according to those in attendance, said he accomplished more in the Sukkah on Thursday than inside Congress, where earlier in the day the House voted to begin an impeachment inquiry on President Clinton.

More than 500 people comprise the Capitol Jewish Forum, a loose-knit group of Jewish staffers and members of Congress that is hoping to expand its membership to staff in the executive branch in coming months. □