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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Hillary issues Jerusalem stance

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton expressed support for Jerusalem as the "eternal and indivisible capital of Israel" in a July 2 letter to the Orthodox Union.

In the letter, which was released on Wednesday, Clinton also endorsed moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but said "the timing of such a move must be sensitive to Israel's interest in achieving a secure peace with its neighbors."

Earlier this year, Clinton, who is exploring a run for a New York Senate seat, tried to distance herself from her previous support for a Palestinian state.

The first lady said that the issue should be left to final-status negotiations between the two parties.

[Page 3]

Peace expectations downplayed

Israel's newly installed foreign minister played down expectations prior to Prime Minister Ehud Barak's planned round of peace talks this week and next with Arab and U.S. leaders.

"Not every meeting must be looked at to produce dramatic results," David Levy told Israel Radio on Thursday. "There will be problems."

Meanwhile, Israel's justice minister predicted the Jewish state will achieve peace with its Arab neighbors within one or two years.

"I don't think we will need more than that," Yossi Beilin was quoted as saying Thursday in an interview broadcast in Qatar.

Similar optimism emanated from Syria, where a Foreign Ministry official said, "Syria shares with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak the same wish to put an end to war."

Panel to probe U.N. stance

The House International Relations Committee announced that it will hold a hearing July 14 to investigate discriminatory treatment of Israel at the United Nations.

Among those scheduled to testify are Ronald Lauder, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Harris Schoenberg, director of U.N. affairs for B'nai B'rith, and Jason Isaacson, director of government and international affairs at the American Jewish Committee.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Meeting on Israeli settlements criticized as manipulation of law

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — If representatives of 188 countries meet in Geneva on July 15, Israel will be on everyone's mind.

Israeli officials, however, won't be there.

The meeting is being convened specifically to discuss the enforcement of the Fourth Geneva Convention in "occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem."

It is being organized at the request of the United Nations General Assembly, which in February voted overwhelmingly to convene the signatories to the Convention, the treaty governing the treatment of civilians during wartime.

Of the parties to the Convention, only Israel and the United States have firmly and publicly stated that they will not participate.

Because there is no precedent for such a conference, some of the most fundamental questions concerning its procedures and goals have yet to be answered. With less than two weeks before the scheduled date, it is not clear whether the conference will be held as planned.

The July 15 conference would be the first meeting of the parties to the Convention for any reason since the treaty was adopted in 1949.

Israel and the United States have criticized the meeting as a political manipulation of humanitarian law aimed at forcing Israel's hand on the issue of settlements.

The Palestinians have strong support from the more than 100 countries in the Non-Aligned Movement at the United Nations to hold the meeting.

But some European states, Germany foremost among them, are pushing for a delay, as the meeting would come just as Israel's new government is being formed.

Still, the European Union has yet to come to a consensus on the matter.

Dore Gold, Israel's U.N. ambassador, called the Geneva meeting "an anachronistic mechanism that singles out Israel" and ignores the "unparalleled risks" Israel has made under the Oslo peace accords. Moreover, he said, "it destroys the foundations of international humanitarian law," most recently defended in the war in Kosovo.

Israel also opposes the meeting's symbolism.

The Fourth Geneva Convention was adopted in the wake of World War II as a measure to protect civilians from the kinds of force, intimidation, and transfer of populations that characterized Nazi expansionist aggression.

To apply the convention today "to Israeli construction in the territories would be singularly biased and an impediment to peace," B'nai B'rith International President Richard Heideman wrote in a June 14 letter to 188 world leaders.

Israel's outgoing ambassador to the United States, Zalman Shoval, called the planned Geneva conference "basically immoral."

Neither Labor nor Likud, he said in an interview, takes an "all-or-nothing" position. "It's a question of degree."

Switzerland, which is responsible for making preparations for the conference, has surveyed the parties and is organizing consultations with representatives of a select group of nations to gauge international opinion about the meeting.

So far, a Swiss diplomatic source said, the majority response indicates clear support for the conference to be held, but little else.

Who will chair the meeting, who will pay for it and even what the conference is expected to achieve all have yet to be determined. The Palestinians recognize the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Court backs secular calendar

Israelis can choose between religious and secular dating systems for inscriptions on their tombstones, Israel's Supreme Court ruled.

The court was acting on the petition of a family that sought Western dates on the tombstone of Rosa Greital, who died in 1986 and was buried in a cemetery near Tel Aviv.

The high court ruled Tuesday that the nation's burial societies, which are under Orthodox control, cannot require families to abide by their religious rules.

Barak to review Iran policy

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is expected to re-examine Israeli policy toward Iran and raise the issue in upcoming talks with the Clinton administration, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Wednesday.

The paper said that as army chief of staff, Barak had opposed viewing Iran as Israel's leading enemy and considered Iraq a far more serious threat to national security. At the same time, the paper quoted a senior political source in Jerusalem as stressing there would be no change in Israeli policy toward Iran as long as 13 Iranian Jews remain jailed on charges of spying for Israel.

Committee post may go to Arab

A member of Israel's Cabinet favors having an Israeli Arab legislator sit on a key Knesset committee dealing with security. "It is not a simple matter, but 51 years after the establishment of the state, the time has come to break this taboo," Haim Ramon said Wednesday.

"In my opinion, there is presently no security problem in including an Arab legislator on the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee." Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg was among those supporting Ramon's remarks, which were reported to have been made with the tacit acceptance of Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

uniqueness of the Geneva initiative, but Marwan Jilani, the counselor to the Palestinian observer to the United Nations, said that lack of precedence is no reason not to convene the parties.

"The policies and practices of the Israeli government are of serious concern to the whole international community," he said, although they "might not seem to some people as serious as what's happening in other places around the world."

Israeli settlement policies during the last three decades, he said, are "the only case of settler colonization in our present time."

The Non-Aligned Movement, representing what is taken to be the Palestinian position, has said the conference should conclude with a declaration that cites, among other points, "the existence of grave breaches and serious violations by Israel of the Fourth Geneva Convention" and the affirmation of the applicability of the Convention to "occupied Palestinian territory."

The movement is also calling for a resolution to be issued at the conference's conclusion, but how or even if such a resolution would be enforced is unclear.

Jilani said that in pressing for the meeting, the Palestinians "are not calling for sanctions against Israel, nor are we calling to establish criminal courts for Israel's pursuing policies against the Palestinian people.

"What we are saying is that the international community has the responsibility to discourage settlements in the occupied territory."

As of July 1, the European Union was reportedly holding meetings with the Palestinians to work out a compromise meeting that would limit the discussion to reaffirming the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to those territories.

Israel maintains that those geographic areas have no current fixed legal status. The question of whether or not it is, in fact, "Palestinian," is a subject to be determined as part of the Oslo peace accords.

Certainly, an Israeli diplomatic source said, Israel does not view the Har Homa neighborhood in southeastern Jerusalem as Palestinian land.

The current push for the Geneva meeting began in earnest in 1997, when the U.N. General Assembly — for the first time in 15 years — convened an emergency special session to discuss Israel's plans to build housing units at Har Homa, which the Palestinians call Jabal Abu Ghneim.

Palestinian riots and a terror attack on Israel followed groundbreaking at the site in March 1997, leading to an impasse in the peace process that lasted for nearly two years.

Israel and the United States say that by bringing international pressure to bear on a question intended for final-status negotiations, the Geneva meeting may serve to undermine the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Permanent-status negotiations are "the place where the settlements issue should be addressed," U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Martin Indyk told reporters on June 30, "not in some international forum which doesn't have the basis in the [Geneva] Conventions for a meeting and which cannot produce a positive result by its very nature."

It is being used, Indyk said, "to put Israel in a corner on the settlement issue" and will "set a bad precedent for other issues."

He also questioned the timing of the proposed meeting, currently scheduled to take place during the first days in office of Israel's new government under Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak.

"A prime minister committed to moving forward in the peace process and to pursuing the policies of Yitzhak Rabin is a prime minister that we believe should be given a chance," he said.

A French diplomatic source agreed that the timing was unfortunate, but said that the European Union earlier this year had pressured the Palestinians to postpone the date until July 15.

"We cannot say every six months that it is inappropriate," the source said in an interview.

He added that France shares the concern that the Geneva conference is being used for "Palestinian propaganda," but he questioned the "chaise vide," or empty chair, policy taken by Israel and the United States in boycotting the meeting.

"What we are saying is that the best way to avoid" abuse of the international forum "is to be there and to try to work right away on the outcome of that meeting." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Suspect linked to Kahane slaying

A New Jersey man was jailed while federal prosecutors investigate whether he was involved in a conspiracy to kill militant Rabbi Meir Kahane in 1990.

In an indictment unsealed Wednesday, Mustafa Elnore was charged with lying to a grand jury about his role in the murder and about alleged bomb-making activities in the early 1990s.

Rothschild art goes on auction

Artworks looted by the Nazis from Barons Nathaniel and Albert von Rothschild in Austria are being auctioned for the Rothschild family by Christie's in London. Officials at the auction house expected Thursday's sale to yield some \$40 million.

Nazi suspect flees Argentina

The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on Croatia to search for an alleged former concentration camp commander who fled Argentina this week after documents were found regarding his possible Nazi past.

The center's Jerusalem office urged the Croatian government to "determine whether Mirko Eterovic had already entered the country and to fully investigate" his wartime activities.

Hungary to get Shoah museum

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban may soon announce plans to establish a Holocaust museum and documentation center, according to sources close to Orban.

The comment came after Orban met last week with the recently elected leader of the Hungarian Jewish community, Peter Tordai, and the nation's chief rabbi, Jozsef Schweitzer during which increased compensation for Holocaust survivors and their families and stricter laws to combat hatemongering and incitement were discussed.

ORT to help Cuban Jews

ORT plans to begin providing computer training in Cuba — its first work there in 40 years.

The move comes after the director general of World ORT Union, Robert Singer, visited Cuba last month at the invitation of the local Jewish community.

During that visit, ORT agreed to provide a fully equipped computer laboratory and set up a computer-training program for children, teens and adults.

Neo-Nazis to march in D.C.

A neo-Nazi group received a permit to march in Washington next month.

The Knights of Freedom Nationalist Party, which blames minorities and immigrants for America's problems, plans to march through downtown Washington to the White House on Aug. 7.

First lady disagrees with husband, calls Jerusalem 'indivisible capital'

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton began her all-but-certain campaign for Senate this week with an attempt to assuage Jewish concerns about her views on U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Following the tradition of most congressional candidates, Clinton expressed support for Israeli control of Jerusalem. But unlike most candidates, her policy marks a split with her husband, the president of the United States.

"I personally consider Jerusalem the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel," she said in a letter to the Orthodox Union released on Wednesday, the same day that the first lady began what she calls "a listening tour of New York."

President Clinton, who made a similar pledge in the 1992 campaign, changed his policy after the Palestinians and Israelis signed the 1993 Oslo accords. Clinton now believes that Jerusalem's status should be determined in final-status talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel considers the city its united capital, while the Palestinians claim the eastern half as the capital of a future state.

The first lady's remarks came in a two-page response July 2 to Orthodox Union President Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, who sent Clinton a letter last month asking her position on Jerusalem and a 1994 law that requires the United States to move its embassy in Israel.

Clinton's comments marked a sharp departure from her controversial statement last year endorsing Palestinian statehood. Earlier this year, she tried to distance herself from the statement, saying that the issue should be left to final-status negotiations between the two parties.

In her letter, Clinton also endorsed moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Last month, President Clinton angered many pro-Israel activists when he used a waiver in the law to postpone relocating the embassy, citing America's "national security" interests. He argued that the relocation would anger the Palestinians and disrupt the peace process.

While the first lady endorsed a Jerusalem embassy, she sided with the president in arguing that the timing of such a move "must be sensitive to Israel's interest in achieving a secure peace with its neighbors."

Responding in a letter to the first lady, Ganchrow wrote, "We are gratified by your stated view that Jerusalem is the eternal and indivisible capital of the state of Israel" and called her position on moving the embassy a "meaningful public statement."

As for the disagreement over the timing of the embassy move, which the O.U. believes should have already occurred, Ganchrow wrote that the group looks forward to discussing the issue with the first lady, who proposed meeting with the group. □

Nazi refugee accused of being a Soviet spy

LONDON (JTA) — A German physicist who fled to Britain in 1933 to escape the Nazis is being accused of having passed vital atomic secrets to the Soviet Union during the 1940s.

Former British lawmaker Rupert Allason, who writes on intelligence affairs under the name Nigel West, based his allegations against Sir Rudolph Peierls on some 2,000 recently released Soviet messages.

Sir Rudolph — who was born in Berlin 1907, knighted by the queen in 1968 and died in 1995 — is regarded as one of Britain's most eminent, and highly decorated, physicists of the century. He submitted what is now regarded as a historic top-secret memorandum to the British government on the uranium bomb.

According to Allason, the agents in the cables — referred to as "Pers" (the Persian) and Tina — bear a striking resemblance to Peierls and his wife.

"Pers," which Allason believes is a partial anagram for Peierls, was in the right place at the right time to leak key atomic information to the Soviets.

Former colleagues and descendants of Peierls are defending his reputation. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Chilean student campaigns against upcoming Nazi meeting

By Marcelline Block

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Yoram Rovner, a Jewish Chilean engineering student, heard last year that an international Nazi congress was scheduled to take place in his country, he decided he could not let it happen — at least not without a protest.

A member of Jewish youth groups, Rovner, 20, has often crusaded against neo-Nazis. That is why he recruited a group of 10 fellow students to protest the First Ideological Meeting of the National Socialists International, scheduled for April 2000 in Santiago, Chile's capital.

After founding the Jewish community magazine *Der Ruf*, or *The Cry* — whose name is taken from the slogan of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising — Rovner also launched a campaign to gather 1.5 million signatures against the Nazi meeting, each signature representing one child who perished in the Holocaust.

Yet Rovner's activism goes beyond protesting the meeting. He is also intent on challenging what he says is the predominant attitude in the small Chilean Jewish community — a desire not to make waves.

"The Jewish leadership in Chile tries to maintain a low profile," says Rovner, who studies at Catholic University in Chile.

"We cannot allow such things to happen without protesting. We are a group of students trying to do something against the Nazi congress."

On June 21, Rovner and 100 young people demonstrated against an attempt to legally register the Nazi Party in Chile.

Wielding pictures of 100 children who perished in the Holocaust, the protesters received a great deal of press coverage, that, according to Rovner, "made a strong impact."

Since the protest, the Chilean government has taken an official stance against the Nazi congress as well as the legalization of the Nazi Party, and Rovner and *Der Ruf* have also launched a public campaign against "the many" members of Chile's right-wing political party, National Renovation, who sympathize with the neo-Nazis.

By publishing the names of the members of the right-wing party who either belonged to or sympathized with the Nazi movement, *Der Ruf* was instrumental in National Renovation signing an agreement barring neo-Nazis from the party.

Despite these successes, Rovner and *Der Ruf* are facing an uphill battle against neo-Nazism in Chile.

They are currently planning a protest of neo-Nazi seminars aimed at inaugurating teen-agers into the movement.

Rovner has been repeatedly threatened by neo-Nazis who have labeled him a "Jewish skinhead," an "ultra-Zionist," and an "extremist."

He also believes that someone from the Jewish community, out of fear of neo-Nazi backlash, has been threatening *Der Ruf* in an attempt to delay its activities.

"I am shocked when I learn that people are afraid to speak about Judaism or being Jewish in newspapers because they feel it creates anti-Semitism," Rovner says.

"If this silence continues, history may repeat itself, and we must prevent that from happening."

Rovner admits the fight could be a difficult one, given Chile's

history of anti-Semitism and a rise in neo-Nazi activities in Latin America.

"There has always been anti-Semitism in Chile," Rovner says. "In the 1930s, local factions of the Nazi Party were found throughout Chile, and since then, there have been many movements in Chile supporting Nazi policies."

Rovner is countering the rise in right-wing groups by distributing material of his own.

"They are distributing anti-Semitic papers and we are trying to fight that."

Rovner says many Chileans do not know where to find information about the Holocaust, and the subject is not given much attention in Chilean schools, as it is difficult for students to find Holocaust resources in Spanish. This lack of information, combined with a lack of legislation regulating hate speech, make neo-Nazis believe they can find a home in Chile, Rovner says.

Rovner and his *Der Ruf* colleagues are "asking the present government to promote anti-discrimination laws, so that the next government can make the decision not to allow the Nazi congress to take place."

The government in Chile will change hands in March 2000, just one month before the Nazi congress is set to happen.

Experts agree that Rovner's group faces an uphill battle not only within Chilean society, but also within the Jewish community.

"The Chilean Jewish community is very passive in a sense," says Nathan Fischer, a Chilean Jewish doctor who now lives in West Hartford, Conn.

"People are very scared of attacks such as the bombings of the Jewish agencies and the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires," he says, referring to the 1992 and 1994 attacks on Jewish targets in Argentina's capital.

Fischer says that while Jews in Chile and elsewhere in Latin America are widely accepted — he notes that there are Jewish senators and Cabinet ministers, and Chasidim who are part of the Chilean government — "there is also a duplicity, as many Nazis came to Chile and South America after World War II."

But not all Jews of Chilean heritage say the community is inactive.

"The Jewish community in Chile is very cautious, and also very committed to Jewish issues, although it is politically divided," says Marjorie Agosin, a professor of Latin American literature at Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

Agosin's family left Chile many years ago. Her great-grandparents were the founders of the Jewish community in Valparaiso, one of Chile's largest cities.

"The fact that the Nazis chose Chile for their congress shows that Chile is perceived as somewhat of an anti-Semitic society, with a history of fascist governments and dictatorships," Agosin says.

"Many people are afraid to face that. We do care — if we don't, we will give in to the Nazi congress. We must not allow the next century to start with hatred."

Several Chilean political parties that support anti-discrimination laws that would make neo-Nazi activities illegal are backing Rovner's appeal. Rovner and *Der Ruf* have attracted attention in the Chilean media. Chile's national television network twice aired an in-depth report on the proposed congress.

And even though Fischer has never personally met Rovner, he admires the student's actions and spirit.

"Yoram really touched my heart," he says. "He is fighting a lonely crusade." □