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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu: Accord will be kept

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright that Israel will keep to the timetable in the Wye agreement although the pact has not yet been ratified by Israel's Cabinet or Knesset.

The telephone conversation took place after Netanyahu informed Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat that he would have to delay implementation of the accord until after the ratification votes.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority adhered to the timetable of the accord by providing the U.S. State Department with its working plan to combat terrorism.

Ross to return to Middle East

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross is scheduled to leave for the Middle East in the coming days to work with Israel and the Palestinians on the implementation of the Wye agreement.

On the eve of Ross' departure, State Department spokesman James Rubin praised Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in the wake of death threats from Hezbollah and Hamas terrorists. Despite these threats, Rubin said Arafat "appears ready, willing and able to follow through with his commitments and we certainly applaud that courage."

Sakic extradited from Argentina

An alleged former Croatian concentration camp guard arrived in Croatia from Argentina to face charges of involvement in atrocities during World War II.

Nada Sakic, who took the first name Esperanza while living in Argentina, is alleged to have been a guard in the women's section of the Jasenovac concentration camp. Sakic's husband, Dinko, who ran Jasenovac, will also be tried for war crimes.

Deadline passes on inquiry

A deadline passed for an investigation of a Communist lawmaker in Russia who has made several public anti-Semitic statements. When asked about the statements of Gen. Albert Makashov, Russian Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov — who had recently attempted to soften his own image by offering Rosh Hashanah greetings to Russian Jews — himself made thinly veiled anti-Semitic remarks. [Page 3]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jordanians ponder a future without King Hussein at helm

By Avi Machlis

AMMAN, Jordan (JTA) — From countless photographs in the streets and shops of Amman, King Hussein of Jordan looks down upon his people with the same fatherly face.

But the robust, healthy images of the ruler of the Hashemite kingdom are no consolation to worried Jordanians as they watch their king, who has ruled for 46 years, battle lymphatic cancer at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota.

Some 90 percent of Jordanians have never known another leader, and they fear that several television appearances made by the king since his departure more than three months ago for the clinic were aimed at preparing them for the worst.

Many Middle East observers got their first look at the ailing monarch, bald and thin from chemotherapy, when he made a dramatic appearance at the summit last month in Maryland to help save the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The rest of the world had their first glimpse when Hussein participated in the Oct. 23 White House signing of the Wye agreement. Hussein's appearance sparked fresh speculation about his condition, the regime's stability and prospects of a change in Jordan's policy of pursuing a "warm" peace with Israel.

Jordanians have not yet lost hope, especially since the king has recovered from cancer once before, in 1992.

"We pray to God that the king will return healthy" from his treatments at the clinic, says Mahmood Hassan, who owns a small clothing store in Amman. "There is nobody like King Hussein, but Prince Hassan is also good, because he is a student of the king."

Jordanian officials and analysts, many speaking anonymously about an extremely sensitive subject, are confident that if Hussein dies, the transfer of power to his younger brother, Crown Prince Hassan, will pass smoothly and with little impact on relations with Israel.

But, they say, although overall policies will remain intact, if the peace process with the Palestinians again becomes deadlocked, Hassan may be forced to use tougher rhetoric against Israel in public statements to show Jordanians that he is not ignoring their frustrations.

Replacing Hussein will not be easy. Despite his authoritarian tendencies, Hussein's charisma and commitment to his people have earned him genuine respect and loyalty, while many other Arab leaders are merely feared.

His often emotional commitment to neighborly relations with Israel — in spite of his public's misgivings — has also earned the king genuine affection from Israelis.

"Nobody in Jordan has King Hussein's charisma," says Hani Hourani, director general of Al-Urdun Al-Jadid Research Center, an independent think tank in Amman.

"But the crown prince has been involved in decision-making for a long time. There is a theory that the prince doesn't support peace the way King Hussein does, but I believe that this is a strategic decision made not just by the king."

Hourani's analysis is confirmed by a source close to the palace, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"The king's policy is not a personal policy. It is a Hashemite policy, meaning a Jordanian policy," says the source. "The crown prince will continue the same policies."

In the past, the crown prince has made tougher public statements on Israeli policy than Hussein. However, in 1994, Hassan was the first Arab leader to meet Benjamin

MIDEAST FOCUS

Clinton appears on Israel TV

President Clinton called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to deliver the same speeches during appearances together before Israeli and Palestinian audiences.

"It would help the Palestinians to see Yasser Arafat saying the same thing to the Israelis he says to the Palestinians. It would help the Israelis" as well, Clinton said in an interview with Israel Television. Clinton also said his scheduled December visit to the Gaza Strip should not be construed as an endorsement of the Palestinian goal of statehood.

Hamas statement denied

A Hamas political leader denied that a statement from the militant group threatening civil war with the Palestinian Authority is authentic. Ismail Hanieh said the statement, which accused Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat of treason, ran counter to the political goals of the Islamic group.

His comments came after the military wing of Hamas warned of civil war if the Palestinian Authority continues its crackdown on the group. It is not unusual for Hamas to issue contradictory statements because the group is divided into military and political cells operating in different countries.

Israel approves expansion

Israel gave approval to expand a settlement on the outskirts of Hebron. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu backed the construction of 200 new housing units in Kiryat Arba to soften settler opposition to the Wye agreement, political observers said.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright criticized the move during a telephone call to Netanyahu. Discussing Albright's criticism, State Department spokesman James Rubin said, "If we go back to business as usual in these areas, we'll be out of business."

Netanyahu, who was then head of the opposition Likud Party.

Later, he met Ariel Sharon, who is despised in the Arab world for his role in the 1982 Lebanese war and who was one of only six legislators to abstain from the Knesset's vote in support of the historic Israeli-Jordanian peace accord in 1994.

Yet some political experts say Hassan, as a new leader, cannot ignore growing hostility toward the Israeli-Palestinian peace process among the Jordanian people, especially since some 60 percent of the country's 4.6 million population are of Palestinian origin. Meanwhile, Hassan is already taking a bigger role in Jordanian affairs of state, signaling that the process of succession is well underway.

Hussein remains involved from his hospital bed, but has given his brother full control of the government.

In September, on the king's instructions, Hassan reshuffled the Cabinet in response to a severe water crisis during the summer and an ongoing economic crisis.

Hassan seized the opportunity to begin consolidating support for his future regime, especially among Palestinians.

Palace insiders say the new government includes more Palestinians in senior positions than ever before.

But solving the country's problems will require more than just a Cabinet reshuffle.

In recent years, unemployment has soared to nearly 30 percent, according to unofficial estimates.

Riots in the southern town of Karak in 1996 over a rise in bread prices were swiftly crushed, but highlighted the potential for an explosion.

The economic crisis has fueled frustration with the Israeli-Jordanian peace accord, which many had hoped would bring economic benefits.

Some businessmen criticize the regime for neglecting Jordanian ties with Iraq for the sake of relations with Israel that have not borne fruit.

These factors have boosted support for Islamist groups opposed to the monarchy and peace with Israel.

Many Jordanians are disappointed at the king's reversal — through an elections law and a tough press law aimed at marginalizing Islamic opposition groups — of democratic reforms launched in 1989.

These groups are not expected to threaten the monarchy, but as frustration with the peace process grows, the crown prince will be inclined to try to build trust with them.

"I do believe in dialogue, I do believe in participation," Hassan told CNN last week. "I do believe in the creation of a civil society based on a new political discourse that we can forge together."

These comments, say experts, confirm impressions that the Oxford-educated prince is more committed to democratic reforms than his older brother.

He may need to pursue such reforms in order to bolster support for his leadership during the early days, especially since he appears to lack the charisma of his brother.

"He is more sensitive to demands of democracy, not just because it is democracy for the people but because it is a trend in the world," says analyst Hourani. "He also has to give the people something when he comes into power to show that he is different."

Dr. Ramzi Azar, who runs a private clinic in the Baqa'a refugee camp north of Amman, where 100,000 Palestinians are crammed into an area of less than 1 square mile, is not optimistic.

"People here do not think the crown prince will make it easier for them," he says, noting that support for Islamic groups in the camp has climbed steadily for several years. This is because the refugees' hope for a better future is pinned on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which is not under Jordan's control.

Many thought that, at least, the peace process would make it easier for them to travel from Jordan to visit relatives in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But Azar says it has only become more difficult to get permits from Israel.

"People here were convinced that the peace process will improve their economic situation, but nothing has improved," says Azar. "On the contrary, there are more people living in poverty than ever before."

"And while they appreciate the king's role," he says, "they all believe that the main problem is not the Palestinians, the Arabs or the king, but Netanyahu and his colleagues." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Poland wants answer to dispute

Poland said it wanted a quick solution to the problem created by the crosses recently erected by Polish Catholic fundamentalists near the site of the former Auschwitz death camp. Last month, the Polish government lost a court bid to take over the site of the crosses, which have been criticized by Jewish groups and the Polish Catholic Church.

Historian seeks bank list

An Israeli historian investigating two German banks' involvement in Nazi-era dealings said they should publish a list of dormant accounts belonging to Jews.

But spokesmen for Dresdner Bank and Deutsche Bank said a settlement on such accounts was reached in 1975.

Building to start on Rabin center

A groundbreaking took place for a center for Jewish life dedicated to Yitzhak Rabin at the University of California at Los Angeles. The event for the \$6 million center — which is expected to house a chapel, a computer center, a kosher kitchen and a center for interethnic programs — occurred on the third *yahrzeit* of the slain prime minister. The building is expected to be completed in the year 2000.

Union leaders visit museum

A delegation of trade union leaders from Northern Ireland recently visited the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles and announced plans to create a similar institution reflecting their own history in Belfast. The Belfast Museum of Tolerance would serve as a symbol of peace in a land riven for decades by sectarian violence between Protestants and Catholics, said Brian Campfield, president of the Belfast Trades Union Council.

CD lands rightist in jail

A rock CD describing the brutal murder of political opponents landed a leader of Germany's far-right NPD Party in jail.

Frank Schwerdt, 54, was sentenced to six months in jail for glorifying violence on the CD, which sold 2,500 copies.

Schwerdt is already in prison on an unrelated charge of inciting racial violence.

Cable network drops character

An American cable television network recently said it would no longer use a character in a comic strip that the Anti-Defamation League called anti-Semitic. Grandpa Boris had been drawn with a large hook nose and heavy-lidded eyes in a comic strip adaptation of the Nickelodeon network's "Rugrats" show.

High court orders 3 Israeli cities to seat non-Orthodox on councils

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In a decision that advances the cause of religious pluralism in Israel, the High Court of Justice has ordered three Israeli cities to appoint Reform and Conservative representatives to local religious councils.

Along with the ruling regarding Tel Aviv, Haifa and Arad, the court called on a government committee that oversees the contentious issue to resolve challenges regarding the religious councils of Jerusalem and the northern community of Kiryat Tivon.

In its ruling, the 13-justice panel established a general criterion for membership on the local councils — that the representatives not be anti-religious.

The participation of non-Orthodox representatives on the councils has been hotly debated in the courts for more than two years.

The local religious councils, supervised by the Religious Affairs Ministry, have exclusive jurisdiction over marriage, kashrut, burial and other religious matters for all Jews living in Israel. Members of each council are appointed by the local municipal council, the religious affairs minister and the local chief rabbi.

Rabbi Uri Regev, head of the Movement for Progressive Judaism in Israel, as the Reform movement in Israel is known, termed the latest ruling an "important stepping stone" that builds on a decision last year which opened the way for the appointment of a Reform representative to the Netanya religious council.

But Orthodox representatives challenged the ruling, questioning how it would be possible for a religious council to operate if its members possessed varying degrees of religious observance.

"Regarding Haifa, the question was not whether Conservative, Reform and Orthodox could sit together on a council. We consider such categorizing artificial," Haifa's chief rabbi, Rabbi Sha'ar Yishuv Cohen, told Israel Radio.

"If the council includes members who openly say they do not observe" kashrut and keep the Sabbath, "then the religious councils, whose function is to provide religious services, such as kashrut certification, cannot accomplish their tasks." □

Zyuganov defends lawmaker who made anti-Semitic remarks

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A deadline for taking action against the anti-Semitic comments of a Communist lawmaker has come and gone.

And when asked about the lawmaker's comments, the leader of Russia's Communist Party, Gennady Zyuganov, himself made several thinly veiled anti-Semitic remarks.

Russian state prosecutors said last month they were considering bringing criminal charges against Gen. Albert Makashov, a hard-line member of the Russian Parliament's lower house. The announcement came after Makashov told a television interviewer in early October that "it is time to expel all yids from Russia."

At rallies held subsequently in Moscow and the Central Russian town of Samara, Makashov said Jews are to blame for the current economic crisis in Russia and that if he had to die he would take a "dozen yids" with him.

But the deadline assigned by the prosecutor's office for an investigation has now passed, and the office is refusing to comment on the state of the inquiry.

Moreover, the uproar in the press and among some liberal lawmakers over Makashov's statements has prompted an anti-Semitic backlash among prominent members of the Russian Communist Party, including party leader Zyuganov, who had recently appeared to soften his image by offering Rosh Hashanah greetings to Russian Jews.

In an interview with the Moscow Jewish weekly *Evreyskaya Gazeta*, Zyuganov said Makashov's remarks may well have been prompted by the fact that "there are quite a lot of people of Jewish nationality among the so-called democratic journalists" who "day and night are making a fool of the people." □

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Jews expect little change in working with new Congress***By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In a normal year, the political discourse following a midterm election would be dominated by debate of the key issues facing lawmakers as they look ahead to a new legislative session.

But these are not normal times.

After a brief hiatus that saw most congressional candidates engaging voters on an array of pressing and topical "non-Monica" issues, lawmakers are set to return to the business foremost in the minds of most in the Washington establishment — presidential impeachment proceedings.

At this early stage, few are venturing to guess how that spectacle will play out and affect the work of lawmakers in the last Congress of the 20th century.

But for now, with little evidence showing any significant change in the power balance in Washington, most political observers anticipate that the 106th Congress will, by and large, hold the status quo.

Which is to say it will probably be a Congress that will confound Jewish activists more often than not.

Indeed, since the Republicans took control of Congress after the 1994 elections, most Jewish activists working in the domestic arena on Capitol Hill have been devoting most of their energies to damage control, trying to block or mitigate various policy initiatives.

In the wake of Tuesday's election, there is little to suggest that will change.

The 105th Congress concluded its work under the dome with more unfinished business than any Congress in recent memory — and late in the session the Republican leadership shelved much of its agenda until next year, hoping to seize new momentum to push it forward.

The unfinished business of particular interest to Jewish activists includes banning so-called partial-birth abortion procedures, various school voucher initiatives and tax breaks to support private or parochial education.

It also includes a continued reassessment of immigration policy and immigrant benefits, as well as a restructuring of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

For most Jewish activists, that portends another round dominated by defensive and reactive lobbying, rather than pushing forward an affirmative agenda.

"There are always proactive issues, but it certainly has been the case" during the last few years "that we have had to run to put out fires, whether it's on church-state issues, or the education agenda or civil rights," said Richard Foltin, legislative director and counsel for the American Jewish Committee.

Most activists anticipate a return to many of the same battlefields, particularly on the church-state front, where they say countering the agenda of the Christian Coalition and other religious conservatives will continue to be a top priority.

But "there's still room, if we pick our fights carefully, to make some positive advances," said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Although Jewish activists often disagree about which issues should concern the community most — and occasionally take opposing sides on the issues themselves — some of the anticipated fights on domestic policy include:

- crafting a new law to restore the broadest possible protections for religious liberty;
- giving low-income students vouchers to pay tuition costs at private or religious schools;
- saving Social Security;
- passing a patient's bill of rights;
- strengthening hate crime laws;
- protecting abortion rights;
- providing additional education and social-service block grant funding to the states;
- expanding tax-free savings accounts for public and private-school expenses;
- revamping the way the nation's campaigns are financed; and
- protecting the rights of religious minorities in the workplace.

In the international arena, the Middle East peace process is expected to pose new challenges, particularly as the May 4, 1999, deadline for completing final-status talks approaches.

Funding for U.S.-Israel cooperation in ballistic missiles defense and for moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem will likely come up for debate.

But lawmakers are expected to first determine how much aid to allocate to the Palestinians for economic support and to Israel for troop redeployment in the West Bank as part of the interim peace accord signed in Washington last month.

Efforts to contain Iran as it seeks weapons of mass destruction will continue to be a focal point, as will the State Department's newly established function of monitoring religious persecution abroad.

All of this will play out against a backdrop of presidential electioneering as both parties jockey for position for the 2000 campaign.

"There's going to be a very small window of time to actually get things done," said Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs.

"Once the presidential cycle kicks in, everything that goes on the Hill is just going to be a function of presidential politics, which probably makes it likely that compromise will not be the word of choice."

The Christian right will likely figure prominently into that equation, particularly with the Christian Coalition once again expected to play a crucial role in determining the Republican nominee for president.

"A Congress leading up to a presidential election that — if not beholden to these constituencies — is greatly influenced by these constituencies certainly makes it tough" for us to advance our agenda, said Sammie Moshenberg, director of the National Council of Jewish Women's Washington office.

And of course, all of this must be viewed through the prism of impeachment proceedings — a dynamic that will likely go a long way in setting the tone and tenor of the next Congress.

If the impeachment process goes forward at full throttle, "you're going to once again see a Congress that's distracted from its business," the AJCommittee's Foltin said.

"That can be good or bad depending on whether one likes what Congress is doing or not." □