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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Political battle heats up

A political battle is heating up in Israel, where right-wing politicians and Jewish settlers blasted the peace agreement signed last Friday as a betrayal and said it could lead to more bloodshed.

Members of the National Religious Party met to discuss whether to move to bring down Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition and call for early elections.

Meanwhile, police dashed with settlers who tried to shut down main intersections on West Bank roads to protest the land-for-security accord.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned to Israel under an umbrella of heavy security precautions that were taken to prevent his possible assassination by opponents of the agreement he signed at the White House.

The premier told reporters upon his return that the accord is "the best agreement possible."

He added that as a result of the specific Palestinian steps on security included in the pact "we have plugged many of the holes in the Oslo Swiss cheese." [Page 1]

Fighting erupts in Ramallah

Fighting erupted in the West Bank town of Ramallah between members of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's mainstream Fatah movement and Palestinian security forces.

A Palestinian youth was shot in the head and seriously wounded during the clash.

The fighting alarmed Palestinian officials, who were concerned that the self-rule government's compliance with the security aspects of the latest agreement with Israel will ultimately lead to Palestinian-on-Palestinian violence.

Clinton nullifies Iran provision

President Clinton nullified a provision contained in the new budget law aimed at helping the family of an American Jewish victim of terrorism collect damages from Iran.

The family of Alisa Flatow has been attempting to gain access to Iranian assets in the United States ever since a U.S. judge earlier this year ordered Iran to pay the family \$247.5 million for its role in bank-rolling the 1995 terrorist attack in Gaza that claimed the 20-year-old student's life. [Page 4]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Ideological gap may be narrowing in Israel after peace summit accord

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu points to the Palestinians' willingness to publicly nullify the anti-Israel clauses of their charter as one of the major successes of the land-for-security agreement signed last Friday at the White House.

But a no less significant outcome of the accord is Netanyahu's nullification of the Likud Party's long-held doctrine of maintaining the boundaries of Greater Israel.

It is true that Netanyahu ceded a sliver of Eretz Israel when he turned over some 80 percent of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority in early 1997. But the plan to redeploy from the West Bank town had been worked out by the previous Labor government.

It is also true that his government's longstanding commitment to pursue the Oslo peace process ostensibly entailed a willingness to cede further tracts of the Biblical homeland.

But the Netanyahu government's formal pledge to pursue the Oslo process has been, for the past 19 months of stalemated negotiations, largely a matter of words.

Many observers in Israel and abroad believed the premier would not compromise the Greater Israel philosophy that has underpinned the platform of the Israeli right for decades.

But now, in a moment televised around the world, Netanyahu affixed his signature to an accord that plainly spells land for peace.

And Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon, a foremost leader of the right for the past quarter of a century, looked on and applauded. And the Likud Party, back home, issued a statement of congratulations and enthusiastic support for the prime minister.

The White House signing may well turn out to be cataclysmic for the future of Israel — both for its politics and its society.

After this latest agreement, the clear-cut distinction between left and right, hawk and dove, in Israeli politics has been blurred.

By the same token, the planned gathering of Palestinian representatives in the Gaza Strip in mid-December, with President Clinton present, will be equally historic for the Palestinian people. At that gathering, according to the agreement signed last Friday, the anti-Israel portions of the Palestinian Covenant will be discarded.

The agreement "plugged the holes in the Swiss cheese called Oslo," Netanyahu told a news conference Sunday at Israel's Ben-Gurion airport after he returned from the United States.

Along with the Palestinians' promise to publicly revoke their charter, the agreement hammered out after nine days of roller-coaster talks at the Wye Plantation in eastern Maryland includes the following provisions:

- an Israeli troop redeployment from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank;
- the release of some 700 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails;
- opening safe passage routes for Palestinians traveling between the West Bank and Gaza; and
- a comprehensive security arrangement, carried out with CIA oversight, under which the Palestinian police will arrest terrorist suspects and confiscate unlicensed weapons.

The deal was nearly scuttled by a last-minute dispute over an Israeli request that the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon's stance unclear

Despite his participation in the negotiations leading up to the land-for-security agreement, it remains unclear whether hawkish Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon would support the accord in a vote by the Israeli Cabinet.

Sharon issued a statement that the agreement contained "important achievements" for Israel. But at the same time, the statement said Sharon still believed that a 13 percent further Israeli redeployment in the West Bank was dangerous.

Poll: Israelis back accord

Some 74 percent of Israelis support the land-for-security agreement signed at the White House, according to a poll published by the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot.

Eighteen percent of those polled oppose the pact, while 8 percent have no opinion, according to the poll, which had a 4.5 percent margin of error.

Iran, Syria oppose deal

Iran's president said he will oppose the latest Israeli-Palestinian accord. President Mohammad Khatami said the accord "will not bring the region nearer to peace."

He added that it is "detrimental to the Palestinian people and independent Arab states, whose interests are threatened by the Zionist enemy."

Syria also opposed the agreement, saying the participation of the CIA to monitor Palestinian compliance is an "alarming aspect" of the pact.

Israel arrests Hamas militants

Israeli police arrested three Hamas members on suspicion of carrying out the August murders of two Jews from the West Bank settlement of Yizhar, Shlomo Lieberman and Harel Bin-Nun.

The officials said the three followed instructions from a top Hamas militant to carry out the murders.



Daily News Bulletin

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U.S. free Jonathan Pollard, a former U.S. naval intelligence analyst who has been serving a life sentence since 1987 for spying for Israel. President Clinton ultimately agreed to reconsider Israel's request for Pollard's release, but without making any commitments about the outcome or time frame of a decision.

The "test" of the Wye agreement, say many politicians and pundits, will be in its implementation. Indeed, the agreement could quickly unravel in the face of less-than-firm determination on the part of either side to carry out the intricate process of implementation, which spans a crowded 12-week schedule.

That period will doubtless be replete with crises, some evolving out of ongoing negotiations surrounding the implementation itself, some engendered by the provocations of opponents of the accord on the radical fringes of both Palestinian and Israeli society. Timely implementation will be critical, but it should not be overlooked that the moving White House signing ceremony — with Jordan's King Hussein in attendance despite his battle with cancer — was in itself an event of indelible political significance.

Already, stress lines are beginning to form within Israeli parties on both ends of the political spectrum. Witness, for example, the Labor Party's reaction.

Labor leader Ehud Barak said this week his party would give the agreement its support in the Knesset — thus ensuring a sweeping majority there. But in the next breath, Barak said his party would work toward toppling the Netanyahu government and forcing early elections. In this one case at least, he was saying that Labor would make common cause with the ultra-rightist Moledet Party and with rightist renegades within the governing coalition to bring down Netanyahu for signing the Wye accord.

But this plan is being openly challenged by some prominent figures within Labor, among them former Prime Minister Shimon Peres. They feel that to oppose the government now, before implementation has even begun, would be construed by the public as opposition for opposition's sake, or, worse, as opposing peace.

They add that the best interests of peace would be served by the present, Likud-led government actually withdrawing the army from a significant portion of Eretz Israel.

The confusion in Labor is mirrored by confusion and conflict within the hard-line right. The National Religious Party, comfortably in command of the education and transportation ministries, is plainly less than happy to leave office for the barren pastures of opposition, fearing especially that Likud and Labor — their differences now narrowed — may team up in a government of national unity.

For now, only those on the far right are saying that Netanyahu must be felled regardless of what coalition may take power in his place.

The various arguments within the leftist and rightist camps may be cut short by Netanyahu himself: Some observers believe that the prime minister, if he finds his ability to govern hamstrung by the threats of defection, may actually initiate early elections himself.

This scenario is predicated on the assessment that Netanyahu's popularity is bound to rise with the successful conclusion of the Wye accord. Certainly, it would be hard today for Labor to tar Netanyahu with the same anti-peace brush that it has grown used to painting him with these past two years.

What does this mean for election tactics — whenever an election eventually takes place? And, beyond tactics, what does it mean for the evolution of Israeli politics in the long term? So far, the 20 years of fitful peacemaking that have elapsed since the signing of the Camp David accords in September 1978 have not seriously eroded the left-right divide that cuts through Israeli politics.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin won Labor's support for the peace treaty with Egypt, but quickly lost it when he dug in his heels against autonomy talks with the Palestinians. Subsequent Likud-led administrations have been reluctant to consider the prospect of Palestinian statehood, a prospect that many feel permeates the language and spirit of the Oslo accords.

Now, after Wye, that deep divide might at last be closing, as the Likud prime minister embraces the land-for-peace logic that lies at the heart of Oslo. Netanyahu, at this moment, is a man in motion. He is in traumatic transit between the rightist leader of yesterday and the centrist leader of today. His tomorrow is still unclear. But what seems certain is that if he does indeed oversee the implementation of the Wye agreement, Israeli politics will never be quite the same again. □

JEWISH WORLD

Gingrich: Don't release Pollard

U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich said President Clinton should not release Jonathan Pollard. Gingrich maintained that the former U.S. naval intelligence analyst has knowledge of classified secrets that he may sell to a foreign nation upon his release.

The Israeli-Palestinian pact reached last Friday was nearly scuttled by a last-minute dispute over an Israeli request that President Clinton free Pollard, who has been serving a life sentence since 1987 for spying for Israel. Clinton ultimately agreed to reconsider the request.

Gorbachev: 'No turning back'

The man who headed the former Soviet Union when the mass emigration of Jews began said Russia is eliminating anti-Semitism, but the process is not complete. "There is no turning back the clock. There will be no return to anti-Semitism in Russia," Mikhail Gorbachev told reporters before addressing a State of Israel Bonds dinner in New York.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir also spoke at the dinner, which was held to mark the 10th anniversary of the massive Soviet aliyah to Israel.

Eagleburger asked to head panel

Former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger has been asked to head an international commission charged with resolving all unpaid insurance claims of Holocaust victims. The newly formed commission will audit and investigate the records of European insurance companies and set up a mechanism for paying out claims in a process that is to be completed within two years. Eagleburger is expected to let the commission know his decision within a few days.

Man charged in asylum case

A Russian-language translator from Ukraine now living in Chicago was charged with making false statements to the U.S. government to help 23 people seeking political asylum in the United States.

Federal officials said that in exchange for cash, Victor Voinenko, 34, helped immigrants pose as persecuted Jews so they could gain asylum. He is accused of accepting almost \$13,000 from the 23 asylum seekers in the scheme.

Passengers' fate probed

Researchers at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum are nearing completion of a compilation that will detail what happened to all the passengers who were on board a 1939 refugee ship that was turned away by the United States. The stories of 40 passengers on the S.S. St. Louis remain unknown. Many of the 936 passengers on the ill-fated ship, which was forced to return to Europe, perished in the Holocaust.

Rabbis' manual offers prayers for life's tribulations, mitzvahs

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Nowhere is it more obvious that religious life has changed in recent decades for many American Jews than in the new Conservative manual for rabbis.

The 688-page, two-volume set — which is three times as long as the last edition, published in 1965 — is full of rituals for life's threshold moments that had historically remained unmarked by formal Jewish prayer.

The new *Moreh Derech*, or Rabbis' Guide, issued this week by the Conservative movement, reflects clearly how Jewish spirituality and liturgy have become much more personalized than they were in the past.

Now, when a baby with disabilities is born, a teen enters college or an older person retires, the Conservative movement has a prayer to mark the occasion.

There are different supplementary blessings for couples being married — the one for younger couples includes mention of children, and the one for older pairs focuses on companionship. Three variations of a ritual to mark a baby's adoption are presented, as are three different naming ceremonies for girls. For boys, the traditional ceremony for brit milah, or circumcision, is included.

Also included are a prayer to mark a miscarriage, including immersion in a mikvah afterward, a prayer to help cope with infertility, and a ceremony to aid a couple or woman following an abortion.

Another new element is a grieving and burial ritual after the death of a newborn, still-born or premature baby.

Until now, there were no widely disseminated guidelines from the Conservative movement to offer comfort to people in any of these circumstances.

All of the English translations are rendered in gender-neutral language.

"That has been a feminist issue but it's also one of the maturity of the Jewish community in general. It's not a deviation from the past, but a confirmation of Jewish theology, which has always regarded God as beyond gender," said Rabbi Perry Raphael Rank, one of the manual's two editors.

More than a decade ago, when the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly began work on the new manual, the goal was to revise slightly what already existed.

But "it became clear that we needed more. The Jewish community had changed, had become more open to tradition, was more aware of Israel, and women were coming into the rabbinate," Rank said. In the end, more than 100 different Conservative rabbis were involved in the endeavor, about 10 of them female.

Information about conversion to Judaism has been expanded, Rank said. Conservative movement practices around conversion haven't changed over time, but there was a desire to make sure the practices were standardized.

"Our motivation was to make sure everyone was on the same page in our movement," said Rank. "When our Orthodox colleagues pick up the manual, they will see how strict we are about maintaining a traditional ceremony for conversion."

There were some ardent debates during the editing process, Rank said.

One occurred over the level of detail that should be included in the ritual after an abortion. Its author, Rabbi Amy Eilberg, has created four distinct rituals — which she uses in her own work — tailored to the different circumstances under which women terminate pregnancies. "We weren't ready for that kind of specificity," Rank said. "We distilled the most fundamental aspects of the ceremony and expect the rabbi to adapt it to the circumstance."

Also illuminating is what was left out, in this version, which had been included in the 1965 rabbis guide — specifically a lengthy groundbreaking ceremony for new synagogues. "In the 1960s, we were building buildings. In the 1990s, we are building communities. The focus has changed," Rank said.

In the newer version, there is more focus on Torah study in shiva homes and other circumstances — another reflection of changing times, he said. "It shows that Jews are seeking solace through traditional sources and have an openness toward study." □

Clinton blocks effort to force Iran to pay terror victim's family

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Clinton has nullified a provision in the new U.S. budget law aimed at helping the family of an American Jewish victim of terrorism collect damages from Iran.

The provision, inserted by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) in Congress' session-ending spending bill, was intended to force the Treasury and State Departments to help American victims of state-sponsored terrorism collect damages awarded by U.S. courts.

It was specifically geared toward the case of Alisa Flatow, a 20-year-old Brandeis University student from West Orange, N.J., who was killed in a 1995 terrorist attack in the Gaza Strip.

Flatow's family has been trying to gain access to Iranian assets in the United States ever since a U.S. judge earlier this year ordered Iran to pay the family \$247.5 million for its role in bankrolling the attack.

The provision would have helped the family collect the sum by forcing the sale of three Iranian properties in Washington.

But the Clinton administration has opposed the move, calling it a violation of U.S. law and treaty obligations.

"If the United States permitted attachment of diplomatic properties, then other countries could retaliate, placing our embassies and citizens overseas at grave risk.

"Our ability to use foreign properties as leverage in foreign policy disputes could also be undermined," the White House said in a statement.

The bill gives the president the authority to waive the provision for national security reasons — and Clinton exercised that authority Oct. 21. But the White House also said it would help the Flatows identify other Iranian commercial assets that may be available to them.

Stephen Flatow, Alisa's father, had a mixed reaction to Clinton's action.

He expressed disappointment at the waiver, but said he was heartened by Clinton's promise to help identify other assets.

"We asked for that back in March and that's when they started stonewalling us," Flatow said of the Clinton administration, which has been seeking normalization of relations with Iran even as it has sought to punish countries that sponsor terrorism.

"I've been promised things in the past that have not been delivered by the administration, but never before has their promise been in writing," Flatow said in an interview. "The ball is in the White House's court."

Lautenberg fired off a letter to Clinton saying he was "deeply disappointed" with the waiver and urged the administration to make good on its commitment to help the Flatow family. □

Survey: Minority of Poles back crosses erected near Auschwitz

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Only a small minority of Poles support the forest of crosses that have sprung up recently near the site of the Auschwitz death camp, according to a recent Polish opinion poll.

While only 15 percent of the respondents back the placing of new crosses outside Auschwitz by radical Catholic militants, about half of those surveyed support the presence of a much larger cross that was used by Polish-born Pope John Paul II during a mass at Birkenau in 1979 and erected outside Auschwitz 10 years ago.

The survey, conducted last month by the polling agency OBOP and published in the leading newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, also bore out earlier surveys denoting a strong tendency among Poles to internationalize Auschwitz as a symbol of evil and martyrdom.

It also indicated that many of the respondents feel that Polish suffering during World War II has been downplayed.

The survey was carried out to gauge public opinion in light of the continuing controversy over the crosses placed outside the walls of Auschwitz.

Catholic fundamentalists have set up more than 300 crosses since the end of July in defiance of protests by Jewish groups, and despite calls from the Polish Roman Catholic Church and the Polish government for a halt to the campaign.

The campaign to erect the crosses has given a prominent public platform to virulent anti-Semites normally on the fringe of political life.

Those involved in the campaign say they are erecting the crosses to prevent the removal of the so-called papal cross and to commemorate 152 Polish Catholics who were killed at the site by the Nazis.

Some 20 percent of the respondents would prefer to see a monument erected to the memory of the murdered Poles instead of the crosses.

The poll indicates that "one-half support the official line of the government and the episcopate, only 15 percent support the new crosses and as many as 30 percent want even the papal cross to go," said Stanislaw Krajewski, a member of the board of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland.

According to the survey, he said, those who want the removal of the papal cross mainly included people who are better educated, live in large cities and are less religious.

The survey also touched on how Poles perceive Auschwitz in general.

Some 5 percent said only Jews were murdered at Auschwitz. Eight percent believed it was the site solely of "Polish martyrdom." Some 48 percent considered it the site of the martyrdom of many peoples.

Some 38 percent said the identity of the victims killed there is irrelevant.

Some 1.5 million people were killed at Auschwitz, 90 percent of them Jews.

Asked to name which people suffered most during World War II, some 50 percent said Poles, about 28 percent said Jews and some 11 percent said such comparisons could not be made.

Some 54 percent said they think Poles respect Jewish sensitivities regarding Auschwitz, while 35 percent disagreed.

But only 23 percent think Jews respect Polish sensitivities regarding Auschwitz, compared to 59 percent who said Jews do not.

Krajewski recently faulted some Jews for failing to recognize that even though 90 percent of the 1.5 million people killed at Auschwitz were Jews, Polish Catholics, too, have a right to consider Auschwitz a symbol of Nazi persecution and to mourn the thousands of Poles who were murdered there. □