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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clinton sets new target date

President Clinton called Monday for accelerated Israeli-Palestinian negotiations with a one-year goal for completion. He also called for an Israeli-Palestinian-United States summit to occur within approximately six months.

The calls came as Clinton is sending Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat a letter setting forth the same ideas. The letter is aimed at persuading the Palestinian Central Council, which is to begin deliberations Tuesday, not to have Arafat unilaterally declare statehood next week. [Page 3]

Gunman had Jewish roots

One of the Littleton, Colo., gunmen who traded Nazi salutes with fellow "Trenchcoat Mafia" members is the great-grandson of a prominent Jewish philanthropist in Columbus, Ohio.

The Jewish Community Center in Columbus is named after Leo Yassenoff, the great-grandfather of Dylan Klebold, who along with another heavily armed student opened fire in their suburban Denver high school April 20, killing 12 students and one teacher before killing themselves.

While Klebold was raised as a Lutheran, he reportedly read the Four Questions at a Passover seder this year, and Klebold's mother was raised in a Jewish home, family members have said.

CIA head meets ADL officials

CIA Director George Tenet repeated his criticism of agency officials who wrote memos attacking a Jewish attorney now on forced leave from the agency.

In a private meeting Sunday night with Anti-Defamation League activists, Tenet, citing a threatened lawsuit by attorney Adam Ciralsky, refused to discuss possible disciplinary action against the memo's authors.

Ciralsky has said anti-Semitism played a role in the agency's decision to put him on leave.

China hails Israel ties

Israel and China have made "remarkable achievements" in economic, agricultural and technological exchanges, China's president said Monday. During a meeting in Beijing with visiting Israeli President Ezer Weizman, Jiang Zemin spoke of the "long history of friendship" between the Jewish and Chinese peoples.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Settlers mount drive to define Israeli sphere on the West Bank

By Avi Machlis

MITZPE DANNY, West Bank (JTA) — Wearing loose, trendy pants and a colorful beaded necklace, Moran Mor hardly looks like a stereotypical West Bank female settler, many of whom sport long, modest skirts and head coverings.

Three months ago, Mor, a 23-year-old student of alternative medicine, moved into one of 12 mobile homes on this hilltop near the Ma'aleh Michmash settlement, which commands a spectacular view of Jerusalem and the Judean Desert.

"This is a beautiful place," she says. "Look at the view, it's so calm and relaxed."

But as Mor explains why she came to live in these sparse conditions, it becomes clear she is not here just for a room with a view.

She is one of many settlers who have joined a settlement drive and recently moved into new sites throughout the West Bank, often setting up homes in shacks.

The drive has angered Palestinians, who argue that Israel is trying to create new facts on the ground that will affect the amount of West Bank land handed over to them in future negotiations.

The drive has also drawn repeated criticism from American officials, who describe settlements as obstacles to peace.

While the various sides dispute whether new settlements are being created or existing settlements are being expanded, one point is agreed to by all: If one connects the dots on the map where Jewish settlers are now living, the amount of territory on which their homes are placed is now larger than it was before — and this land will not easily be negotiated away to the Palestinians.

Officially, the Israeli government's policy has been to allow for the "natural growth" of settlements, but not to create new ones.

"We are not grabbing another inch of land," said David Bar-Illan, the prime minister's spokesman. "We're just doing it within those areas" already designated for settlements. "It's totally irrelevant to talk about more land. There is nothing unilateral about continuing to build in the settlements."

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics recently reported that the Jewish settler population grew 7 percent last year to 172,000 — slower than the 9 percent increase in settlers in 1997, but much faster than Israel's general population growth of 2.3 percent.

Mitzpe Danny, named after Danny Frei, a Michmash settler who in 1995 was stabbed to death in his home by a Palestinian, is located in the central Jordan Valley. There are few Palestinian villages here, and many Israelis hope these areas will remain part of Israel under a final-status agreement.

But most of the 20 new settlements that have sprouted on hilltops since the Wye accord was signed last October are in the heart of the West Bank and near Palestinian villages.

Peace Now, which monitors — and repeatedly criticizes — settlement activity, says roads are being paved and hilltops razed at about 20 additional sites, which the group says is a telltale sign of another round of settlements yet to come.

Settlers, who along with their opponents agree that the settlement drive is enjoying government support, insist that the new sites are located within master building plans of existing settlements within the territory originally envisioned for each settlement.

Peace Now says it is extremely difficult to get access to the master plans.

"In any case, the master plans have a lot more to do with politics than urban

MIDEAST FOCUS

Hammas to attend PLO meeting

Hammas representatives are planning to attend a meeting Tuesday of the Palestinian Central Council, a PLO body that will discuss whether Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat should unilaterally declare statehood next week.

Hammas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin told the Reuters news agency that he would lead the Hammas delegation.

The council is widely expected to delay the statehood declaration.

Meanwhile, nearly half of the Palestinians polled support postponement of a declaration of statehood, according to a survey released Monday by the Nablus-based Center for Palestine Research and Studies.

The poll, which has a 3 percent margin of error, put support for the postponement at 48 percent, up from 39 percent in February.

Election ads hit the airwaves

Israel's election campaign shifted into high gear Monday, with the start of election broadcasts on radio and television stations.

The 33 parties vying in the Knesset elections will run political ads during the 11.5 hours of television broadcast time allotted for the campaign.

Twenty-six hours have been allocated for campaign ads on the radio.

Sharon renews papal invitation

Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon renewed Israel's longstanding invitation for Pope John Paul to visit the Holy Land next year.

Sharon also discussed the Middle East peace process during a meeting with the pope and Vatican officials Monday, according to a Vatican statement.

The statement made no mention of an ongoing conflict in Nazareth, where Islamic leaders want to build a mosque on contested land near a holy Christian site.



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planning," says Didi Remez, the settlement watch coordinator for Peace Now. "The settlers know that occupied land is much less negotiable."

Aharon Domb, the director of the Yesha Council, which represents settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, says some 32 new sites have been settled in the past two years.

"All of the sites are part of the settlements' master plans, and all have been legally approved," he says, adding, "We built even more new sites during the government of Yitzhak Rabin."

For settlers like Mor, these new sites are just as things should be.

"We must settle these lands," she says. "I am in favor of every new settlement that is being set up. If we don't settle here, they [the Palestinians] will take over the entire area."

Like Mor, who was raised in the settlement of Ofra, many of the new pioneers at these sites are second generation settlers, the 20-something children of the founders of the original Gush Emunim settlement movement.

They are motivated by the ideology of their parents that maintains all of the biblical Land of Israel is the birthright of the Jews.

But they are also driven by a post-Oslo strategic understanding that the future of this land will likely be decided at the negotiating table, not by divine intervention.

With Israeli elections scheduled for May 17, the settlements are playing a big role in the campaign.

Amid increasing public opposition to funding settlements instead of infrastructure projects after a three-year economic slowdown, Ehud Barak, the Labor Party's candidate for prime minister, is promising to dry up funding for the settlements.

Some politicians are questioning whether settlement construction is indeed being approved to accommodate a community's natural growth.

Last weekend, Yossi Sarid, leader of the left-wing Meretz Party, strolled through an empty neighborhood in the Eli settlement with a film crew in an effort to contradict government claims that the settlements are bursting from overpopulation.

His shouts of "Anybody out there?" echoed off the empty homes.

Some settlers admit that the manner of the growth is not entirely "natural."

At Ma'aleh Michmash, several hilltops and two fields hugging the settlement remain barren, while settlers have placed their mobile homes atop this hill about a half-mile away from the main road.

"There has been a jump of sorts," says one Mitzpe Danny settler.

"Through natural growth of Michmash, we might only have reached this hilltop in 20 years."

The leap is even more dramatic at Mitzpe Hagit a few miles down the road.

Shimon Ben-Dor, a moderate settler and designer of Judaica who insists he will leave quietly should the government ever ask, lives here alongside his three dogs, a water tank and an Israeli flag.

The settlement is legal, he says, because it falls within the jurisdiction of Kfar Adumim, the nearest settlement, which is visible in the distance more than two miles away across a spectacular desert valley.

"It is very important that we stake a claim to as much land as possible in this area, where there are no Arab villages, and establish facts on the ground," Ben-Dor says.

"Eventually, I hope we can establish territorial contiguity with the nearby settlements."

U.S. officials do not hide their frustration with the activity.

"We have been repeatedly promised by the Israeli government, at all levels, that they were not going to take any unilateral actions that would undermine final-status negotiations," said one American diplomat.

However, aside from tougher talk, the U.S. is not pressuring Israel on the settlements, as Palestinian officials have requested.

"The settlement activities are really creating a pressure-cooker situation," warns Saeb Erekat, a chief Palestinian peace negotiator.

"It could get out of hand at any time."

So far, with little Palestinian opposition in the streets or near the settlements, Israel's high-stakes settlement activity appears likely to continue. □

JEWISH WORLD

Reform leader backs airstrikes

A Reform Jewish leader supported NATO's airstrikes against Yugoslavia at a rally Monday on Capitol Hill.

But Rabbi Paul Menitoff, the executive vice president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, criticized both the United States and NATO for its delay in acting forcefully in Kosovo.

Menitoff's comments came at rally that was part of a conference on social issues sponsored by the movement.

Survivors gather in Croatia

Holocaust survivors gathered Sunday at a former concentration camp in Croatia to commemorate an escape attempt from the camp.

In 1945, 600 inmates broke out of their barracks in the Jasenovac camp. Only 70 escaped, and the others were shot to death.

During their commemoration, the survivors called for a guilty sentence to be imposed on the camp's commander, Dinko Sakic, who was extradited to Croatia last June and is being tried for crimes against humanity.

Official: Dutch claims small

Claims against Dutch banks dating from the Holocaust are small, a Dutch banking official recently told the Reuters news agency.

Hein Blocks told the agency that there are some \$193,000 in unclaimed funds, according to the interim results of a commission looking into the matter. The Scholten Commission is expected to publish its final results this summer.

Canadian arrests blamed on Jews

A lawyer for seven men charged with violating Canada's hate laws recently told a court that a Canadian Jewish group was responsible for their arrest.

The only reason the men were arrested after demonstrating against Romani, or Gypsy, refugees, is because the Canadian Jewish Congress issued a press release questioning why they had not been arrested, said Harry Doan.

Bernie Farber, an official with the Canadian Jewish Congress, told the court that he believes that the men, who were carrying "swastika flags and signs saying, 'Honk if you hate Gypsies,'" were violating Canadian law.

Yiddish scholar gets Guggenheim

A Philadelphia-area scholar of Yiddish literature was recently awarded a 1999 Guggenheim fellowship. Kathryn Hellerstein, who teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, received the award to support her research into female poets who wrote in Yiddish.

Clinton tells Arafat he'll speed up talks, discourages May 4 declaration

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA)—The Palestinian Authority will receive no public reward from the United States if Yasser Arafat backs off of a threat to unilaterally declare statehood.

Instead, President Clinton promised to speed up the pursuit of a final Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement, with the goal of reaching an agreement within one year. Clinton offered to bring together Arafat and the winner of Israel's upcoming election within six months for talks on a final-status agreement that would resolve some of the toughest issues, including Jerusalem, final borders, settlements and statehood.

Clinton's pledge, which came in a statement from the White House and in a private letter that was to be delivered to Arafat, fell far short of the Palestinians' goal of a clear endorsement of their right to declare a state. Arafat has threatened to declare a state May 4, the end of the interim period established by the 1993 Oslo accords.

In response, Israel threatened to annex parts of the West Bank, which could lead to violent confrontations with Palestinians.

Arafat has toured more than 20 countries, asking for support of a future declaration of statehood in exchange for a delay of a unilateral declaration. The United States was one of a few countries that did not endorse the Palestinians' "right to self-determination."

Clinton stopped short of that goal on a visit to the Gaza Strip last year.

"Israel must recognize the right of the Palestinians to aspire to live free today, tomorrow and forever," Clinton said.

White House officials said similar language would be included in the letter to Arafat, which calls for the Palestinians to determine their future on their land. Clinton will also put in writing an earlier pledge to increase the "level of relations" between the Palestinians and the United States, officials said.

Israeli officials and many Jewish activists feared that Clinton would reward Arafat in some way for delaying a declaration of statehood, but White House officials said this week that there would be no reward. The United States also told Arafat that it unequivocally opposes unilateral actions, including a declaration of statehood, as well as Israeli settlement construction on the West Bank.

"If Israelis and Palestinians are to reach an agreement, it is essential that they do their part to create a serious, fair and credible environment for negotiations," said White House spokesman Joe Lockhart.

"Palestinians and Israelis must avoid unilateral acts and declarations that prejudice or predetermine issues reserved for permanent-status negotiations," Lockhart said.

The United States called on both parties to "engage in accelerated permanent-status negotiations, and to rededicate themselves to the goal of reaching an agreement within a year."

The talks cannot be "open-ended," Lockhart said.

But within an hour after release of the White House statement, Clinton administration officials were already distancing themselves from the one-year time frame.

"I wouldn't call it a deadline, I would call it an objective and a sense of what is possible if there is a good-faith effort on both sides," State Department spokesman James Rubin told reporters.

"Frankly, if the parties don't do what they need to do to create" a positive environment and "don't demonstrate a serious commitment to resolving the issues, even 20 years wouldn't be enough."

Rubin refused to specify when the one-year period would start.

Palestinian officials refused to comment until after they receive the Clinton letter.

Israeli officials in Washington hailed the White House statement but remained concerned about the possibility of private promises in the Clinton-Arafat letter that has not been released.

Seeking to end such speculation, Rubin said, "Our private and public positions are the same." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**ADL publishes book to remind Bulgarians of their tolerant past***By Lev Krichevsky*

SOFIA (JTA) — Renee Benjaminov of Terre Haute, Ind., begins each day with a prayer for the well-being of the Bulgarian people who saved her life — and the lives of thousands of other Bulgarian Jewish families during World War II — when she was a teen-ager in Bulgaria.

A member of an Anti-Defamation League delegation that recently visited the Bulgarian capital retold Benjaminov's story to Bulgarian President Peter Stoyanov to highlight the appreciation felt by Bulgarian-born Jews around the world toward a country that, despite its wartime alliance with Germany, did not allow the Nazis to implement the "Final Solution" in this Balkan nation.

"So often we come to condemn, to rebuke others who have done wrong," said Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director. "But we are here to express our deep appreciation to the Bulgarian people for having said 'no' to Hitler's plans."

During the current conflict, Bulgaria again has become a refuge, this time for eight Jewish men from Macedonia.

The men, all of them college students, expressed fears that they may become involved in the conflict in neighboring Yugoslavia if the war spills over the Serbian-Macedonian border.

They are being cared for by local Jews near Sofia.

The ADL mission came as the group prepares to release a Bulgarian translation of a book that details how the country's Jews were saved. It also came as Bulgaria's Jewish community has dwindled to approximately 4,000 — and as Stoyanov's government seems prepared to use the Jewish rescue as a salvo in its battle to earn membership in international organizations.

The wartime record of the Bulgarian government is far from perfect. During the war, Bulgarian Jews were forced to wear Stars of David. Their slave labor was used to construct roads and bridges. Thousands of Jewish families were forced out of their homes in the capital and exiled to the countryside.

Bulgaria did not protect Jews living outside its borders. In 1943, its forces rounded up and deported over 12,000 Jews from Macedonia and the Greek province of Thrace. Fewer than 300 of the deportees survived Treblinka.

But the entire Jewish community of 50,000 living inside the country was spared from Nazi camps due to the firm stand of prominent lawmakers, the leadership of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and ordinary citizens.

"If there had only been more individuals and communities throughout Europe who said 'no' to the Nazi plans, who knows how many other Jews like me and like the Bulgarian community would have survived," said Foxman, who survived the Holocaust as a child in Lithuania.

During the Communist era, the Bulgarian authorities claimed that the combined efforts of Communist guerrillas and the anti-Nazi Resistance were solely responsible for saving the Jews.

Even now, nine years after the fall of Sofia's pro-Moscow regime, most of the country's 8.5 million residents do not know the complete story of the rescue. That's where the ADL is stepping in. The group funded a Bulgarian translation of the recently published "Beyond Hitler's Grasp: The Heroic Rescue of Bulgaria's Jews,"

written by the Israeli author Michael Bar-Zohar, and it will distribute 30,000 free copies of the translation to the country's educational institutions.

More than 80 percent of the Bulgarian Jewish community immigrated to Israel in the years following the war, and the postwar story of Bulgarian Jewry is one of a small community struggling to stay alive.

During the Communist era, Bulgarian Jews had it better than others living behind the Iron Curtain. Jewish residents were allowed to maintain contact with family that had moved to Israel — although anti-Semitism did increase after the Six-Day War.

Since the fall of communism, this mostly Sephardic community has enjoyed a mild renaissance. Sofia's Great Sephardic Synagogue, built in 1909, is one of the largest shuls in Europe — and last year the community restored the interior of the synagogue's main hall, which for decades was closed to the public.

Several Jewish services are now based in the Beit Ha'am, or People's House, a community center in Sofia that houses several Jewish organizations. In addition, Jews took advantage seven years ago of a government decree allowing schools to teach in "minority languages" to open a Jewish day school.

The Sofia Dimcho Debelianov Hebrew and English Schools enroll 720 children from first to eighth grade, 400 of them Jewish.

"One hundred percent of Jewish first-graders in Sofia go to our schools," says Gergana Bojanova, the school's principal.

Much of the welfare and educational activities here are underwritten by such donors as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Lauder Foundation.

Yet despite the renaissance, few Jews here believe the community has a long-term future. Since an economic crisis broke out in early 1997, almost 900 Bulgarian Jews have made aliyah, mostly for economic reasons. Ori Konforti, the head of the Jewish Agency for Israel's Sofia office, predicts that in 1999 between 300 and 400 Bulgarian Jews will come to Israel.

Despite a recent increase in anti-Semitic incidents, including one in the western Bulgarian town where the first effort to rescue the Bulgarian Jewish population was made in 1943, Jews say the climate is generally tolerant, if only because the Jewish heritage of some in politically powerful positions is generally unknown.

"This government is not very successful in coping with economic problems. If these politicians' Jewish ancestry becomes widely known, this will lead to a growth in anti-Jewish sentiment," said one Jewish leader who did not want his name to be published.

Jews are only one of several minorities in Bulgaria. During the Communist era, the state sponsored discrimination against the Turks, the country's largest ethnic group.

While the post-Communist governments have done much to improve relations between ethnic Slavs and Turks, Bulgaria has a long way to go to improve the situation of its half-million Romani, or Gypsies.

With the shock of its 1997 deep economic crisis seemingly only a memory, Bulgaria, with an eye toward joining NATO and the European Union, has committed itself to increased respect for democracy, human rights and tolerance.

ADL leaders, who were invited by Stoyanov to visit the country after they met him in the United States last year, believe the book can help Bulgaria reach that goal. The delegation also urged Bulgaria to introduce diversity training and race-and-religion-sensitive curricula into the country's classrooms. □