



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Barak makes key appointments

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak appointed the head of his National Security Council to serve as the nation's ambassador to the United States.

David Ivry, a former director general of the Defense Ministry, has been one of a group of Israeli officials involved in drawing up a new strategic pact with the United States. Barak also named the nation's current ambassador to Jordan to serve as the head of the team that will negotiate a final peace agreement with the Palestinian Authority. [Page 3]

Cohen promises to pursue aid

The Clinton administration is determined to provide \$1.6 billion promised to Israel and the Palestinian Authority to help implement last year's Wye accord, Defense Secretary William Cohen said Tuesday in Jerusalem.

His comment came as 200 members of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee met with U.S. lawmakers to urge congressional passage of the aid and before Cohen was scheduled to meet in Jerusalem with Israeli President Ezer Weizman.

Last week, President Clinton vetoed a foreign aid bill because it did not contain the Wye aid.

Extremist to run — in marathon

The New York Road Runners Club turned down a request from Jewish leaders in Brooklyn to ban an Austrian far-right leader from participating in next month's New York City Marathon.

In response to the refusal to bar Jorg Haider, New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind threatened to confront Haider during the Nov. 7 race. [Page 4]

Rabbis plan controversial ruling

A group of Orthodox rabbis in Israel is planning to renew a religious ruling banning the exchange of land for peace. "Giving up lands where Jews live" will create "a risk to the lives of those Jews," Rabbi David Druckman, a member of a group known as Pikuach Nefesh, or Saving Lives, said Tuesday.

He said the ruling will be similar to one issued when the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin agreed to hand over portions of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the Palestinians. Rabin assassin Yigal Amir refused during his trial to express regret for his actions, saying they were justified by Jewish law.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Controversy over Arafat award shows what a difference a decade can make

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Reports that North America's central Jewish philanthropic and social service organization had considered honoring Yasser Arafat with a prestigious award have raised eyebrows across the Jewish world.

The United Jewish Communities is denying reports that it had made preparations to present its Isaiah Award to the chairman of the Palestinian Authority during a high-level mission to France and Israel earlier this month. But officials at the UJC have confirmed that Arafat's name was floated among a list of possible honorees.

That Arafat was even being considered for the award shows what a difference a decade has made in reforming the reputation of a man once almost universally considered the archenemy of the Jews.

But it also raises questions about the extent to which Jews should embrace Arafat, despite his uncontested status as Israel's negotiating partner.

Indeed, the president of the UJC, Stephen Solender, says that honoring Arafat at this time would be "premature."

Assessing the change in American Jewish attitudes toward Arafat, Menachem Rosensaft, a former president of the Labor Zionist Alliance, said, "It's called an earthquake." Rosensaft, who is the founding chairman of the International Network of the Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, was one of the first American Jews to sit with Arafat at a 1988 meeting organized by Sweden.

A five-member delegation of Jewish Americans, acting on their own initiative, went to Stockholm to discuss prospects for peace in the Middle East with a Palestine Liberation Organization contingent.

At the time, Israelis were forbidden from meeting with PLO members, and the United States refused to enter into negotiations with PLO representatives. After the Reagan administration, citing Arafat's "associations with terrorism," refused him a visa to address a U.N. session in December 1988, the session was moved from New York to Geneva to enable the PLO leader to speak.

The American Jews' participation in the Stockholm talks was met with criticism and some outright hostility.

It was not until 1993, when Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin cemented the peace process by shaking Arafat's hand on the White House lawn, that American Jews began to meet openly — and often — with Palestinians, including Arafat.

"Following the Oslo accords, there was a recognition that the PLO and Yasser Arafat were going to be Israel's partners on this long and difficult journey of peacemaking," said Martin Raffel, associate executive vice chair at the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella organization. "In a lot of ways, the Oslo accords and the handshake between Rabin and Arafat made it possible for mainstream Jewish leaders to meet and interact with senior Palestinian officials."

In 1994, representatives of JCPA, then called the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, made one of the first trips to visit Arafat's headquarters.

The following year, when Arafat came to the 50th anniversary celebrations at the United Nations in New York, he addressed NJCRAC's executive committee as part of his first meetings with American Jews in the United States. During that same trip, the past chairmen of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, another umbrella organization, held a private meeting with him. Today, many

MIDEAST FOCUS

Conversions to be discussed

A governmental committee in Israel plans to meet this week in an attempt to resolve the conflict over the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate's control of conversions performed in the Jewish state.

The committee, which is expected to include religious and secular representatives, will mark the first high-level government effort to take on the issue since Prime Minister Ehud Barak's election last May.

Bethlehem protests continue

Israeli troops fired rubber bullets at Palestinians protesting in Bethlehem against a soldier's killing of a Palestinian a day earlier. The troops also used tear gas Tuesday to disperse the more than 100 stone-throwers.

At least 15 Palestinians were wounded in the second day of clashes prompted by the incident, in which an Israeli soldier shot and killed a Palestinian who allegedly tried to stab him.

Hezbollah to broadcast in Hebrew

Hezbollah plans to begin satellite broadcasts in Hebrew in a bid to fuel debate in Israel about the continued presence of Israeli soldiers in southern Lebanon. Israeli intelligence sources also reportedly said Hezbollah plans to add Hebrew to its Internet site.

Lawyer: Airman swap botched

Israel botched an opportunity in 1988 to gain the freedom of airman Ron Arad, an attorney for a Lebanese fighter being held by Israel claimed at an Israeli court hearing last week. Zvi Rish, the lawyer for Mustafa Dirani, said contacts took place with the Syrian-backed Amal movement.

The court put off hearing a petition filed by Arad's relatives in which they asked that Dirani and another hostage being held by Israel be kept as bargaining chips for Arad, who was shot down over Lebanon in 1986.

Jewish American groups — including the JCPA, the Presidents Conference, the AJCommittee and Jewish community federations — have made meeting with Palestinian representatives a regular feature of their missions to Israel.

Still, many continue to distrust Arafat.

As recently as 1998, pressure from some American Jewish groups forced the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum to rescind an invitation to the Palestinian Authority leader to tour the museum. In the wake of this controversy, the museum's director, Walter Reich, who had opposed the invitation, resigned his post.

Rosensaft, a member of the museum's executive committee, supported Arafat's coming to the museum "in the hope that it would have an impact on him, and he might have learned something" about the significance of the Holocaust on the Jewish and Israeli psyche. Still, Rosensaft and many American Jews draw a line between exchanging views or negotiating for peace and conferring major communal honors.

Arafat may have shared with Rabin the "geopolitical honor" of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994, but "he is still someone who has the responsibility for the deaths of Jewish men, women and children on his conscience," Rosensaft said.

"And while he may have moved beyond that, and it is important to view him as a political partner, there's a difference between that and giving him an award."

The Isaiah Award, named for the visionary biblical prophet, is given at the discretion of lay leaders of the UJC, the new entity formed by the merger of the United Jewish Appeal, the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Israel Appeal.

Past recipients include Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, President Clinton and South African President Nelson Mandela.

The Jewish Advocate, a Boston-based newspaper, reported that the UJC had purchased the award for Arafat and notified Arafat's office of its plans to honor him on Oct. 13, during its mission to Israel and France.

Those plans were scrapped, the paper reported, when the UJC learned that Arafat would be in Tokyo during the mission. The UJC said in a statement, "There was never any intent to issue the award to Chairman Arafat."

A further statement on Oct. 25, signed by Solender, said that Arafat's name had been proposed by "some within United Jewish Communities."

"It is regrettable that inappropriate and unauthorized steps were taken to present the award to him," the statement continued. "As soon as top leadership learned this information, steps were taken to stop the process."

The controversy surrounding the possible UJC award led many to question whether Arafat has done enough to deserve such an honor.

The executive vice chairman of the Presidents Conference, Malcolm Hoenlein, said Arafat is Israel's negotiating partner and it is important for the Palestinians to understand American Jews' point of view. But, he said, "there are still some serious problems with compliance" by the Palestinian Authority. "That doesn't win you an award."

Across the religious spectrum, many agreed that honoring Arafat would be inappropriate. Arafat has come up "short in fulfilling the expectations" of both Israel and the United States, said Betty Ehrenberg, director for international affairs and communal relations at the Orthodox Union.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said that although Arafat has "done what's right and necessary for his people" in negotiating with the Israelis, "he's not a hero to us." He said of the award: "I think it's not necessary for us to praise him with an award named after one of our prophets, because that imputes to him more than is necessary, more than he is entitled to."

At least one veteran of the Jewish-Palestinian dialogue believes honoring Arafat is a good idea. Rita Hauser, a lawyer who participated in the controversial 1988 meeting in Stockholm, says that giving the Isaiah Award to Arafat would have said "something bold and wonderful about the American Jewish community."

The Advocate has reported that the Palestinians believe that the UJC is still planning to give Arafat the award at some point in the future.

UJC officials would not comment on that possibility, and Solender, who is traveling in Israel, said through a spokeswoman this week, "At this time, it is premature for the North American Jewish community to honor Yasser Arafat, given the fact that no final peace agreement yet exists between the Palestinians and Israel." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Israel moves peace process forward with new ambassador, safe passage

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel took several key steps toward advancing peace efforts this week, with two key diplomatic appointments and the opening of a safe-passage route for Palestinians between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

At the same time, tensions were high in the West Bank town of Bethlehem, where riots continued following Monday's shooting death of a Palestinian who the Israeli army said had tried to stab a soldier.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister David Levy agreed this week on the appointment of David Ivry, former director general of the Defense Ministry, as ambassador to the United States and Oded Eran, Israel's ambassador to Jordan, as chief negotiator in final-status talks with the Palestinians.

Ivry is considered to have good relations with the U.S. administration. Currently head of Barak's National Security Council, Ivry is one of a group of Israeli officials involved in drawing up a new strategic cooperation pact with the United States.

"We have known and worked with David Ivry for many years, and he is a superb choice," said Howard Kohr, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"He has probably been responsible for handling more sensitive matters in the U.S.-Israel relationship than perhaps any other individual in the last decade. He is without question one of Israel's most seasoned and proven strategists who is intimately familiar with all of the nuances in the U.S.-Israel relationship."

The appointments came as American peace team members Martin Indyk, who is slated to return to Israel as ambassador, and Dennis Ross were to arrive in Israel to try to push forward peace efforts.

Eran, a veteran diplomat who has served in the Israeli Embassy, is believed to be close to both Indyk and Ross, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported. The Palestinians have accused Israel of foot-dragging in getting the final-status talks under way.

Under the Sharm el-Sheik agreement signed in September, the two sides set a five-month deadline for reaching a framework agreement with the aim of concluding an accord in a year.

Also this week, Israel opened a land link between the Palestinian autonomous areas in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, first envisioned in the Cairo Accords five years ago. The 28-mile route through Israel enables Palestinians bearing special permits to travel between the two areas.

The opening of the safe-passage route was hailed as another step forward in implementing the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords. At the same time, Palestinians are critical of the rigorous Israeli security checks they are still subjected to.

Some Israelis protested against what they said are the dangers posed to towns and cities along the route.

In Tel Aviv, a group of rabbis convened to condemn the transfer of any part of the Land of Israel. The same group had issued a religious edict against the territorial concessions negotiated by former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and the chairman of the Knesset warned that similar decrees could lead to violence.

Alongside this developments, tensions were high in Bethlehem for a second day. Some 15 Palestinians and two Israeli border police were injured in Tuesday's confrontations, reports said.

Reports said British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, visiting Israel and the Palestinian autonomous areas, canceled a trip to Bethlehem due to the unrest.

Cook's visit was also marred by a confrontation between Israeli and Palestinian security guards. The Palestinian guards prevented an Israeli bodyguard who was accompanying Cook from entering an eastern Jerusalem hotel where the diplomat held talks Tuesday with Palestinian officials Faisal Hussein and Hanan Ashrawi.

Israeli police who arrived at the site demanded that the Palestinian guards come outside for questioning, or the police would enter the building. Following mediation, the two guards left the hotel and were questioned by police about the incident. □

France seeks Papon's helpers

French prosecutors are planning to investigate who helped convicted Nazi collaborator Maurice Papon flee earlier this month to Switzerland. Anyone who helped in Papon's escape could be charged, the justice minister said.

Under French law, aiding a fugitive can result in a three-year prison term and a heavy fine. Switzerland returned Papon to France last Friday, when he began serving a 10-year sentence for complicity in deporting French Jews during the Nazi occupation.

FBI provides info on millennialists

The FBI recently passed information on to Israel about American Christian groups that could be planning violence in the Jewish state linked to the millennium, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Tuesday.

Israeli law enforcement authorities have been monitoring activities of suspected Christian apocalyptic groups in Israel, fearing some could try to disrupt public order or carry out violent acts.

Earlier this week, police detained 21 members of two messianic cults, among them eight children, and plans to deport them in the coming days.

U.S. won't deport Palestinian

The U.S. Justice Department has dropped its efforts to deport a Palestinian suspected of plotting to kill Attorney General Janet Reno.

Monday's decision led to the release of Hany Mahmoud Kiardeeen, who had been jailed for 19 months.

According to secret evidence collected by the FBI, Kiardeeen threatened to murder Reno because of her role in prosecuting those responsible for the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

He was freed Monday after immigration judges described that evidence as unreliable.

Parley focuses on teaching Shoah

The use of dance, CD-ROMs and multimedia to teach the Holocaust were among the topics discussed at a conference last week in Jerusalem on teaching the Holocaust. More than 350 participants from 23 countries met at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial for the weeklong program.

Film festival to honor Peck

Actor Gregory Peck will be honored at a Jewish film festival in Los Angeles next month.

The award to Peck at the First International Jewish Film Festival will occur Nov. 3. Peck's "Gentleman's Agreement," one of the first Hollywood films to examine anti-Semitism, will be shown the same night. "Train of Life," a new Holocaust comedy, will also be shown at the festival.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Switzerland the latest flash point in the ascent of Europe's far right

By Fredy Rom

ZURICH (JTA) — Fears that voters across Europe are succumbing to the pitches of hard-right populists were given credence by the latest election results from Switzerland.

As a result of Sunday's parliamentary vote, widely described by Swiss commentators as marking a watershed in Swiss politics, the right-wing People's Party came in second and is poised to snare a larger role in the government.

Political analysts here were stunned by the showing of the People's Party, which had campaigned on a nationalist, anti-immigrant platform and called on Switzerland not to join the European Union. In 1995, the party placed a distant fourth.

Sunday's vote took place less than a month after Austria's Freedom Party, led by populist firebrand Jorg Haider — notorious for past comments praising Hitler and the SS — came in second in that nation's parliamentary elections.

The voting in Switzerland threw a spotlight on the dominant figure of the People's Party, Christoph Blocher.

Political commentators are already speculating that Blocher, the head of the Zurich branch of the party, may get a Cabinet seat.

Swiss Jewish leaders have repeatedly spoken out against Blocher, who has made speeches before Parliament laced with thinly veiled anti-Semitic appeals.

In 1997, when Switzerland was confronting charges that it profited from wartime dealings with the Nazis, Blocher launched a campaign to prevent public funds from being used to support victims of the Holocaust. That same year, Blocher, a millionaire businessman, told a rally that Switzerland had no reason to apologize for doing business with Nazi Germany.

Now, Jewish leaders are warily watching the ascent of Blocher and his party.

"We are concerned and worried" by the showing of the People's Party, Thomas Lyssy, vice president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Switzerland, told JTA.

A leader of Geneva's Jewish community, referring to the campaign Blocher launched in 1997, said Blocher has been rewarded by Swiss voters for his insistence that the government should not pay a cent for any "wrongdoing perpetrated by the Swiss during World War II."

This week, drawing more fire from Jewish leaders here and abroad, Blocher told the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot that the threats of a boycott that Jewish groups made against Swiss firms in 1997 and 1998 were similar to Nazi-era boycotts of Jewish businesses. Those threats came during a period of often-contentious negotiations in which Switzerland was being urged to settle Holocaust-era claims.

In August 1998, Switzerland's two largest banks agreed to a \$1.25 billion settlement of those claims.

The tactics Jewish groups used during those negotiations were "clear blackmail," Blocher told Yediot, adding that those actions left many Swiss people feeling "threatened and extorted."

In New York, Elan Steinberg, the executive director of the World Jewish Congress — which was actively involved in the two years of negotiations — criticized those comments. "Switzerland

now has an opportunity to stand up to this extremist," he said.

Blocher also told Yediot that his party opposes "any manifestation of anti-Semitism and racism." But such manifestations helped Blocher's party in Sunday's vote, Swiss Jewish leaders charge.

In the week before the vote, Blocher was accused of praising a book that denies the Holocaust occurred.

Blocher responded by claiming that he never read "On the Decline of Swiss Freedom," but liked the title.

The charge, which was leveled against Blocher by his political opponents, backfired and provided him with support in Sunday's voting from extremists and anti-Semites, say Swiss Jewish observers.

"I am not an extremist," he told Swiss television on the eve of the election. "I reject any form of revisionism as absurd."

Just the same, he refused to explain his positions for Switzerland's two Jewish newspapers or tell them why he recently said he was "pleased" to receive an anti-Semitic letter.

Not all of the leadership of the People's Party is happy with some of the elements supporting Blocher.

Adolf Ogi, a highly popular member of the party who serves as defense minister, said in an interview after the election that "extremists and anti-Semites have no place" in the Swiss political spectrum. He also said his party should "clean" such elements from its ranks.

Ogi is currently the party's sole representative in the Cabinet, but Sunday's vote has prompted Blocher to call for a change in that situation. "We have a right to a second seat in the government," Blocher said after ballots were tabulated this week.

For the time being, the current Cabinet lineup will remain.

But that may change on Dec. 15, when the Parliament votes on the Cabinet's makeup. □

Extremist can run but not hide from politician during marathon

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's never easy completing a 26-mile race, but one European far-right leader might find next month's New York City Marathon particularly grueling.

At least one Jewish politician is threatening to interrupt Jorg Haider, the leader of Austria's Freedom Party, if he goes ahead with his intention to compete in the Nov. 7 marathon.

"My goal is to have a conversation with him. I want to understand his views on the SS when he calls them men of character," said New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind, who represents a district that is home to many Holocaust survivors and Orthodox Jews. "I intend to do it during the race" with a group of survivors or children of survivors.

Hikind made his comments after the president of the New York Road Runners Club refused requests from him and from Brooklyn's Chasidic community to ban the 49-year-old politician from the race.

"We don't discriminate. We are not going to change this route, and we are not going to kick him out of the race," Allan Steinfeld, the president of the runners club, was quoted as saying.

Several mainstream Jewish groups, while not hesitant to share their dislike of Haider, are not opposing his participation in the race. □