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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli redeployment on hold

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced he is suspending a West Bank redeployment slated for this week until Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat retracts his latest statement that he will declare Palestinian statehood next May. The premier's comments came before the Knesset began debating the Wye agreement.

Palestinian officials countered that Netanyahu had misunderstood Arafat's remarks and that the self-rule authority remains committed to its decision to pursue peace. [Page 4]

Netanyahu addresses G.A.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a gathering of over 3,000 Jewish leaders from North America in Jerusalem that massive aliyah and Jewish education are the keys to "securing the future of the Jewish people." He told the 67th General Assembly of UJA Federations of North America that "the People of the Book have become the people who cannot even read the book." For the first time, Israel has budgeted money — \$5.1 million — to fund education in the Diaspora.

Three Israeli soldiers killed

Three Israeli soldiers were killed, and four others wounded, by a roadside bomb in southern Lebanon. The bomb exploded about 100 feet from the soldiers' outpost in the security zone, prompting Israeli officers to question how Hezbollah gunmen were able to get so close to their position. Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attack, which it filmed from a distance and broadcast on Lebanese television.

The dead soldiers were identified as Sgt. Nahum Eila, of Jerusalem; Sgt. Yossi Ben Moha, of Haifa; and Sgt. Raz Bromowitz, of Gan Yavneh. All were 19 years old.

Greece helps Holocaust museum

A book published by the Greek government on the history of Greek Jews includes documents from the talks between the Allies and Switzerland that led to a 1946 agreement on looted Nazi gold.

The publication of the book came as the Greek Foreign Ministry is sending 25 crates of documents to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. [Page 2]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Jewish Agency struggles to reprioritize its mission

By Mark J. Joffe

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Facing a future when its historic mission of rescue and resettlement may one day be completed, the Jewish Agency for Israel is struggling to reposition itself and reorder its priorities.

And it is doing so at a time when the landscape of American Jewish philanthropy is rapidly changing around it.

Delegates from around the world grappled with that reality this week as they convened here for the Jewish Agency's annual assembly. After hours of debate that included a fair amount of vociferous criticism, they adopted a "Shared Vision and Mission Statement" that redefines both the agency's work and the way it is supposed to accomplish it.

The adoption of the statement is the first major milestone in a strategic planning process that may determine whether the agency continues to enjoy the support of most Jewish community federations in the United States beyond Dec. 31, 1999, when its contract for funding by the United Jewish Appeal expires.

Many federations have been openly critical of the agency and have reduced their annual allocations to it over the years, in some cases funding their own programs in Israel separately.

If this trend leads to the abrogation of a binding arrangement between the federations and the Jewish Agency, it will change the way American Jews have been contributing money to Israel for the last half century.

But, in fact, that process is already changing, as the three central institutions of American Jewish philanthropy — the United Jewish Appeal, the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Israel Appeal — put the finishing touches on a merger into a single, streamlined entity.

While many of the specifics of the merger are still being ironed out, one thing is clear, said Bennett Aaron, chairman of UIA. "The federation system in North America wants to have much more control" over the money its donors send to Israel and how that money is being spent.

The mission and vision statement, adopted Monday after three days of extensive debate, was crafted to respond not only to changing needs in Israel but to the changing priorities of the federation system and its donors in North America.

The statement identifies five major areas of activity for the agency:

- aliyah and rescue, which it defines as its "primary priority at this time";
- strengthening the relationship between Israel and the rest of world Jewry;
- enhancing Jewish unity;
- enhancing Jewish identity; and
- strengthening the State of Israel as a state for all Jews.

All but the "aliyah and rescue" functions are essentially new.

While the agency has always underwritten Jewish and Zionist education in the Diaspora, never before has it assumed responsibility for such things as "cultivating Jewish identity," promoting the "enrichment of Jewish life" in Israel and striving to "create an appetite and an environment for developing Jewish values and Jewish cultural creativity."

And while the Jewish Agency has always billed itself as the principal link between Israel and the Diaspora, never before has it assigned itself the task of securing the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon urges land grab

Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon said Jewish settlers should grab as much West Bank land as they can to keep it from the Palestinians.

"Whatever is seized will be ours. Whatever isn't seized will be in their hands," said the hawkish Sharon, who championed Jewish settlement in areas captured in the 1967 Six-Day War. One senior Palestinian official said Sharon's comments amounted to a call for war.

King Hussein: I'm cancer-free

Jordan's King Hussein said he has been successfully treated for cancer and has no remaining signs of lymphoma. The king's comments, which came as he marked his 63rd birthday, contradict earlier news reports that his disease is fatal. Hussein added that he will undergo one more round of chemotherapy before returning to Jordan at the end of December.

Jewish settler wounded

A Jewish settler was moderately wounded in a shooting attack near the West Bank town of Jenin. The shots were fired at the settler from a passing car. The attack was the first such incident in the Jenin region in a year.

Israel denies weapon report

Israel denied that it is trying to identify genes unique to Arabs in order to target them with a biological weapon that would leave Jews unharmed.

London's Sunday Times had reported that Israeli scientists were trying to create a genetically modified bacterium or virus that only attacks people who carry specific genes.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman, David Bar-Illan, rejected the report, saying such stories only proved "that there is no limit to human gullibility and also no limit to the desire to sell newspapers."



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"future of the Jewish people" or creating a "global Jewish community."

The move to broaden the agency's mandate is "an attempt to grapple with a post-aliah period," said Shoshana Cardin, immediate past chairman of UIA, which distributes and monitors the use of funds raised by Jewish federations in the United States for the Jewish Agency.

With just 50,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union now coming to Israel each year and with all but a few thousand Jews rescued from Ethiopia, "we had to have a vision of what the agency would do in the 21st century," Cardin said.

Beyond the expanded mandate, the mission statement calls for a new mode of operating, using many of the buzzwords of American corporate culture in an era of "downsizing" and "re-engineering."

The agency plans to continue to "act collectively while also facilitating and coordinating individual community action and interaction," according to the statement. It will strive to be a "flexible, responsive, dynamic learning organization" that will "encourage consultation, mutuality, accountability and controlled risk taking."

What that means is that the Jewish Agency "should concentrate on only those issues where our added value is important," said Salai Meridor, the agency's treasurer and next chairman. "We have to go through a serious process of cultural change in the agency," he said last Friday in an address to assembly delegates.

Whether these changes will succeed in countering the agency's image as a bloated Israeli bureaucracy that is unresponsive to the needs of its donors — in the words of one federation executive — remains to be seen.

According to some delegates, that change has already happened.

"This is not the same animal that existed a few years ago," Nicky Capelouto of South Africa, a member of the agency's Board of Governors, said last Friday, during one of the assembly's several break-out discussions.

Others warned that such changes could go too far. "We have made a fetish out of efficiency and professionalism," exclaimed Jacques Torczyner of New York, a Zionist delegate and member of the Board of Governors.

The heated debate sometimes degenerated into fierce battles over semantic minutiae. But in the end, the delegates adopted the two-page statement, agreeing that it was time to move forward. Avraham Burg, chairman of the Jewish Agency, put the assembly's discussions in a broader context. The Jewish world is "going through a very deep and difficult crisis about identity," he said. The real question, he said, is, "Can the Jewish people survive without an external enemy?" □

Greece sending archives to U.S. Holocaust museum

By Jean Cohen

ATHENS (JTA) — A book published by the Greek government on the history of Greek Jews includes documents from postwar talks between the Allies and Switzerland on plundered Nazi gold.

The book, "Documents on the History of the Greek Jews," published in English, is based on 159 of the ministry's files relating to the rich cultural, economic and political activities of Greek Jews and to their suffering during the Holocaust.

The Foreign Ministry will ship 25 crates full of archival documents to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington for study. Both the book and the documents will be used at a December conference in Washington on Holocaust-era assets. The documents include official dispatches from Greek diplomats who attended talks held after the war between the Allies and the Swiss government on Nazi funds held in its banks, which led to the 1946 Washington Agreement under which Switzerland agreed to return \$58 million in looted gold.

"We come to the real problem that the appearance of this volume punctures like a lance in the boil of denial. Nazis expropriated, exploited then killed the Jews. But after the war, who got the loot?" asked Steven Bowman, a professor of Judaic studies at the University of Cincinnati, who helped compile the English-language volume.

Bowman said the book contains many previously unpublished official documents that languished in the Foreign Ministry archives until three years ago. □

JEWISH WORLD

Young UJA leaders go to Prague

Czech President Václav Havel appealed to a group of young Jewish leaders to continue their support for the revitalization of the Czech Republic's Jewish community.

Havel's comments came during a meeting with the heads of UJA Federations of North America's Young Leadership Division, which was on a mission to Prague before traveling on to Israel.

Of the 350,000 Jews living in 153 communities throughout Czech lands before the Holocaust, an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 survived. There are currently some 1,300 registered members in the Prague community.

While in Prague, the group delivered a Torah to Beit Praha, the only synagogue in Prague that holds mixed-gender services, during a special Sabbath morning service last Saturday.

Pollard petitions Israeli court

An American jailed for life for spying for Israel petitioned Israel's High Court of Justice to block the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners until he is freed.

In the petition, Jonathan Pollard said President Clinton reneged on a promise he made last month to release him as part of the Wye agreement.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pressed for Pollard's release at the Wye negotiations, but Clinton reportedly refused after CIA Director George Tenet said he would resign if Pollard were released.

Swiss document to be late

The release of a report on assets in Swiss banks left over from the Holocaust era expected to be released by the end of the year will be delayed by about six months.

The commission, which is headed by former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, is currently investigating dormant accounts in some 63 Swiss banks.

Yisraels granted citizenship

A family of black Americans that converted to Judaism under Conservative auspices was granted Israeli citizenship.

Elazar and Sara Yisrael, their four children and two grandchildren arrived in Israel on aliyah several months ago but were not granted automatic Israeli citizenship.

Masorti, as the Conservative movement is known in Israel, attributed the delay to the fact that the family is black and that they converted under the aegis of a non-Orthodox movement.

U.S., Israeli scientists close to manufacturing human tissue

By Mica Schneider

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Patients in need of tissue and organ transplants are one step closer to receiving laboratory-produced replacements, as a result of a breakthrough made by a team of American and Israeli scientists.

In January, the scientists became the first to extract human embryonic stem cells — the parent cells of all tissues in the body — and the first to trigger continual cell division. If programmed correctly, this cell division will develop into human tissues and allow scientists to create, from a petri dish, anything from human heart muscle to bone marrow and skin.

The advance is expected to benefit transplant medicine, drug discovery and basic developmental biology. Doctors may utilize it in the future to treat victims of heart disease, diabetes, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, spinal cord injuries and some kinds of cancers.

"Although a great deal of research needs to be done before these cells can lead to human therapies, I believe that in the long run they will revolutionize many aspects of transplant medicine," said James Thomson, a developmental biologist at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and the head of an international research team that published news of the scientific breakthrough in the Nov. 6 issue of the journal *Science*.

Joseph Itskovitz, an Israeli in-vitro fertilization specialist and a member of the medical faculty at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, joined Thompson's collaboration efforts two years ago and provided the study with embryos and research assistance.

"We are searching now for a way to control the differentiation of the cells," Itskovitz said in a telephone interview.

"We cannot direct the cells changing into other human tissue cells — it happens on its own randomly."

With so many scientific hurdles to cross, Thomson does not expect his labs to create specialized cells and tissues overnight.

"We're looking at 10 to 15 years before these treatments go to trial on humans," Terry Devitt, a spokesman for Thomson said.

"Science is a slow process," he said.

Due to the lack of suitable organ donors, the breakthrough is especially critical to transplant surgeons who hope to use the technology to repair or replace damaged or diseased tissues or organs, according to Jon Odorico, a transplant surgeon at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

"The principal theoretical advantages of this type of treatment for organ replacement over current organ transplantation is the fact that cells can be grown in large quantity, and can be genetically engineered outside the body to escape immune attack," Odorico said.

Thomson expects the most immediate use of the human embryonic stem cell technology will be for the development of new drugs. Drugs currently in the trial stage will be injected into the cells to check for their impact on the cells, including possible side effects.

The announcement puts the American and Israeli researchers at the head of a pack of scientists who have worked for 17 years to capture and to isolate human embryonic stem cells.

Devitt explained the embryos used in this project were originally intended for in-vitro fertilization clinics.

"Often times, when a couple uses in-vitro fertilization there are leftover cells," Devitt said.

"Some couples chose, in writing, to donate the embryos to research."

Eventually scientists hope to manipulate a human adult cell and clone it to become an embryonic cell.

Once a string of dividing embryonic stem cells can be controlled, its uses are unlimited, Itskovitz said. □

Israel, Palestinians renew war of words, delaying redeployment

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The two parties to the peace process have renewed their war of words less than a month after they signed a land-for-security deal at the White House.

Reacting to comments by Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Monday that he was suspending a redeployment from the West Bank scheduled for this week until the Palestinian leader retracts his latest statement that he will declare statehood on May 4, 1999.

The premier's comments came shortly before the Knesset began debating the Wye agreement, which calls for an Israeli pullback from 13 percent of the West Bank in exchange for a Palestinian crackdown on terrorism.

The accord, which ended a 19-month stalemate in the peace process, was expected to usher in a new period of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation.

But to the dismay of the United States, which brokered the deal, both sides have returned to inflammatory rhetoric, and the agreement's implementation has been delayed.

Netanyahu announced the postponement one day after Arafat spoke at an event in the West Bank town of Ramallah to mark the Palestinian declaration of independence issued 10 years ago in Algiers.

In addition to reiterating his vow to declare a Palestinian state, Arafat told the gathering of Fatah members, "Our rifles are ready, and we are prepared to use them against whoever tries to prevent us from praying in Jerusalem."

In recent weeks Arafat has faced growing criticism — not only from Islamic fundamentalist groups such as Hamas, but also from within his own Fatah organization, the main body in the Palestine Liberation Organization.

"Arafat's standing among his own people has been weakened" by signing the Wye accord, Wadia Abu-Nassar, of the Open University in Tel Aviv, said in an interview. "He must make overtures toward the extremists, and direct an accusing finger toward the Israelis in order to tell his people, 'Don't worry, I have not deserted you.'"

But apart from attempting to placate his own opposition, Arafat's address was also a deliberate reminder that the Wye accord did not amount to any compromise on one of the ultimate Palestinian goals — an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Speaking at the opening of the Knesset debate, Netanyahu blasted the Palestinian leader for heating up the political atmosphere with his declarations.

The premier said Arafat's remarks were a "clear threat, not only to force the final status agreement on us, but to do so with violence. It is a dual violation of the agreements.

"I do not intend to carry out any redeployment, including the first phase this week, until the matter is resolved," Netanyahu added.

Netanyahu also said he plans to convene his Cabinet later this week to discuss the issue.

Earlier Monday, Netanyahu called Arafat and demanded a

public retraction. Arafat, speaking subsequently in Jericho, said he remained committed to the peace process.

But Netanyahu spokesman David Bar-Illan said the Palestinian leader's statement did not contain a retraction and was, therefore, unacceptable to Israel.

Palestinian officials countered that Netanyahu had misunderstood Arafat's remarks and that the self-rule authority remains committed to its decision to pursue peace.

"He did not mean guns in the literal sense," Palestinian official Ziad Abu Ziad told Israel Radio. "He was talking about Palestinian rights to Jerusalem."

Meanwhile, Dr. Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli Arab who is an adviser to Arafat, charged Israel with contributing to the inflammatory atmosphere.

Tibi cited comments made by Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon, who said Jewish settlers should grab as much West Bank land as they can to keep it from the Palestinians.

"Whatever is seized will be ours. Whatever isn't seized will be in their hands," said the hawkish Sharon, who championed Jewish settlement in areas captured in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Sharon had warned that if the peace process continues to deteriorate, a free-for-all would develop in which in the West Bank would be up for grabs.

The rhetoric from both sides heated up as U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross was visiting the region to oversee implementation of the Wye accord.

Shortly before meeting with Ross on Monday, Arafat summoned Israeli reporters to his headquarters and tried to downplay his remarks, saying they were nothing more than a response to a question.

Both Netanyahu and Arafat face strong internal opposition to the Wye accord, and their respective declarations can well be viewed as an attempt to soften that opposition.

Just the same, American officials have their hands full with what looks like two less-than-willing partners to the peace process.

In Washington, State Department spokesman James Rubin criticized the comments issued from Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

"There is no place in this process for statements which call for or suggest violent actions. These remarks were wrong. And we will be raising them directly with Chairman Arafat," Rubin said.

But at the same time, he had little sympathy for Netanyahu's announcement postponing the redeployment.

"We expect both parties to abide by the agreement they signed, which did not include conditions about subjects like this," Rubin said. "The Israelis and the Palestinians signed a document at the White House which imposed certain obligations on them, and those obligations did not come with conditions about every word that was said by every party."

Using language that echoed what he said about Arafat, Rubin also criticized Sharon's "land grab" statement.

"It is absolutely essential that the right kind of environment be created for permanent-status negotiations," Rubin said.

"Statements such as the one made by Foreign Minister Sharon undermine the trust and confidence necessary for such an environment. And we will be raising this statement with the Foreign Ministry directly." □

(JTA correspondents Gil Sedan in Jerusalem and Matthew Dorf in Washington contributed to this report.)