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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Cabinet backs Wye accord

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High-level Israeli sources denied reports that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convened the Cabinet only after President Clinton informed him in a phone conversation that Israel's failure to ratify the accord could make it difficult for the United States to gain Arab support in the event of an American attack on Iraq. [Page 1]

Leaders discuss Gulf tensions

President Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed during a phone call Tuesday the escalating tensions in the Gulf in the wake of Iraq's latest standoff with U.N. weapons inspectors.

The two leaders discussed possible U.S. measures to help defend Israel in the event that it is targeted by Iraq following an American attack, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department said in a travel advisory that American citizens may wish to leave Israel and the self-rule areas because of growing tensions between the United States and Iraq.

"Iraq's continued defiance of the will of the international community," the advisory said, "is heightening the level of risk to American citizens in the Middle East." [Page 3]

Primakov opposes ban

Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov said he opposes the idea of banning the Communist Party despite its failure to officially censure a lawmaker who has publicly made several anti-Semitic statements recently.

Some analysts speculate that Primakov's stand was due to his desire to win broad support for next year's budget, which is expected to arrive soon in the Duma, the Communist-dominated lower house of Parliament.

Meanwhile, Patriarch Alexei II, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, criticized Gen. Albert Makashov, who continues to make anti-Semitic statements.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israeli Cabinet vote places Wye agreement back on track

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After Islamic terrorists twice tried to derail the peace process in the three weeks since the signing of the Wye agreement, Israel's Cabinet has ratified the accord.

But implementation of the land-for-security deal still faces more hurdles, with Israel closely watching a meeting of the Palestine National Council scheduled for next month that is expected to nullify, once and for all, the clauses in the Palestinian charter that call for the destruction of Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had postponed the ratification vote because of the terror attacks, and, in an effort to gain the support of hard-line ministers, he attached a number of conditions, including a demand that the council vote to annul the anti-Israel clauses of the Palestinian charter.

In the end, however, he was unable to sway a majority of his ministers to give their explicit support. The Cabinet approved the accord Wednesday by a vote of 8-4, with five abstentions.

When the Knesset convenes in the coming days, a larger majority is expected to endorse the accord because the Labor opposition has promised Netanyahu a "safety net" of votes to protect him from any hard-right defections.

The Cabinet had been in session last Friday, with the clear intention of ratifying the accord before the Sabbath, when word of a car-bomb blast at Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market prompted the premier to bring the proceedings to a peremptory halt.

A week earlier, a car-bomber missed a school bus full of children outside a Gaza Strip settlement, killing an Israeli soldier in a jeep that was escorting the bus.

Last Friday, only the two suicide bombers were killed in the teeming market; a score of shoppers were injured — but most of them lightly.

Had either of these attacks achieved the perpetrators' intended results, the Wye agreement may well have unraveled.

On the Palestinian side, and indeed among some left-wing Israelis, the feeling is that Netanyahu, while obviously grieving innocent Israeli deaths, would have welcomed an excuse to escape implementing the further 13 percent redeployment in the West Bank called for under the Wye accord.

As it is, relentless pressure both from the American go-betweens and from his own defense minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, has brought the prime minister back on track — provided that Israeli and Palestinian efforts to prevent further terror outrages bear fruit.

Mordechai is resisting a move led by Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon to couple Israel's implementation of the Wye agreement with high-profile government support for building at a controversial site in southeastern Jerusalem. Israel's announcement in March 1997 that it would construct a Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa led to the suspension of Israeli-Palestinian talks that were only resumed at the Wye summit.

The defense establishment, led by Mordechai and backed by somber warnings from the intelligence community, also is opposing demands from the settlers for a new West Bank road to bypass the refugee camp of el-Aroub between Hebron and the Gush Etzion settlement bloc. The army and Israel's domestic security service, the Shin Bet, warn of violent protests if that plan goes forward.

But even with the Cabinet's approval of the Wye accord, expansion work is proceeding in at least half a dozen West Bank Jewish settlements, according to

MIDEAST FOCUS

Olmert wins re-election

Israel's Labor Party edged ahead of the Likud in nationwide municipal elections, winning mayoral races in three of the five largest cities. Jerusalem incumbent Ehud Olmert of Likud was re-elected, as expected, for a second term.

Religious parties won nearly half the seats in Jerusalem's city council. Olmert, whose slate won only two of 31 seats, blamed the result on the low turnout of secular voters, which fell far below that of the city's religious residents.

Israelis targeted in West Bank

Two Israelis were wounded, one of them seriously, in a shooting attack late Tuesday night south of the West Bank town of Hebron.

The two were driving near the settlement of Otmiel when their car came under fire. Israeli security forces detained five Palestinians suspected of possible involvement in the attack.

Arafat relates theory on bombing

Yasser Arafat believes that Israeli intelligence operatives were perhaps responsible for last Friday's terror attack at Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market.

The Palestinian leader reportedly discussed the idea during a conversation in Ramallah with Labor Knesset member Yossi Beilin, one of the architects of the Oslo accords.

Arafat said he had growing suspicions that the operatives were attempting to derail Israeli approval of the Wye agreement.

Israel denies spy charges

Israel denied that two of its citizens were spying on Cyprus for Turkey.

But Israeli officials provided no explanation of what the two were doing with listening equipment when they were arrested over the weekend by Cypriot police.

substantiated Peace Now reports. While these have triggered some Palestinian objections, Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat and his top officials have been markedly low-key in all their public statements during the past several weeks.

Political observers say the Palestinians feel that they have Washington in their corner and therefore prefer to remain quiet while U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and her aides press Israel to start implementation.

Not wishing to appear to be bowing to either U.S. or Palestinian pressures, Netanyahu was apparently in no hurry to the Cabinet discuss the Wye accord before nationwide municipal elections took place Tuesday.

With exquisite timing, he had the announcement of the Cabinet meeting made just a few hours before the polling stations closed — just to reassure that section of the electorate that supports Likud or Likud-allied candidates and wants the Likud-led government to move ahead with the peace process.

On Wednesday, high-level Israeli sources denied reports that Netanyahu convened the Cabinet only after President Clinton informed him in a phone conversation that Israel's failure to ratify the accord could make it difficult for the United States to gain Arab support in the event of an American attack on Iraq to punish the rogue state for failing to comply with U.N. weapons inspectors.

The conditions Netanyahu attached to the Cabinet's approval of the accord will create yet more hurdles in the coming weeks — particularly over how the Palestine National Council will abrogate the anti-Israeli clauses in the Palestinian charter.

Israel insists on a formal convocation and vote. American officials apparently believe that, with President Clinton planning personally to attend an assembly of the council and other Palestinian leaders in Gaza in mid-December, they can finesse this issue to the satisfaction of Israeli public opinion — if not of Israel's hard-line ministers.

Clinton apparently intends to actively participate in the deliberations and himself put to a vote-by-acclamation the prior decisions of PLO institutions abrogating the charter.

But mid-December is a long way off, and the phased implementation process is scheduled to last three months — a long time for what is by all accounts a shaky peace process. □

Defendant's failing health blocks trial of suspected Nazi war criminal

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — It appears that a suspected Nazi war criminal may never stand trial in Lithuania.

The trial of Aleksandras Lileikis was suspended indefinitely this week because he is considered too ill to appear in court.

The judge presiding over the case said a doctor's report shows that the 91-year-old Lileikis is suffering from coronary disease and will be unable to leave the hospital for several weeks. The suspension marks the fifth time that the trial has been postponed.

Lileikis, who during the war headed the Vilnius branch of the Lithuanian security police, is suspected of having handed scores of Jews over to Nazi death squads.

Meanwhile, his lawyer has hinted that the trial may never resume.

"One must reconcile oneself to the thought that nobody will manage to investigate" the crimes unless Lileikis recovers, Algirdas Matuiza told reporters in Vilnius.

The court is now expected to assign another group of medical experts to gather data about the defendant's health — and this is unlikely to happen until next year, according to Matuiza. Meanwhile, there have been indications that doctors who last month said Lileikis was fit to stand trial are revising their opinion.

Last week, Lileikis made a brief appearance in court, where he proclaimed his innocence before being rushed off to the hospital.

Lileikis, who immigrated to the United States in 1955, was stripped of his U.S. citizenship in May 1996. If his trial is ever completed, it would be the first trial for Holocaust crimes in any of the three Baltic states since they gained their independence from the Soviet Union seven years ago. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Report: Resignation threatened

The director of the CIA threatened to resign if Jonathan Pollard was released as part of last month's Wye summit, *The New York Times* reported.

George Tenet's threat reflected the anger felt by the U.S. intelligence establishment toward Pollard, who was sentenced in 1987 to life in prison for spying for Israel.

Swiss fund makes payments

A Swiss fund created to help needy Holocaust survivors gave payments of \$400 to each of 102 Jews in Belarus.

In the coming weeks, another 223 survivors in the former Soviet republic are expected to receive the one-time payment from the \$170 million Holocaust Memorial Fund, created last year by Switzerland's leading banks and industry.

Meanwhile, the head of the fund said it will take about two more years for all of its moneys to be distributed. Rolf Bloch, who also leads the Swiss Jewish community, added that the process has been complicated because some people are filing false claims.

Survivors sue banks

A group of Holocaust survivors and their heirs sued German and Austrian banks for stealing assets from victims during the Holocaust and profiting from slave labor.

The lawsuits, which were filed in a Brooklyn court, come after lawyers for the plaintiffs announced last week that they were negotiating with Bank Austria and Creditanstalt.

'Life Is Beautiful' to win Oscar?

Italy chose the Holocaust tragicomedy "Life Is Beautiful" to be its country's nominee for the Academy Award for best foreign film. The film, which depicts how a Jewish man tries to save his son after they are deported to a concentration camp, has already garnered several European awards. It opened last month in the United States to wide critical acclaim.

Vandals defame Rabin park

Police in Rome are searching for vandals who destroyed two signs honoring Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in a city park named in honor of the late Israeli leader.

The signs at the park, which was dedicated to Rabin's memory last year, bore the words "Yitzhak Rabin Park, Israeli Prime Minister 1992-1995, Nobel Prize for Peace 1994."

Graffiti was also found on a nearby wall with the words "Death to Zionism." A member of the Rome city council called the vandalism "a barbarous act of ignoble violence."

Top Jews arrive in Israel as U.S. issues travel warning

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Undeterred by a U.S. State Department warning against traveling to Israel, hundreds continued to descend on Jerusalem for the largest annual gathering of leadership in North American Jewish communal life.

On Wednesday, the State Department issued an "Israel Travel Warning," as the Clinton administration continued to rattle the sabers of war against Iraq.

The advisory came five days before the scheduled opening of the General Assembly of the UJA Federations of North America. Some 2,000 delegates had arrived in Israel by Wednesday afternoon. Another 700 were scheduled to land before Monday.

"Private American citizens may want to consider departing the country," said the warning, which is milder than previous advisories. The State Department also authorized all non-emergency personnel and eligible family members of U.S. Embassy and consulate personnel to leave Israel. The United States has "not ruled out the use of any options" against Iraq, the warning said, using diplomatic code for military force.

"Iraq's continued defiance of the will of the international community, therefore, is heightening the level of risk to American citizens in the Middle East," the warning said, referring to Iraq's refusal to cooperate with U.N. weapons inspectors.

During the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq launched dozens of Scud missiles at Israel. Three Israelis died during the attacks.

Although the risk of chemical and biological warfare "is remote, it cannot be excluded," the State Department said.

President Clinton called Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday to discuss the U.S.-Iraq crisis. U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen used a hotline phone twice this week to talk to Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

Israeli officials said the possibility of an Iraqi attack against the Jewish state remains low, but nevertheless opened gas mask distribution centers.

As the news broke about the gas mask distribution, UJA officials pledged to discuss the matter and "respond with all due care and diligence," said Gail Hyman, vice president of marketing and public affairs for UJA Federations of North America.

"We are watching the situation minute by minute and we will take precautions as we need to," said Hyman. "Right now we are moving ahead as planned," she added.

UJA officials had no immediate information on cancellations but said that they had received many calls inquiring about the warning. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

Czechs charge skinhead teen

PRAGUE (JTA) — Czech police have charged a teen-age skinhead with stabbing a Jewish soldier.

The 17-year-old suspect was charged under the country's hate crimes laws with attempting racially motivated murder and promoting fascism. Since the accused is a minor, he faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

The executive secretary of the Federation of Czech Jewish Communities said he believed the attack was the first anti-Semitic criminal act since the fall of communism in 1989. "It's a very alarming incident," said Tomas Kraus.

The Czech press reported that the youth stabbed the 22-year-old soldier at a Prague restaurant in the early hours of Nov. 8. The soldier was reported to be in stable condition in a Prague hospital.

The Czech Republic has been widely criticized for failing to bring to justice skinheads accused of violence against Romanies, or Gypsies, the country's most visible ethnic minority.

Last month, a Czech court handed down suspended sentences of 15 to 22 months against four underage skinheads accused of beating a Romany father of six and leaving him in a road, where he was killed by a truck. They were convicted of a racially motivated crime, but were never charged with murder or manslaughter. □

Kristallnacht ceremonies mark restoration of Polish synagogues

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — A synagogue in the Polish town of Oswiecim — a town better known by its German name, Auschwitz — has been rededicated as a “center of prayer and contemplation and eternal memorial to Jewish victims of the Holocaust.”

The ceremony, held Tuesday and attended by a Jewish delegation and representatives of the Polish, American and Israeli governments, was one of several events across Poland marking the 60th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

“It is good that next to a camp of death there will be a camp of life,” said Hirsch Kornreich, a 70-year-old Holocaust survivor from Oswiecim who now lives in New York.

Kornreich, who formed part of the 50-member Jewish delegation at the dedication ceremony, grew up next door to the synagogue and became a Bar Mitzvah there.

The Lomdei Mishnayot synagogue, long used as a carpet warehouse, was returned to Poland’s Jewish community in April. It was the first Jewish property to be returned in Poland under the provisions of a law enacted last year.

Before the Holocaust, Oswiecim was a shtetl and more than half of its 12,000 population was Jewish. The Nazis built their most notorious death camp, Auschwitz, a mile and a half outside the town.

Kornreich told reporters he was too emotionally shaken to join the other members of the delegation on a tour of Auschwitz and Birkenau, where at least 1.5 million Jews — including Kornreich’s family — were killed.

The new prayer and education center is to be built in the synagogue and in an adjoining house over the next two years by the New York-based Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation at a cost of up to \$10 million.

“Our goal is to recreate a permanent structure symbolizing Jewish life in a place which, for too many years, has only represented Jewish death,” project founder Fred Schwartz said.

The Nazi pogrom on Nov. 9-10 1938, in which hundreds of synagogues in Germany and German-occupied Austria were put to the torch and thousands of Jews arrested, foreshadowed the Holocaust itself.

The destruction of Poland’s 3.5 million Jews began less than a year later, when Germany invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939, touching off World War II.

On Sunday, Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek and other representatives of the Polish government, the Roman Catholic Church and other faiths, as well as Jewish groups, unveiled a monument to commemorate the Kristallnacht pogrom in Wroclaw, a city that before World War II was the German city of Breslau.

Breslau was home to Germany’s second largest Jewish community.

The monument was unveiled at the site of one of the synagogues burned down during the pogrom.

“For 50 years we have been asking how such a horrible Holocaust could have been possible,” Buzek said at the ceremony.

“Despite the difficulties and barriers, I believe Jewish culture will become an integral part of the culture of the Polish republic,” he said.

In another event, the only 19th-century synagogue still standing in Poland, the Tempel synagogue in Krakow, was opened to the public for tours of the full-scale restoration that is a project of the New York-based World Monuments Fund. □

ADL unveils software to block access to hate sites on Internet

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — The World Wide Web — it’s a seemingly limitless information frontier that allows nearly anyone an internationally visible soapbox.

And in response to concerns that children were stumbling across such sites that portray graphic sex or spout virulent hate attacking Jews, blacks and homosexuals, the Internet industry has come up with several commercially available filters to screen out those sites containing language deemed objectionable by the filter-buyer — who is, in many cases, a parent.

The Anti-Defamation League jumped into the fray this week by introducing its own blocking software, called the ADL HateFilter.

Instead of screening out sites based on an objectionable word — which in the ADL’s case would require educational sites debunking Holocaust revisionism to be blocked out along with those sites promoting the concept — HateFilter obstructs access to specific Web pages.

About 200 have been blocked by the debut version of the program.

Those selected for filtering are devoted to “promoting hatred or hostility on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity or other immutable characteristics like sexual orientation,” said Elizabeth Coleman, national civil rights director for the ADL.

“We see this as a parents’ tool,” Coleman said. “We talk about it as your children needing a crossing guard on the information superhighway.”

Web filters of all sorts have come under fire for censoring information that some believe should be readily available.

The ADL, which often defends First Amendment rights to free speech, said the HateFilter doesn’t interfere with those rights because it’s not censoring anyone’s right to put on the Web whatever they wish on the Web, no matter how repugnant the information.

“We’re not saying they can’t do it, but that parents have a right not to invite it into their homes,” said Coleman.

The HateFilter, which can be downloaded from ADL’s Web site (www.adl.org), is designed so that both children and adults can use the computer. When a child logs on, the HateFilter is active. But when an adult logs on using a different access code, the program won’t impede access to any sites.

Once downloaded, the program is free for the first week. It then costs \$29.95 for the first three months and \$29.95 for each year thereafter. The blocked sites will be updated weekly by the ADL and CyberPatrol, a company that develops hate filters, which together developed the program, said Coleman.

If a child clicks on one of the blocked sites, the screen will indicate that access is denied and then provide a list of educational alternatives on related topics.

Some of the sites blocked by the ADL HateFilter include Aryan Nations, the White Pride Network and the Institute for Historical Review, a Holocaust-denial group. □