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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clinton holds Oslo meetings

President Clinton met separately in Oslo with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Barak told Clinton that there are final-status issues where compromise is impossible, according to an Israeli official. In his meeting with Clinton, Arafat reportedly said the issues of Jerusalem and Jewish settlements were the most sensitive topics standing in the way of a final peace agreement.

Meanwhile, a Palestinian official said a meeting later Monday between Barak and Arafat was intended to "show our constituencies that we are serious" about reaching peace.

Fund-raiser among crash victims

A fund raiser for an Israeli university was among those who perished in Sunday's Egypt Air crash. Sheila Jaffee, 53, of Huntington Beach, Calif., raised money for Hebrew University. She was one of four members of a club who had been planning a trip to Egypt and Israel for nearly a year.

Report: Israel to OK state

Israel will agree to a Palestinian state when a framework for a final deal is set in February, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The paper reported Monday that a demilitarized state would be established with the signing of a final peace agreement in September 2000.

Rabbi plans to name names

An Orthodox rabbi in London said he will name and shame estranged husbands who refuse to give their wives a get, or Jewish divorce, that would enable the wives to remarry according to Jewish law.

Rabbi Pini Dunner of the Saatchi Synagogue in London said the names will be posted on his shul's Web site next month.

Ethiopians protest in Jerusalem

Members of Israel's Ethiopian community demonstrated outside the Interior Ministry in Jerusalem.

The protesters demanded Monday that the government arrange the immigration of 18,000 members of their community they say remain stranded in Ethiopia. A similar demonstration was held Sunday opposite the Prime Minister's Office.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Safe-passage route ignites fears and hopes for Israelis, Palestinians

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israelis were on their way back from a solidarity rally with the Jewish settlers of Hebron when their worst fears were realized.

Assailants in the dark fired on their bus.

No group claimed responsibility for Saturday night's ambush near the West Bank village of Tarkumiya — the final point of the safe-passage route Israel opened last week for Palestinians traveling between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Already, the attack is raising the question of whether Prime Minister Ehud Barak is granting too many concessions to the Palestinians without getting enough in return.

Five passengers were injured on the bus, which was filled with men, women and children.

Given the ideology that had led them to participate in the rally, it was unlikely that many aboard the bus support the opening of the safe-passage route — or any other concessions to the Palestinians.

From the standpoint of the Israeli peace camp, the attack could not have come at a worse time, taking place just two days before Barak, President Clinton and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat converged on Oslo for a summit amid commemorations marking the fourth anniversary of the slaying of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The safe-passage route's opening was called for in the September land-for-security accord Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed in Egypt.

It allows Palestinians to move freely between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank — subject to Israeli security controls.

The attack, which took place just six days after Israel opened the route, came as Israeli hard-liners are warning the route will be used by terrorists to carry out attacks against Israelis. Palestinian officials reject such claims.

"This is total nonsense," Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told JTA this week. "The safe passage is the best thing that has happened to the peace process in a long time."

Erekat and other Palestinian officials discounted the fact that the attack came near the Tarkumiya terminal, adding that they believe the assailants came from within Israeli-controlled territory.

They say the attack could have happened anywhere within the Jewish state.

According to Israeli Arab Knesset member Dr. Ahmed Tibi, the route has "tremendous symbolic value."

Moreover, he added, "it renews the territorial link between both parts of Palestinian territory."

While Israelis debate the wisdom of opening the route, it has also created potential problems in Palestinian society.

During the past week, thousands of Palestinians — mostly young people, many of whom were banned by Israel from leaving Gaza — made their way from Gaza to the West Bank. This led to an unexpected problem: Many people in the West Bank were not quite ready for the influx of visitors.

While Ahmad Soublaban, a human rights activist, maintained that "our brethren" from Gaza "are always welcome," there were indications that West Bankers were not prepared to roll out the welcome mat.

With the route's opening, old tensions between the West Bank and Gaza are

MIDEAST FOCUS

Weizman hospitalized again

Israeli President Ezer Weizman was hospitalized Monday after suffering inflammation of the gall bladder.

A hospital official said Weizman, 75, is not in danger and is being treated with antibiotics.

After being hospitalized for the same condition two months ago, Weizman was originally scheduled to be admitted Tuesday for the removal of his gall bladder.

Israel tests Arrow missile

Israel successfully tested its Arrow missile, which destroyed a dummy Scud missile fired from another boat.

The outgoing director general of the Defense Ministry, Ilan Biran, said over the weekend that if the tests succeed, the Arrow would be operational next year.

Mandela plans to push peace

Former South African President Nelson Mandela says he is planning to travel next month to the United States to lobby for his plan to bring peace to the Middle East.

The plan, which he recently outlined during a trip to the Middle East, calls for Israel to withdraw from Arab lands it won after the 1967 Six-Day War and for Arab states to recognize Israel's sovereignty.

Iraqi opposition meets in N.Y.

Iraq's vice president criticized a meeting of Iraqi opposition groups seeking to bring about the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

"We, and all honest people in the world, ridicule the meeting," Taha Yassin Ramadan said Monday.

His comment came after some 300 delegates representing Iraqi opposition groups gathered in New York over the weekend to map out a concerted strategy targeting the present Iraqi leadership.



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surfacing — tensions between a traditional elite and the predominantly refugee population of Gaza.

Palestinian society has always been sharply divided — between religious and secular, city residents and villagers, the well educated and the less educated.

There has also been a political divide between the local leadership and the PLO leaders who emerged in the Palestinian diaspora.

During the days of the intifada, the 1987 to 1993 uprising against the Jewish state, the two societies in Gaza and the West Bank cooperated against their common enemy.

But now, with the route's opening, young Gazans are expressing a relief that is not shared by all West Bankers.

"It's a smell of fresh air," said Mohammad Ashraf, 22, of the Shati refugee camp in Gaza, when he traveled last week to the West Bank town of Ramallah.

For Ashraf, it was no easy task to reach Ramallah. He had to wait in line with hundreds of Palestinians. His papers were checked time and again. His car was thoroughly scrutinized by Israeli officials before he began the 90-minute trip to Tarkumiya in the southern Judean Mountains.

Once there, he took a roundabout route, bypassing Jerusalem, until he reached Ramallah.

He had no specific goal in mind. He said he just wanted to see Ramallah and sigh with relief.

He added that he planned to stay a day or two with distant relatives before returning home.

Unlike Ashraf, thousands of young Palestinians are hoping to find work in the West Bank — and remain there.

This could well spell problems.

Gazans, as a general rule, are less educated, worse off economically and more religious than residents of the West Bank. Unemployment in Gaza is more than 17 percent, almost double the rate in the West Bank.

Several mosques in the Ramallah area are already reportedly filling up with young Gazans who do not have a place to stay the night.

Given that Gazans are traveling to the West Bank in search of economic opportunity, the reunion between the two self-rule areas could soon develop into a major social problem.

Economist Hisham Awartani of the Palestinian Center for Research and Studies in the West Bank town of Nablus has warned that wages will inevitably drop if Gaza job-seekers can freely relocate.

Moreover, given the relative ease with which they can move from the West Bank into the Jewish state, they may also compete for high paying construction jobs in Israel.

Palestinian economists are confident that the standard of living in Gaza will rise more than the West Bank's will fall.

Just the same, they say, closer links between the two economies will demand greater sacrifices on the part of West Bankers.

While Knesset Member Tibi is enthusiastic about the route's opening, he nonetheless believes that the Palestinian Authority will have to develop new policies to facilitate the economic merger of the two areas.

But Erekat, who serves as Interior Minister in the Palestinian Authority's Cabinet, insists that the short-term growing pains resulting from such a merger will be nothing compared to the gains of linking the two areas.

"If the West Bank can purchase cheaper agricultural products from the Gaza Strip and thus contribute to employment in the strip, what's bad about it?" □

Israeli Arab to become El Al steward

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The first Israeli Arab to pass El Al's flight attendant school will begin work for Israel's national airline this month.

The hiring of law student Assad Joubran, who recently passed the airline's course for flight attendants, comes after the airline was criticized earlier this year for refusing to admit an Israeli Arab to the course. The airline said the previous applicant had failed the course's entrance exam. □

JEWISH WORLD

Japanese publisher to apologize

The publisher of a major Japanese magazine agreed to run an apology and a retraction for an anti-Semitic statement in a recent article.

The Oct. 15 article in the *Shukan Post*, Japan's second-largest weekly magazine, claimed that "Wall Street Jews" were behind an American company's Sept. 28 takeover of a Japanese credit bank. The company that publishes the magazine also agreed to hold a seminar on the Holocaust and human rights.

Jews elected in Georgia

Two Jews were elected to Georgia's Parliament in elections held in the former Soviet republic.

Dzhamal Adzhiasvili of the ruling Union of Georgia's Citizens and Dennis Davitashvili of the Socialist Party will take seats in the new Parliament, which was elected Sunday.

The ruling party, which according to preliminary results took more than 50 percent of the vote, is headed by President Eduard Shevardnadze.

Colleges to mark Kristallnacht

College campuses across North America will mark the 61st anniversary of Kristallnacht with programs centered on screenings of Steven Spielberg's 1999 Academy Award-winning documentary, "The Last Days."

To commemorate the Nov. 9-10, 1938, pogrom in which Jewish stores in Germany and Austria were attacked, several affiliates of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life in the U.S. and Canada will also have Holocaust education programs and speakers.

Jewish papers to be sold

Three individuals involved in Jewish newspapers reached a preliminary agreement that would allow them to buy the *Detroit Jewish News* and *Atlanta Jewish Times*.

Terms and a timetable for the sale of the papers to Arthur Horwitz, the current publisher of the *Detroit paper*, Michael Steinhardt and Seth Lipsky are not being disclosed. Steinhardt, a philanthropist, and Lipsky are co-owners of the *Forward* newspaper.

Internet company going public

A New York-based Internet company that operates a major Jewish Web site is going public. Virtual Communities Inc. operates the Virtual Jerusalem site — www.virtualjerusalem.com — which includes 24-hour news and an online English news radio station.

The company, which also runs sites designed for other ethnic groups, is merging with Heuristic Development Group Inc. and will be traded on the NASDAQ Small Cap Market under the symbol VCIX. Virtual Jerusalem operates JTA's Web site.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Jews: New Auschwitz exhibit would whitewash Hungary's role

By Michael J. Jordan

BUDAPEST (JTA) — The Hungarian government has dropped plans to revamp its planned exhibit at Auschwitz after protests that the exhibit dodged the issue of Hungarian anti-Semitism.

Jewish leaders here rejected the proposed text for the exhibit, which lays the blame for the Holocaust in Hungary — in which roughly 600,000 Jews were killed — squarely on Germany's shoulders.

This whitewashing of the past reinforces the perception of Hungarian Jews and other observers that this nation, like others, is unwilling to confront its role in the Holocaust. But it's also a sign of the times: Today, the voice of the right wing increasingly prevails in the din of Hungarian politics.

In September the Council of Europe branded two of the six parties in Hungary's Parliament — including the junior coalition partner — as "extremist." Earlier this month, Istvan Csurka, the leader of a small far-right party, was the lone politician in Central Europe to praise Jorg Haider for his anti-immigrant Freedom Party's stunning performance in the Austrian elections. In another affront to the 100,000 Jews still living in Hungary, right-wing politicians last week unveiled a plaque dedicated to the memory of the Hungarian royal police who died during the two world wars.

However, the plaque made no mention that it was mainly these police who, after the German occupation on March 19, 1944, efficiently carried out orders to round up all the Jews from the countryside. In seven weeks, they herded 437,000 Jews into ghettos and then deported them to various death camps.

Hungarian Jews are especially sensitive about the issue of war memorials because no administration here has ever built a monument to its murdered Jews, said Peter Tordai, head of the Hungarian Federation of Jewish Communities.

"The essence of a public memorial is that it is official acknowledgment of the Jewish martyrs," Tordai said. "Establishing it, therefore, is the obligation of the Hungarian nation, not of the Jewish community. And all we ask is that any monument be accurate and complete."

That was clearly not in store for the planned Auschwitz exhibit. Admittedly, the current one needs rewriting. The Hungarian national exhibit — like those for the now-defunct "Soviet Union," "Czechoslovakia" and "Yugoslavia" — were produced through the ideological prism of the respective Communist regimes.

That meant toning down Hitler's war against Jews and playing up communism's victory over fascism.

The historian who installed Hungary's first Auschwitz exhibit in 1965 was initially criticized by the museum's Polish director for presenting work that was "too Jewish-centric." Historian Emil Horn, himself a survivor, was told to add portraits of Communist members of the anti-fascist Resistance group the Hungarian Front.

"That's why there aren't so many portraits up there of those who rescued Jews," Horn told JTA recently.

When Viktor Orban visited the exhibit last spring, just prior to his election as Hungary's prime minister, he was reportedly shocked by the exhibit's decrepit conditions and pro-Communist slant. He vowed to modernize it if he was elected.

Hungary's chief rabbi, Jozsef Schweitzer, gave feedback on the first draft of the new project. For the second round of feedback, the 73-page draft was sent to various Jewish officials and historians, including Horn and Tordai. In early September, Jewish leaders took to the airwaves, accusing the government of doctoring the historical record.

Someone even leaked the draft to a leading daily newspaper, accompanied by a threat: If the current text were displayed at Auschwitz, it would spark "a scandal from Washington to Tel Aviv." In response, Orban dropped the Auschwitz project — indefinitely, says Maria Schmidt, a close adviser to Orban.

While the Jewish side has since rewritten the text, she says funding for the project will now have to come from the Jewish community alone. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Russia to inventory looted artwork that the Nazis stole from the Jews***By Douglas Davis*

LONDON (JTA) — Gerta Silberberg has come one step closer to regaining artworks that the Nazis looted from her family.

The 85-year-old British widow lives modestly in northern England, but is the sole heir to an art fortune that remains scattered around the world.

She welcomed word that Russia has agreed to take steps that may lead to the return of at least one painting that belongs to her — a Cezanne currently housed in Russia's Hermitage Museum — and perhaps the return of several more.

Just the same, she acknowledges that any dealings with the Russian authorities "can be a long and complicated business."

"We will have to see what happens next," she said. "For a long time, the Russians were very unhelpful. We will now have to see how nice they are prepared to be."

A team of lawyers and art historians have identified other paintings from the Silberberg collection in Israel, Britain, Germany and the United States.

Russian officials earlier this month told the chairman of the London-based Holocaust Educational Trust, Lord Janner, that they are prepared to begin making an inventory of artworks looted during World War II.

This is a crucial first step toward restoring the works to their legitimate owners.

The Red Army looted an estimated 130,000 artworks in Germany at the end of the war and shipped them back to Moscow in 1946. Many of the artworks were returned to East Germany in 1958, but Moscow has always resisted demands to return others, which it regarded as "reparations."

As recently as July the constitutional court upheld a decision by the Russian Parliament to block the return of any artworks that once belonged to the German government.

The inventory they are now willing to undertake has only to do with works the Nazis looted from individuals.

However, many of the paintings removed by the Russians were not the property of the German government but had, in fact, been stolen by the Nazis from Jewish collections.

According to investigators, hundreds of these works may still be in the vaults of Russia's great museums — the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and the Pushkin in Moscow. Several Silberberg pieces, apart from the Cezanne, might be among items that have been in storage for more than 50 years.

The Russians are also now known to have dozens of SS documents that detail the real owners of paintings removed from Berlin at the end of the war. Moscow's change of heart follows intense lobbying by Jewish groups, particularly the Holocaust Educational Trust, which brokered the deal.

Janner said he was delighted "that we have managed to secure this breakthrough. I think there can be no doubt that the Russians have valuable clues to the whereabouts of some of the paintings that have gone missing."

It now remains to be seen whether the "long and complicated business" Silberberg mentioned will result in the artworks' return to their rightful owners.

Silberberg and her husband, Alfred, arrived in Britain as destitute refugees from Nazi Germany in 1937.

Unable to leave was Alfred's father, Max, who had been stripped of all his assets and forced to sell his entire 143-piece art collection — currently valued at some \$35 million — for a pittance at a series of four "Jew Auctions" in 1935.

Max Silberberg later died in a concentration camp. □

Families of terror victims still wait to collect as Congress debates law*By Michael Shapiro*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A father's fight for compensation for the terrorist murder of his daughter is far from over.

For now, it is caught in the political and legal wrangling between the Clinton administration and those who seek to collect damages from state sponsors of terrorism.

Last year, an amendment to the Anti-Terrorism Act was passed to make it easier for Americans like Stephen Flatow of West Orange, N.J., to collect money against terrorist countries by seizing their assets frozen in the United States.

Flatow's 20-year-old daughter, Alisa, was killed in a 1995 bus bombing in the Gaza Strip. The Islamic Jihad, which receives funding from Iran, was implicated in the attack. But the president, citing national security concerns, has invoked a waiver in the law.

Flatow is perplexed that American officials who helped with his case against Iran are now fighting against it.

He testified at a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee on Oct. 27, where families of victims and lawmakers criticized the Clinton administration for blocking their efforts to collect judgments they won in a U.S. court under a law President Clinton urged Congress to pass.

Sen. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) played a video clip of Clinton from February 1996 in which he urged Congress to pass the legislation. It was proposed after a small plane carrying four Cuban Americans looking for refugees in the Florida straits was shot down by the Cuban air force. Two months later, Clinton signed the Anti-Terrorism Act, which allows Americans to seek damages from countries that sponsor terrorism.

Mack and Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) are trying to work around Clinton's waiver. They introduced legislation Oct. 27 that would allow the president to block the seizure of diplomatic property but not commercial property or rental proceeds from diplomatic property.

Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat said the Clinton administration opposes the bill, describing it as "fundamentally flawed." He told lawmakers that the bill would harm American interests by eliminating the use of blocked assets as leverage in dealing with countries such as Iran and Cuba and would also put U.S. diplomatic property around the world at risk.

Eizenstat proposed setting up a commission that would recommend proposals to the president and Congress to help families receive compensation. Flatow, who testified at the hearing, told JTA that the commission was another delaying tactic being used by the administration.

"This city needs another commission like a moose needs a hat rack," said Flatow, who is trying to collect on a \$247.5 million court judgment against Iran. □