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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clinton laments Assad's absence

President Clinton is disappointed that Syrian President Hafez Assad did not attend the funeral of Morocco's King Hassan II on Sunday. Clinton had hoped to use the opportunity to bring Assad and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak together for the first time.

"I am slightly concerned and don't quite understand why he didn't come," Clinton told Israeli reporters. Clinton spoke after a brief meeting with Barak and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Moscow's mayor speaks out

This week's attempted bombing of a Moscow synagogue and the July 13 stabbing of a Jewish leader in the Russian capital are "anti-Semitic acts of terror," according to Moscow's mayor.

Yuri Luzhkov, who is a likely contender in next year's presidential elections, also said Monday the two incidents were directed against all Muscovites, not only its Jewish citizens.

Moscow's Jewish leaders had criticized federal and city officials for their silence after the stabbing attack.

Senators urge embassy move

Eighty-four senators urged President Clinton to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. "Jerusalem is Israel's capital, a fact that should have been recognized long ago by putting our embassy there," the lawmakers said in a letter to Clinton that was released last Friday.

While this is not the first letter from legislators urging the move, it came after Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak urged members of Congress during a visit to Washington last week to let him take the lead on such issues.

Palestinian official visits Knesset

The speaker of the Palestinian legislative council visited the Israeli Knesset on Monday.

The invitation to Ahmed Karia, also known as Abu Alaa, was made by Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg, who said the visit was aimed at improving Israeli-Palestinian ties.

Opposition lawmakers blasted the move, saying it elevated the status of the Palestinian council to that of a full-fledged Parliament.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Western Wall compromise is first pluralism test of Barak government

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Relations among the streams of Judaism may not be high on Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's priority list, but some government officials are already taking steps toward addressing issues that have strained Israel-Diaspora relations in recent years.

Yitzhak Herzog, Israel's new Cabinet secretary, will ask the government to establish a committee to address issues related to religious pluralism, including conversion.

The government also took a step toward allowing egalitarian services at the Western Wall. For the first time, the government officially recognized the right of non-Orthodox streams of Judaism to pray at a section of the Wall known as Robinson's Arch that is near but separate from the main prayer plaza.

Details were expected to be ironed out in a meeting this week among Herzog, Conservative leaders and representatives from the Religious Affairs Ministry.

Reform and Conservative leaders, who were pessimistic that any progress would be made on pluralism after the fervently Orthodox Shas Party was included in the government, are now more upbeat.

"We are encouraged by the serious and warm attitude of senior government officials," said Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of Masorti, as the Conservative movement is known in Israel.

But the optimism may be premature.

Some government officials are already backtracking from their apparent change of position regarding services at the Western Wall.

The new momentum started on the eve of Tisha B'Av, the annual fast day marking the destruction of the Temple, which according to tradition occurred because of Jewish infighting.

In recent years, small egalitarian services on Tisha B'Av at the Western Wall, held far from the main prayer plaza, had sparked violent protests by fervently Orthodox Jews.

Although there were no problems reported during the holiday this year, secular and fervently Orthodox Jews clashed on the preceding Shabbat. Two days before the annual fast, the possibility of violence worried Shlomo Ben-Ami, Israel's new public security minister.

Ben-Ami called Conservative and Reform leaders and asked them to hold their services at the Robinson's Arch area. The area, where extensive archaeological digs have been carried out, is only about 100 feet away from the main prayer plaza, but Orthodox Jewish worshipers cannot see it.

Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Israel's Religious Action Center, agreed immediately.

"It has been my view for quite some time now that Robinson's Arch is an acceptable compromise to allow our people to hold services at the Wall and avoid confrontation," he said, adding that he considered it to be a "sign of goodwill" from the new government.

"But let's not forget that this is not the most acute example of violations of personal liberties and freedoms in Israel," Regev said. In contrast, the Conservative movement rejected the solution, saying that it would not forgo a fundamental right to pray at the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Panel to study domestic violence

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak appointed a special ministerial committee to combat domestic violence. Barak's move followed the arrest of a Tel Aviv man who confessed to murdering and torching his wife and two small children Saturday night because he suspected his spouse was flirting over the Internet.

Strikers protest privatization

Service at Israel's Ben-Gurion Airport was briefly interrupted by a limited strike called by public service employees. The strike, which also affected telephones, trains and post offices, was called to protest privatization. Earlier this month, workers at the Mekorot water company walked off the job to protest wages and plans to privatize the firm.

Jerusalem demographics profiled

Jews make up some two-thirds of Jerusalem's 633,000 residents, according to a study released Monday. The city's Jewish population grew by 1 percent last year, compared to a more than 3 percent growth rate among the city's Arab residents.

The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, which released the findings, attributed the disparity to a higher birth rate among Arab residents and a rise in the number of Jews leaving the city.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert called for an increase in affordable housing to attract young Jewish couples to the capital.

Foreign investments post gain

Foreign investments in Israel totaled \$2.3 billion during the past eight months, a 44 percent increase over the previous 10 months, according to the Bank of Israel.

The total reflects the "continuing bullish outlook on the part of international investors toward Israel," according to Israel's economic minister in North America, Ron Chaimovski.



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main plaza. "The issue is not whether the stones are sacred," Bandel said. "It is the fact that generations of Jews stood at that place and wept tears of prayer."

Conservative leaders also pressed Ben-Ami because the government's offer was not initially a concession — they were able to pray at Robinson's Arch before, even without government permission.

Herzog then made two offers.

First, he promised that the government would provide for the needs of egalitarian worshippers at Robinson's Arch.

Second, Herzog said the government would seriously consider setting up an interministerial committee to resolve a host of outstanding issues.

The first offer was backed up with a letter from Oded Weiner, a Religious Affairs Ministry official responsible for holy sites.

In the past, Weiner — who is Orthodox — objected to allowing the groups to pray at the arch.

Now, his letter contained a promise to provide "requisite assistance" to the liberal groups if they chose to pray there.

That, said Rabbi Andrew Sacks, director of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly of Israel, amounted to an "unprecedented promise" under which, according to his interpretation, the government would provide for the needs of the egalitarian groups — Torah scrolls, prayer podiums, tables and chairs.

The Conservative movement responded with a "one-time gesture" and asked its members not to come to the Wall at all on Tisha B'Av.

Weiner, however, refused to say exactly what his somewhat vague letter meant, insisting that issues would be discussed in the meeting this week with Herzog and Conservative leaders.

Shimon Malka, spokesman for the Shas-controlled Religious Affairs Ministry, denied that the Orthodox officials have changed their position, and rejected the suggestion that Shas or the ministry had softened its line toward Reform or Conservative Jews.

"We have no problem with them praying at Robinson's Arch," he said. "But this was a one-time offer — for Tisha B'Av — and all we offered to provide was chairs."

Malka also accused the Conservative movement of exploiting services at the Wall for protest.

"When there are no television cameras or action they don't come to pray," he said. "This is why they didn't show up in the end."

Bandel, however, said Herzog guaranteed that the offer would not expire after Tisha B'Av, and that the ministry would provide the same services it gives worshippers at the main plaza.

Herzog's second offer — to launch a broader discussion of pluralism issues through a new committee — was of even greater significance. Reform and Conservative leaders believe that Herzog is positioning himself to take a leading role in the new government on pluralism issues, and he has several qualifications for the job.

Herzog's grandfather was Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog, and the Cabinet secretary himself is well acquainted with Conservative and Reform Judaism.

He also once served on a public committee that examined the structure and functioning of religious councils.

"We saw this as a kind of hour of goodwill for all parts of Israeli society and the Diaspora to try and find amicable solutions to problems that loom over our ability to live together," Herzog said.

"We wanted to set an example here, on the eve of Tisha B'Av, which marked perhaps the greatest disaster that ever happened to the Jewish people." □

Israeli book named one of century's best

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A book by an Israeli author was chosen by a German publishing company as one of the 100 great novels of the 20th century, Israel Radio reported Wednesday.

Amos Oz said Bertelsmann's citation for his work "My Michael" was a tremendous honor both for himself and for 20th-century Hebrew literature. □

JEWISH WORLD

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

New German slave labor negotiator raises hopes for a quick end to talks

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — The naming of a new German government representative to participate in talks aimed at compensating Nazi-era slave laborers has created hopes for speedy conclusion of those negotiations.

And given the sensitive nature of the talks — which bring together 16 of Germany's leading industrial firms and representatives of Holocaust survivors under the auspices of the United States and Germany — the virtually unanimous acclaim that greeted last Friday's appointment of Otto Graf Lambsdorff as the country's new chief negotiator is something of a wonder.

Joining those who praised the appointment, Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, described Lambsdorff, a former economics minister, as a competent and trusted figure.

His appointment proves that German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder is "serious" about bringing the negotiations to a successful conclusion, Bubis added.

The former lead negotiator, Bodo Hombach, recently took over as head of the European Union's reconstruction efforts in the Balkans.

Lambsdorff, 72, is honorary president of the liberal Free Democratic Party, which is not part of the Schroeder administration.

The fact that Lambsdorff comes to the job from outside the Schroeder government gives him the appearance of independence, observers say.

And independence will prove a plus in the sensitive talks, in which Germany's industry giants will likely pay hundreds of millions of dollars apiece to make restitution for the wrongs of a previous generation.

They hope the book on reparations will be closed by the end of the century.

Some 12 million people — mostly from occupied lands — worked as slave or forced laborers in various German industries during World War II. Tens of thousands are still living today.

In recent days, Jewish leaders had charged the German government with dragging its feet in the talks, saying Schroeder had thrown a wrench into the negotiations when he removed Hombach from the talks.

The two sides have been racing to achieve a settlement by a symbolically important Sept. 1 deadline, which marks the 60th anniversary of the start of World War II.

In June, the German industrial firms offered a settlement of \$1.7 billion, but that sum was rejected by Jewish groups.

A lawyer who has worked in banking and insurance, Lambsdorff was minister of economics for seven years under former Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

He left the administration under a cloud in 1984, and was convicted in 1987 of taking campaign donations to help a major German firm avoid paying nearly \$900,000 in taxes.

Despite this brush with white-collar crime, Lambsdorff is known here as a straightforward and fair mediator.

"He is a man who says what he believes," said Michel Friedman, deputy chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. "I think he is not a friend to industry, though he is certainly very connected. But I am sure he knows that his duty is not to represent the industry."

The appointment of Lambsdorff, a man known for his no-nonsense style, has created hopes that he will help untangle issues that have held up the talks — including an industry demand for protection from all future lawsuits related to slave laborers. The firms are demanding such protection as a condition for setting up the compensation fund.

The various sides are planning to meet this week in Washington to hammer out several issues, including this call for protection from future lawsuits, said Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, who also expressed optimism about Lambsdorff's appointment. □

British panel approves claims

A British government panel approved the claims of a first group of Holocaust survivors whose assets were seized by Britain during World War II. The 10 approved claims are said to be worth a total of \$200,000.

In prewar years, people across Europe deposited their assets in Britain for safekeeping, but the British government seized their assets after war broke out because they were citizens of an enemy country.

Information regarding those assets can be found on the Internet at <http://www.enemyproperty.gov.uk>

Hadassah honors legislators

Hadassah honored the five Jewish women members of Congress on Sunday at a banquet opening the women's Zionist group's convention in Washington. First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton is scheduled to address the delegates on Tuesday.

Microsoft deal nets millions

Microsoft bought a software company run by an Israeli for an undisclosed sum believed to be several million dollars.

STNC, which was started by 32-year-old Israeli software engineer Ran Mokady and his wife, Amy, who have lived in Britain for the past decade, specializes in developing technology to hook up the Internet to mobile phone networks.

Synagogues offered on jets

Airbus is willing to outfit five of its A340 aircraft with synagogues in hopes of enticing El Al to purchase the planes.

A spokesperson for the European aircraft manufacturer said the synagogues, which could accommodate 12 people, would be located on the lower deck of the plane and would include an ark mounted on a movable track so that it always faces Jerusalem.

Wiesenthal Center lauds Yahoo

The Simon Wiesenthal Center lauded a leading Internet search engine for removing 39 online hate forums.

Yahoo deleted dubs devoted to groups including neo-Nazi organizations, the Ku Klux Klan and the Trenchcoat Mafia, the group linked to the Littleton, Colo., school massacre earlier this year.

Cleveland philanthropist dies

David Myers, a leading Cleveland philanthropist, died July 22 at the age of 99.

Myers supported Cleveland's Jewish federation, and was a founder of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine at Yeshiva University in New York.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Assad extends no olive branch to Arafat in his peace campaign*By Douglas Davis*

LONDON (JTA) — Syrian President Hafez Assad has evidently concluded that openness is an essential ingredient in his diplomatic engagement with Israel.

And his spin doctors have been working overtime in recent weeks to open a small gap in the veil that perpetually shrouds the opaque regime in Damascus.

Through British-based journalist Patrick Seale, who is regarded as Assad's unofficial spokesman in the West, the world recently learned of the Syrian leader's high regard for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and of his hopes for a swift deal with Israel.

And through Syrian commentator Ghassan al-Imam, word emerged — via the London-based Arabic media — that Syria is putting the squeeze on the Islamic extremist Hezbollah movement in southern Lebanon and on Damascus-based Palestinian groups that oppose Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's attempts to forge peace with Israel.

But Assad is clearly anxious to point out that this does not indicate any diminution in his contempt for Arafat, who was recently told he would not be welcome in Damascus, either as president of a Palestinian state or simply as chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Imam has explained Assad's position in a critique of the Palestinian leader that was published in the Arabic-language *Asharq al-Awsat*.

There is, Imam noted bluntly, virtually no chance of a rapprochement between Assad and Arafat.

Arafat, who fears that a separate Israeli-Syrian deal will leave him marginalized and isolated, is belatedly seeking to cooperate and coordinate with Assad, but Imam insisted that his efforts are too little, too late. There is simply too much — in substance and in style — that divides the two men.

The Syrian commentator said Damascus believes that profound damage was caused to Syria's negotiating position by Arafat's independent brand of diplomacy, which not only produced the Oslo accords but also presaged a full-blown peace treaty between Jordan and Israel.

Nor is it only the deep tactical differences that keep Arafat and Assad apart: Personal and psychological differences, noted Imam, make "a healthy relationship impossible to establish."

"Assad," he wrote, "is a meticulous, organized, cautious and serene person. While his Ba'ath-style rhetoric may be boring, monotonous and have more than one meaning, at least he is serious and keeps his word."

"Arafat, on the other hand, is more modest and likeable, but he is a political featherweight. He is less cautious and more prone to political U-turns — characteristics of his stormy career."

Imam added that Palestinian "chauvinism and independent-mindedness" led to catastrophes in two Arab states — Jordan and Lebanon — where Palestinian insistence on bearing arms resulted in bloody confrontations.

Jordan resolved the issue of an armed Palestinian presence quickly and decisively in 1970-71, but Lebanon — weak and riven by sectarianism — was unable to withstand "armed chauvinist

Palestinian transgressions on its territory," and the country degenerated into civil war. Arafat aide Salah Khalaf — better known as Abu Iyad, the PLO's intelligence head who was assassinated in Iraq in January 1991 — even conspired to overthrow the Lebanese government, Imam wrote.

"I witnessed first-hand the tragedy experienced by Lebanese civilians over many years as Palestinian militias played havoc with their security, dignity and freedom in their towns and villages," wrote Imam.

"As a Syrian, I was not proud to see Syrian troops enter Lebanon in 1976. But for practical and realistic reasons, Assad saw no alternative to shooting his way into Lebanon."

The Syrians, he wrote, entered Lebanon to restore cohesion to the sectarian Lebanese social fabric, "as well as to stop chauvinistic Palestinian transgressions that had reached intolerable levels."

According to Imam, Assad is still smarting from what he sees as Arafat's betrayal in signing the Oslo accords.

Syria, he continued, is still suffering the negative side effects of that deal, which, he said, have included accelerated Jewish settlement activity and a halt to Israeli talks with Syria and Lebanon. And while he allowed that circumstances may yet force Arafat and Assad into a tactical reconciliation, "a genuine friendship and a strategic partnership between the two remain within the realm of fantasy."

This new openness from Damascus — and it is considered inconceivable that a senior Syrian journalist would express himself so openly without an official imprimatur — is clearly intended to impress Washington and Jerusalem.

Such a departure is an essential element in winning the confidence of Israelis and persuading them that they can trust Syria when the time comes to take risks — including withdrawal from the strategically sensitive Golan Heights — in the search for peace.

Parallel with its territorial demands, it is emerging that Syria's negotiating agenda is likely to include a far-reaching comprehensive strategic package that transcends the more limited tactical agreements that will compensate Israel for its Golan withdrawal.

In practical terms, Syrian negotiators will be setting their sights on persuading Israel to dismantle its nuclear weapons in exchange for a Syrian agreement to decommission its chemical and biological weapons.

Western intelligence agencies believe that Israel has up to 200 nuclear warheads that can be deployed on Jericho ballistic missiles or on its F-15I jet aircraft, while the Syrians are believed to have accumulated a significant stockpile of chemical and biological weapons that can be deployed on Scud-C missiles.

The apparent Syrian determination to broaden the talks to include Israel's nuclear weapons is worrying Israeli analysts, according to the London Sunday Times.

"If this is the Syrian demand, it will be a bad sign, because Syria knows this is a non-starter for Israel," said Uzi Arad, political advisor to former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who recently said he had conducted back-channel negotiations with the Syrians.

The London paper quoted Israeli security sources as saying they understood Syrian concerns.

"It is right for us to protect ourselves against a Syrian blitz tank attack on the Golan, but it is equally reasonable for the Syrians to ask for the dismantling of our strategic arm," said a senior defense source. □