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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Premier faces growing pressure

Calls are increasing from within Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition for him to form a national unity government or initiate early elections.

The calls come amid growing political turmoil in the Jewish state and continued violent demonstrations by Palestinians in the West Bank only days before President Clinton is scheduled to arrive in the region.

Ross tries to narrow gaps

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross met separately with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Referring to President Clinton's upcoming visit to the region, Ross said Clinton will "put things back the way they ought to be." Ross' shuttle diplomacy came as Netanyahu spokesman David Bar-Illan said Israel is unlikely to carry out a further West Bank redeployment next week. Israeli leaders from all sides of the political spectrum are saying Netanyahu must abandon the Wye accord if he is to have any hope of holding his coalition together.

Clinton opposes Israeli position

President Clinton told Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon that he opposes Israel's refusal to implement the Wye agreement until the Palestinians fulfill a series of commitments, according to a White House official.

Clinton participated in a Tuesday evening meeting between Sandy Berger, his national security adviser, and Sharon. Clinton plans to make the case for the Palestinians and Israel to implement the agreement at a proposed summit meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat during a four-day visit to the region that begins Saturday.

Dreifuss to lead Swiss

Ruth Dreifuss will become the first Jew to hold the office of president in Switzerland when she is named to that office on Wednesday.

Dreifuss, who will also become the first woman to be president of Switzerland, inherits a country that is coping with an anti-Semitic backlash in the wake of international criticism for dealings between Swiss banks and Nazi Germany. [Page 3]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Clinton's visit can save Wye or save coalition, but not both

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — President Clinton's visit to Israel and the Palestinian self-rule areas may save the faltering Wye agreement. But in doing so, it may also bring an end to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

Alternately, Clinton may find himself rebuffed by his Israeli hosts. And this treatment of Clinton may prove the salvation of Netanyahu's battered and tottering regime.

But Wye will be dead.

These appeared to be the two most likely scenarios as hundreds of U.S. officials and security people descended on Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip this week to prepare for what was to be a historic odyssey by Clinton — but what threatens to become a strange and sad voyage.

The Israeli domestic stage was set Monday night when the Knesset, on the verge of voting no confidence in Netanyahu and ending his rule, resolved to give him a two-week respite. The vote will now be held Dec. 21, several days after Clinton's departure from the region.

If the hard-line right — which has made common cause with the Labor-led opposition — believes that the premier is going ahead with Wye, it will provide the votes to topple him.

If, on the other hand, the U.S. president is forced to leave empty-handed, with the Wye agreement effectively frozen and no further Israeli redeployment on the West Bank under way, then the hard-liners will relent and Netanyahu's nationalist-religious coalition will live on — though Israel's relations with Washington will presumably sink to a new low.

There is a third possibility, less likely — but more hopeful.

Netanyahu, trapped by the conflicting forces of his coalition and exhausted by his own indefatigable efforts to keep the coalition together, may use the president's visit as a catalyst to create a broad-based government with the Labor Party.

According to some political insiders, a unity government is much less remote than either Likud or Labor, in their various public statements, would have us believe.

These sources hint at ongoing contacts between Netanyahu and Labor leader Ehud Barak, despite Barak's purported rejection of all talk of unity.

They point to the still-potent influence of Labor's former leader, Shimon Peres, who never tires of advocating unity as the only means for ensuring progress in the peace process.

They say that Netanyahu's failed attempt this week to bring former Foreign Minister David Levy back into the coalition fold was in fact a first step toward creating a unity government.

Whichever of these scenarios eventually pans out, this much is already clear: Clinton's mission to save the Israeli-Palestinian peace will be overshadowed to a large extent by the president's sally into the heart of Israeli domestic politics.

There seems no escaping Henry Kissinger's shrewd observation, made more than two decades ago, that Israel has no foreign policy — just domestic politics.

Presumably, the American president did not plan to find himself in the center of Israeli politics when he agreed to make the visit as part of the Wye agreement.

He and his advisers had anticipated that by this stage Wye would desperately need

MIDEAST FOCUS

Hamas braces for crackdown

Hamas officials are bracing for a crackdown by Palestinian security forces in advance of President Clinton's scheduled visit to the Gaza Strip on Monday. "Of course we don't welcome" Clinton, Hamas political leader Mahmoud Zahar was quoted as saying. "He is a 100 percent supporter of Israel."

Erekat's relative on life-support

A cousin of Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat is on life support after being wounded in a dash with Israeli troops in the Palestinian town of Abu Dis. Erekat said doctors had told him that his 20-year-old cousin, Nasser, had been declared brain dead.

Cyprus trial delayed

The trial of two alleged Mossad agents in Cyprus was delayed by two weeks after the prosecutor changed the accusations against them. The new indictment still charges the Israelis with spying, but drops the accusation that they were gathering information for a third country when they were arrested.

Lebanese leaders blast Israel

Lebanon's newly named defense minister said his country would support Hezbollah gunmen seeking to end Israel's "bizarre and arrogant" presence in southern Lebanon. "We have identified our enemy as Israel and our brother as Syria," said Ghazi Zeater, who echoed the previously stated sentiments of the country's new president, Emile Lahoud.

Gaza standoff continues

Israel and the Palestinian Authority are locked in a two-week standoff prompted by the refusal of Palestinian police to let Israeli trucks carrying building materials reach a Gaza Strip settlement. In response, Israel has blocked convoys of Palestinian police from entering Gaza and has held up Palestinian cargo at the various crossings between Israel and Gaza.

a direct dose of presidential diplomacy to keep Israel and the Palestinian Authority on track.

There is some dispute at this point as to whether Clinton or Israel suggested the visit. But during the Wye negotiations in late October, Netanyahu and his team of ministers were insistent that the Palestinians revoke the anti-Israel clauses in the Palestinian Covenant at a full-fledged session of the Palestine National Council, the PLO's parliament-in-exile.

The Netanyahu government has consistently rejected the Palestinians' claim that the PNC did, in fact, revoke the offensive clauses of the covenant in April 1996, at the behest of then-Prime Minister Peres.

Aware of Arafat's own domestic political difficulties, Clinton either suggested or agreed to participate in a meeting in Gaza of PNC members and other Palestinian leaders.

The revocation of the covenant's clauses is expected to be dealt with by acclamation in the president's presence.

For Israel's hard-liners, acclamation is hard to swallow, since it will presumably be a blurring of the formal vote on the clauses that Israel had demanded.

Opposition to the president's involvement has grown inside Netanyahu's coalition in recent weeks — in tandem with an ominous increase in violence across the West Bank.

A bitter dispute between Israel and the Palestinian Authority over the categories of prisoners to be released under Wye has triggered daily demonstrations in the West Bank, many of which escalate into confrontations between Palestinian youths and Israeli troops. The stoning and savage beating of an Israeli soldier near Ramallah last week, filmed by television crews called in by the Palestinians in advance, triggered a wave of shock and revulsion throughout Israel.

Netanyahu seized on it to announce a halt in the Wye implementation process.

Other Israelis traveling on West Bank roads have been stoned, and, in several cases, shot at by Palestinians.

On Monday, Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon informed U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in Washington that Israel would not be implementing the second stage of the Wye redeployment, scheduled for next week.

During Sunday's weekly cabinet session, some ministers had suggested that Clinton should perhaps consider postponing his trip.

Washington cynics say this is the last thing the president wants to consider, given his desire to put many miles between himself and Capitol Hill as the House Judiciary Committee approaches its vote on impeachment.

Clinton and Albright could take some comfort in the fact that Netanyahu and his aides declined to endorse Sharon's statement that the redeployment would not go ahead.

And Netanyahu himself was quickly back bobbing and weaving between hard-liners and moderates.

"We will carry out the agreement," he told the Knesset on Monday night, "if the Palestinians carry out their part. At present they are defaulting on every single provision."

The premier's comments came after he engineered a delay in a Knesset vote that threatened to topple his government.

The reprieve came with the help of one of his coalition members, the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc, which requested that a Knesset vote on a bill calling for early elections be considered a no-confidence motion. Under Knesset rules, the group's request put off Monday's Knesset vote by at least one week.

But the Labor Party, which submitted the bill calling for new elections, agreed to a delay of an additional week in order to avoid holding the vote during Clinton's visit.

As for Clinton, he would be "a welcome guest," the prime minister told a television interviewer later Monday evening.

But, asked the reporter, "according to today's headlines, you told the Cabinet yesterday: 'If he wants to come, let him come; if he doesn't want to come, let him not come.' That's hardly the way to speak of a welcome guest."

"Don't believe what you read in the newspapers," the premier muttered. □



Daily News Bulletin

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JEWISH WORLD

Holocaust council criticized

Rabbi Avi Weiss lambasted members of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council for trying to negotiate an agreement with the Polish government regarding Christian sites near the location of the Auschwitz death camp.

The Orthodox rabbi, who was outspoken on the issue of a convent near Auschwitz, charged that the council has no right to sign international agreements and said he would work with Congress to ensure that no federal money would go to the Holocaust museum except for its remembrance and educational programs. But three speakers at an open meeting of the council rebutted Weiss' charges that the council's chairman, Miles Lerman, was prepared to sign an agreement that accepts the Christian sites.

Reform plans teen initiative

The North American Reform movement said it would spend more than half a million dollars in the first year of a new initiative aimed at building Jewish identity among teen-agers.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations' plan will focus on creating new programs and hiring trained professionals to work with the teens.

Jewish state legislators confer

Some three dozen Jewish legislators from across the United States held a two-day conference sponsored by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs and the National Association of Jewish Legislators.

The conference brought together Jewish state lawmakers for discussions on issues such as church-state separation and hate crimes in advance of a larger gathering of all state legislators.

Spielberg donates \$500,000

Steven Spielberg recently donated \$500,000 to the National Yiddish Book Center to create a digital Yiddish library.

Using the latest technology, the western Massachusetts-based center will reprint works on demand, issue them as CD-ROMs and make them accessible on the Internet.

The first volumes of the project are scheduled to be available next year.

Girl wins settlement from school

A 16-year-old girl who claimed she was the victim of anti-Semitic notes and threats won a financial settlement and an apology from her prep school, which had suggested she staged the whole episode. Neither side would disclose the terms of the settlement, reached between the family of Lucy Weber and the Middlesex School in Concord, Mass.

As Swiss face anti-Semitism, a Jew takes office of president

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A Jewish woman is scheduled to record a double first in Switzerland this week.

Ruth Dreifuss is expected to become the first Jew — and the first woman — to be named president of Switzerland, where women only earned the right to vote in 1971.

Dreifuss, who formally becomes head of state on Jan. 1, will inherit a country that is attempting to cope with an anti-Semitic backlash after a stream of embarrassing disclosures in recent years about the financial ties that existed between the country's leading banks and Nazi Germany.

After months of international pressure, two of the banks agreed earlier this year to pay a \$1.25 billion settlement of Holocaust-era claims.

Dreifuss, 58, was born in an eastern Swiss canton. As the Nazis approached the Swiss border, she moved with her parents to Geneva.

She spent her early career as a secretary in a hotel and as a journalist with a weekly newspaper in Basel, the site of the First Zionist Congress in 1897. In 1965, she joined the Socialist Party.

In 1970, she graduated from Geneva University with a degree in mathematics and was then appointed an assistant in the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences at Geneva University.

She served in the Swiss Development Corporation at the Swiss Foreign Ministry from 1972 to 1981, when she was elected secretary of the Federation of Swiss Trade Unions.

Dreifuss was a member of the Berne Municipal Council from 1989 to 1992, and was appointed home affairs minister in 1993.

She is fluent in French, German, English, Spanish and Italian.

The presidency of Switzerland is a largely ceremonial post. The president is not elected by popular vote — instead, the office rotates among the seven Cabinet ministers of the Swiss federal government. □

Jewish journalists in Europe look to the information highway

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — How can the Internet be used to maximize communications between Jews and Jewish communities?

This was one of the questions on the agenda when some 30 Jewish reporters and editors from six European countries gathered for a three-day seminar in Rome to discuss ways to improve their coverage of Jewish affairs.

The seminar consisted of workshops and roundtable discussions aimed at motivating Jewish journalists to break out of local viewpoints and "think European," a process that would strengthen the European Jewish media through shared experience and information exchange.

"New Frontiers in Jewish Information," organized by the European Council of Jewish Communities, also addressed such questions as:

- Should Jewish media seek an audience outside the Jewish world?
- Should a Jewish newspaper act as a community organ or be independent of community control?
- Should Jewish community bulletins publicize controversial material?

Participants came from France, Italy, Turkey, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Germany.

Participants at the seminar drew up a wish list of proposals to present to community leaders in an effort to improve information channels. Among them was the creation of a network by which Jewish newspapers across Europe could exchange information about their communities with Jewish media in other countries. □

Ruling on Sabbath work rekindles pluralism debate

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A court ruling in Israel has sparked a new debate regarding religious pluralism in the Jewish state.

The decision, issued last week by a labor court, allowed members of a kibbutz on the outskirts of Jerusalem to work on the Sabbath.

In his ruling, the judge noted that Israeli law requires only that citizens not work on their day of rest, as determined by their religion.

But the judge added that the day of rest for a collective organization such as a kibbutz cannot be determined by outside religious bodies.

He said kibbutz members could determine their own day of rest.

The decision came in the wake of charges filed last March by the Labor Ministry against six members of Kibbutz Tzora for working in kibbutz stores on the Sabbath.

The ruling heated up an already simmering debate over the extent to which the country's religious authorities can regulate life in Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was "shocked" by the ruling, which he said "indicates that the kibbutzim live in a different country and are not part of the Jewish people. I am certain that the ruling that the religion of kibbutzim cannot be determined will encounter fierce opposition."

Some of that opposition came from members of Netanyahu's Cabinet.

Labor Minister Eli Yishai of the haredi, or fervently Orthodox, Shas Party said he planned to appeal the ruling.

Transportation Minister Shaul Yahalom, of the National Religious Party, called on the attorney general to challenge the ruling.

Yahalom said that if the appeal is rejected, he would work to change the law.

On the other side of the divide, Yossi Sarid, the leader of the secularist Meretz Party, declared that "every effort by Netanyahu and his haredim to dictate our lifestyle, change the status quo and close down shopping and cultural centers on Saturdays is a declaration of war against the secular public in Israel."

Enforcement of the law banning work on the Sabbath has increased with the political clout of the religious parties in the Netanyahu government.

Under the control of the Shas Party, the Labor Ministry has dispatched non-Jewish inspectors to fine businesses operating on the Sabbath or employing Jewish workers on the Sabbath.

Much of the court's ruling dealt not with religion, but the issue of fair competition.

Noting that most of the kibbutz commercial areas are located in peripheral areas of the country, the court rejected the argument of the labor minister that the kibbutz enterprises present unfair competition to businesses that offer similar services in the center of the country.

Kibbutzim earn an estimated \$36 million a year in revenues from Sabbath sales in kibbutz-run stores, gas stations, restaurants and tourist services.

These revenues represent some 50 percent to 80 percent of their total sales. An order to close on the Sabbath, kibbutz officials have maintained, would be a death blow to these operations. □

Monet painting's disputed past may keep it out of London show

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A painting by the artist Claude Monet is unlikely to be included in an upcoming London display of the artist's 20th-century work because it is believed to have been looted by the Nazis from a private Jewish collection.

The Monet, currently part of an exhibition at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, is one of more than 100,000 Nazi-looted artworks that have not been returned to their rightful owners, according to estimates by the World Jewish Congress' commission on art recovery. The story of what happened to the Monet in the postwar years indicates how difficult the restitution of looted art truly is.

According to research carried out by the London-based Art Loss Register, the French Impressionist painting, called "The Waterlilies," was confiscated from the Jewish art dealer Paul Rosenberg by the Nazis in 1941.

The Art Loss Register is a compilation of Jewish-owned artworks that were seized by the Nazis throughout occupied Europe. The Register currently lists some 3,000 such works.

After it was confiscated, the Monet, now valued at some \$7 million, entered the personal collection of Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim Von Ribbentrop, who had organized the systematic plunder of Jewish-owned art throughout Nazi-occupied Europe.

Descendants of Rosenberg now want the painting to be returned and are considering their legal options, one of which involves a lawsuit that will prevent the work from leaving the United States.

The Rosenberg family, which lives in New York, identified the painting — one of 48 depictions of waterlilies that Monet executed in the garden of his home in Giverny, France — from a photograph of paintings that were owned by Paul Rosenberg.

The work is one of 58 paintings plundered from Rosenberg's collection that the family has asked the Art Loss Register to trace.

Since it was recovered after the war, the work was held in trust by the Musee Nationaux de France and, since 1975, it has been in the care of the Musee des Beaux-Arts in the city of Caen.

Based on the provenance of the work, both the Royal Academy of Arts in London, which was hoping to include the painting in its exhibition, and the Boston museum are understood to have been aware that the work was among those recovered from the Nazis.

The director of the Art Loss Register, James Emson, stressed how difficult it is to determine a work's true owner.

"It is important to remember that this is a very shady period of history," he said. "We do know, however, that this painting was in the collection of Von Ribbentrop and that it was among the 40,000 items seized by the Allies and handed over to France at the end of the war.

"All but 2,085 were returned to their owners," he added, "and the remainder were distributed for safekeeping to Paris and provincial museums." □