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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

May 4 protests erupt

Israeli soldiers dashed Tuesday in the West Bank town of Hebron with hundreds of Palestinian protesters who had hoped the day would bring them independence.

Similar protests were held in the West Bank towns of Ramallah and Beitunia. At least three demonstrators were wounded when the soldiers fired rubber bullets to disperse the crowds.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated his claim that his firm policies had prevented Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat from declaring statehood on May 4.

Arafat's decision to postpone the declaration is an "important achievement for the state of Israel and the government of Israel," the premier said Tuesday, which marked the end of the interim period of Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking under the terms of the Oslo accords.

Israeli opposition leaders charged Netanyahu with delivering a political victory to Arafat by enabling him to rally international support for a Palestinian state in exchange for postponing the declaration.

Agency flight leaves for Albania

A plane sponsored by the Jewish Agency for Israel flew Tuesday to Albania to assist refugees from Kosovo.

On its return flight, the plane was scheduled to carry Yugoslav Jews considering immigration to Israel. Another plane was due to leave for Albania on Wednesday from Budapest.

U.S. slams Israeli piracy

U.S. diplomats in Israel sharply criticized the Israeli government for not taking sufficient action to stop software and compact disc piracy. "Israel is developing a clear taste for stolen property," an official at the U.S. Embassy was quoted as saying Tuesday.

The United States, which has already placed Israel on its priority watch list of countries with inadequate intellectual property laws, last Friday reiterated threats to impose sanctions at the end of the year if Israel does not implement a U.S.-sponsored plan negotiated last year. Israeli officials pledged to pass by the end of the year stronger copyright laws that impose stricter punishments. American companies say they lost \$170 million in 1997 to piracy in Israel.

U.S. senators pressing Clinton to move embassy to Jerusalem

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The quest for formal U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital shifted into high gear this week as four key senators worked to force the Clinton administration to move the American Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The lawmakers are working against a deadline set by a 1995 law that imposes financial penalties on the State Department if the embassy is not moved by the end of this month.

Because of the way the law is worded, the penalties, which would reduce the budget for construction and maintenance of all State Department posts overseas, would not be felt until later this year.

President Clinton has vowed to postpone the move in the interests of "national security" by using a waiver included in that law, the Jerusalem Embassy Act, as early as June.

Israelis and Palestinians agreed to leave the most contentious issues — including the status of Jerusalem — until final-status talks.

Under the Oslo accords, those talks were to have been completed by this week, but they have barely gotten off the ground.

Clinton, who opposed the embassy legislation from the start, has vowed not to move forward on it until Israeli and Palestinian negotiators resolve the final status of the city.

But some members of Congress think the embassy should have been moved already.

By keeping America's top diplomatic post in Tel Aviv, the United States is giving the Palestinians false expectations, members of Congress have argued.

The United States maintains a consulate in Jerusalem, responsible for contacts with the Palestinians and Americans traveling in the city, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The consul general reports directly to the State Department.

The State Department owns a vacant plot of land in western Jerusalem, presumably for a future embassy.

Angered by the administration's failure to move the embassy, Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) drafted a letter to Clinton announcing his plans to introduce legislation that would take away the president's ability to issue a waiver.

Kyl proposed extending the deadline for "establishing an embassy" in Jerusalem by six months in one draft of the letter and one year in another.

But Kyl's effort to convince Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) or Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) to sign on to his plan appeared to collapse on Tuesday after a lobbying effort by the White House and the State Department.

Schumer, who had negotiated the wording and had planned to sign Kyl's letter, backed off this week, sources said.

Instead of signing onto Kyl's plan, the Democratic members united and agreed to wait to press the issue until after Israel's upcoming elections.

While Kyl has taken a more hard-line stance demanding that the administration move the embassy soon, the Democratic members have offered more flexibility over the timing of the move.

Sources on Capitol Hill said Kyl's effort forced the Clinton administration to respond to a March letter from Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.), who wants the president to declare his support for a united Jerusalem as Israel's capital, promise to build an embassy there and, in the interim, designate a site for ambassadorial functions in Jerusalem.

National Security Adviser Sandy Berger was scheduled to respond as early as this

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. expects accelerated talks

Clinton administration officials are confident that Israel and the Palestinian Authority will accept a U.S. proposal to begin accelerated final-status talks after the Israeli elections, State Department spokesman James Rubin said Monday.

He added that U.S. officials are drafting "carefully constructed sentences" on their view of the legal situation confronting Israel and the Palestinians with the end of the interim peace period on Tuesday. The Oslo accords had called for final-status issues to be resolved by May 4, but did not specify what should happen if the two sides failed to meet that deadline.

Three wounded in Lebanon

Hezbollah gunmen wounded three soldiers, one of them seriously, during an attack on an Israeli army base Monday night in southern Lebanon.

Israeli helicopters airlifted the wounded for treatment in Israel. Earlier in the day, a roadside bomb planted by Hezbollah killed one Israeli soldier and wounded another.

Arafat seeks closer ties with Iran

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lashed out Monday after Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat said he would seek to improve relations with Iran.

"Arafat's intention to establish close relations with Iran demonstrates the danger to be posed if a Palestinian state is created," the premier said. "It will bring Iran, Israel's great enemy, to our doorstep."

Hamis members rearrested

Palestinian police last week rearrested six Hamis members 10 days after they were released, according to the group's founder. Sheik Ahmed Yassin also said Monday that a senior Hamis bombmaker, Adnan al-Ghoul, had recently turned himself in to Palestinian officials after escaping from jail last September.



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week to Moynihan's letter. Berger is expected to declare the administration's intent to comply with the "spirit and letter" of the Jerusalem Embassy Act, according to a source who did not want to be identified.

Berger will propose a meeting in the near future to discuss implementing the administration's policy, deferring the issue, sources said, until after the upcoming Israeli elections.

The embassy maintains a suite of offices in Jerusalem. These offices, once at the LaRomme Hotel, are now at the Jerusalem Hilton Hotel, sources said.

While the Clinton administration's response is unlikely to sway Kyl, who has told supporters that Clinton has acted like a "scofflaw" by not moving the embassy, Berger's response "is going to avoid a partisan food fight on Capitol Hill," said David Luchins, a senior Moynihan aide.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert promised Moynihan two years ago that he would name any street on which a future U.S. embassy would stand "Daniel Patrick Moynihan Way."

After this week's flurry of activity, Luchins said, "We're one step closer."

Currently, Costa Rica and El Salvador are the only countries that have embassies in Jerusalem.

The rest have their embassies in Tel Aviv. □

Rabbi returns from Yugoslavia with ambivalence about bombing

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — When Rabbi Steven Jacobs was received at the White House on Monday along with other members of Jesse Jackson's mission to Belgrade that freed three U.S. soldiers, he passed a message on to President Clinton.

It came from Aca Singer, the 70-year-old head of the Yugoslav Jewish community, who had told Jacobs, "I did not survive Auschwitz in order to be killed by American bombs in Belgrade."

While Clinton did not react to the message, Singer's words brought out Jacobs' conflicted feelings about the NATO bombing campaign.

On one hand, Jacobs said, "If 'Never Again' is to be more than just a slogan, we, especially as Jews, cannot be indifferent to the immense suffering of the Albanian refugees."

But we must also be aware that "there are many wonderful Serbs, as well as 3,000 Jews, in Belgrade who are living in constant fear of air raids," he added.

"We must keep up the pressure on Milosevic," said Jacobs, speaking by phone from Washington after an hourlong session with Clinton, Vice President Al Gore and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Jacobs, the spiritual leader of Kol Tikvah, a Reform congregation in the Los Angeles suburb of Woodland Hills, Calif., was the only rabbi among 20 clergy who accompanied Jackson during his tense mission.

Belgrade was bombed heavily during their first night in the Yugoslav capital. Jacobs, 59, said he had worked with Jackson since the civil rights struggles of the 1960s.

The week before the Belgrade mission, he had attended a service in Mississippi to commemorate the murder there of one black and two Jewish civil rights workers.

Jacobs was not among the five delegates who participated in the decisive meeting with Slobodan Milosevic because he preferred to visit the three American who were being held captive.

The rabbi added that he also had no desire to shake hands with Milosevic, the Yugoslav leader.

Before he left Belgrade, Jacobs met one Jew who had survived the war because he was saved by businessman Oskar Schindler.

"I wish at that time there had been a Jackson or a rabbi who had interceded for us with the Nazis as you have done here," Jacobs recalled the Holocaust survivor telling him. □

JEWISH WORLD

Change in Iran's terrorism status draws ire of advocates for Israel

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States' decision to soften criticism of Iran by dropping its designation of Tehran as "the most active" state sponsor of terrorism has drawn criticism from many pro-Israel activists who view Iran as the greatest long-term threat to the Jewish state.

The move, which came in the annual State Department's terrorism report, is widely seen as part of the Clinton administration's continuing effort to improve relations with Iran. It follows last week's decision by the State Department to lift some sanctions on countries, including Iran, to allow the sale of food and medicine.

Iran "continued to be involved in the planning and execution of terrorist acts," according to the State Department's annual report, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, which was released last Friday.

"Iran continued to provide support to a variety of terrorist groups, including the Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which oppose the Middle East peace process through violence. Iran supports these groups with varying amounts of training, money, and/or weapons," the report said.

Clinton administration officials said that Iran is not listed as the most active state sponsor of terrorism because it is not the "premier" terrorist state it once was, according to a State Department official. U.S. sources defended the decision, saying it was "more technical than political," and said the Clinton administration cited the difficulty in "quantifying the level of terrorism."

State sponsors of terrorism are subject to a host of sanctions, including a ban on direct U.S. assistance and controls on exports.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, criticized the administration's decision. "We have serious reservations about any policy that promotes unilateral acts on behalf of the United States towards Iran that are not reciprocated in kind," said Kenneth Bricker, AIPAC's spokesman.

Israel also does not agree with the U.S. assessment.

Zalman Shoval, Israel's ambassador to the United States, said through a spokesman that "Israel has not detected any change in Iran's policy regarding the support for terrorism or opposition to the peace process."

"There certainly has been no change in its treatment of Israel," he said.

The report continues to list Syria, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Cuba and North Korea along with Iran as sponsors of terrorism.

The report also found:

- Last year's 273 international terrorist attacks marked the lowest total since 1971, but caused a record 741 deaths and 5,952 injuries;

- The Palestinian Authority has acted against several terrorists and has stopped several attacks against Israel. The Palestinian Authority's security apparatus "pre-empted several attacks over the year, including a planned Hamas double-suicide bombing staged from the Gaza Strip in late September";

- Palestinian groups opposed to the peace process continued campaigns of violence and terrorism, but at "a reduced level as compared with the previous two years." Hamas alone has launched more than a dozen attacks.

- Israel "continued vigorous counterterrorist operations, including numerous arrests and seizures of weapons and explosives;

- Syria, which has remained on the list since its inception in the 1980s, has not acted to stop anti-Israel attacks by Hezbollah and Palestinian rejectionist groups in southern Lebanon.

Despite Syria's stated commitment to the peace process, it continues to aid in the resupply of terrorist groups operating in Lebanon, the report said.

There is no evidence, however, that Syrian officials have "engaged directly in planning or executing international terrorist attacks since 1986," the report said;

- Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the extremist Jewish group Kach/Kahane Chai, are included once again in the list of terrorist groups. □

Norway accepting applications

Norway has begun accepting applications for the approximately \$60 million fund it created in March for Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Applicants will be eligible for as much as \$25,500.

Further information is available from: The Ministry of Justice, Civil Department, P.O. Box 8005 Dep, 0030 Oslo, Norway.

As in other occupied countries, Norway's Jews were stripped of their assets and businesses when the Nazis invaded in 1942. About 2,200 Jews were arrested during the occupation. Of the 767 who were shipped to death camps, only 30 survived.

More Auschwitz crosses appear

A group of Polish Catholic activists are erecting an additional 50 crosses this week near the site of the Auschwitz death camp. The move, which will bring the total number of crosses there to more than 290, comes despite repeated Jewish protests and government efforts to stop the campaign.

Views differ on Moscow bombs?

Neo-Nazis may have been responsible for bomb blasts Saturday night near two Moscow shuls, according to Russia's interior minister, Sergei Stepashin.

He also hinted Sunday that the country's largest and best-organized far-right organization, Russian National Unity, may have been responsible. Meanwhile, the executive vice president of the Russian Jewish Congress, Alexander Osovsov, put the blame on Communist extremists, linking the blasts to May Day protests staged Saturday.

France says its pledge unfulfilled

France acknowledged Tuesday it has yet to fulfill a pledge made last June to contribute \$3.23 million to needy Holocaust victims.

A Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said Paris had deferred handing out the money because it needed more time to consult with French Jewish groups on how it should be spent. Her comments came after the World Jewish Congress complained that France had failed to follow through on its pledge.

Mogul: Hollywood unfairly blamed

Hollywood is being unfairly blamed for its supposedly baneful influence on the young in the wake of the Littleton, Colo., school massacre, according to one of the world's most influential filmmakers.

"Hollywood gets blamed for so much, but no industry gives back as much as we do," film mogul Jeffrey Katzenberg said when the American Jewish Committee honored him last week. Katzenberg, along with Steven Spielberg and David Geffen, runs the Dreamworks SKG film production studio.

THE ROAD TO ISRAEL'S ELECTIONS

Groups from the left and right fly Israelis back home to vote

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — Yael Cohen went home to Israel a few months ago — and she was dismayed by what she saw.

"People were so depressed," she says. "People are so noisy usually and they're not now."

So when Cohen, a 24-year-old Tel Aviv native who has been living in New York for a year, heard that the KesherUSA organization was providing tickets at a steep discount to Israeli citizens wishing to fly home for the upcoming elections, she took them up on their offer.

Cohen, who says she hasn't decided how to vote but sees the economy as the most important issue, is one of thousands of Jews living in North America who are taking advantage of the cut-rate tickets.

"The history of this is that there has long been a belief in Israel that thousands and thousands of conservative and right-wing Americans who are Israeli citizens come to Israel to vote in elections," says Steve Rabinowitz, a media consultant working for the campaign of Labor Party candidate Ehud Barak.

Indeed, when Benjamin Netanyahu was elected prime minister in 1996 by less than a percentage point — roughly 50.4 percent to 49.5 percent for his Labor challenger, Shimon Peres — some observers believed that Israelis living abroad who were flown in by groups supporting Netanyahu made the crucial difference.

Unlike many other countries, Israel has no absentee balloting.

A group sympathetic to the prime minister's hawkish views, Chai L'Yisrael, is again bringing in voters at the bargain price of \$180.

But Chai L'Yisrael is being countered by Kesher, a group that opposes Netanyahu.

Some 7,000 people have applied for the flights offered through the Brooklyn-based Chai L'Yisrael, according to a source with the organization who asked not to be identified.

The group, which is closely aligned with Israel's right wing, expects, after screening, to send about 3,000 of these voters from North America and France.

The group, which has raised \$500,000 so far, is supported by private individuals and has the backing of right-wing politicians in the United States, including New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind.

In a recent article in the Jewish Press newspaper, Hikind wrote, "Urge your friends, neighbors and relatives to participate in this massive drive to keep Israel Jewish and secure.

"We cannot ignore the virulent anti-Orthodox rhetoric spewing forth from the Labor camp."

It's an appeal that resonated with Victor Na'ar, a 27-year-old American who made aliyah in 1994.

After serving in the army, he moved back to the United States at the end of 1996, but hopes to return someday.

Na'ar, like other potential voters, sees this election as a critical one.

The political process launched by the Oslo accords is at a crossroads, he says.

"There's either going to be a Palestinian state or not. I don't

believe in a Palestinian state, and that's why I'm voting," he says, adding that the idea of taking the future of Jerusalem "off the negotiating table" particularly motivates him.

Chai L'Yisrael has come under attack in Israel for its ties to the West Bank settler movement.

An article in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot last week charged that settler groups in Israel working with Chai L'Yisrael are screening candidates not only to make sure applicants are eligible to vote, but to examine the applicants' political beliefs.

The group is reportedly turning down applicants who might vote for left-wing parties.

The Chai L'Yisrael source said it is acting in accordance with the law, adding that the group is "not UJA running a charity."

Chai L'Yisrael is being countered this time around by Kesher, which is supported by donations from liberal individuals and organizations, including the Philadelphia-based Shefa Fund.

Kesher was formed by Udi Behr, a 38-year-old jewelry designer who has lived in New York for 15 years.

Behr, a political novice, said the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 "woke me up to the very tough reality." Rabin, he says, did a "lot of wonderful things for Israel.

"He created a lot of opportunity, a lot of hope. And then we lost a lot of hope."

Behr predicts that Kesher will fly between 3,000 and 5,000 voters from across North America to Israel.

The flights will cost \$349 for students, and \$450 for everybody else.

Not everyone believes that the money is well spent. One person close to the elections called the campaigns to fly the voters home "expensive bumper stickers."

But in a tight election where U.S. influence is high — Israeli parties are using American political consultants — this view appears to be in the minority.

"In the '67 war and the '73 war, there were Israelis who came back to fight the war.

"I think this election is a war to decide the future of Israel," Behr says.

The war between the two groups extends as far as their analysis of which round of voting will be decisive.

After some wavering, Chai L'Yisrael — counting on widespread reports that Center Party prime ministerial candidate Yitzhak Mordechai will drop out of the running — is sending its cadre of voters for the May 17 first round.

Kesher believes that Mordechai, who has stated as recently as Sunday that he will not drop out of the running before then, will be true to his word: It is sending its group of transplanted Israelis for the June runoff that will occur if no candidate earns 50 percent of the vote in May.

Kesher is sending its voters on regular El Al flights, while Chai L'Yisrael is using regular El Al flights, chartered flights as well as other airlines.

If the main purpose of the trips is to bring those with Israeli passports over to participate in the democratic process, it's also tapping into a reservoir of feeling for the Jewish state — even for those who are living abroad to escape its pressures.

"I didn't expect that I would" fly back to Israel to vote, says 31-year-old journalist Ranan Shaked.

"I didn't know that I would care this much. It's a bit of a surprise." □