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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clinton upbeat after summit

President Clinton was optimistic after his summit with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat. "We have just completed a very good meeting. I feel we have revitalized the peace process," Clinton said after Tuesday's meeting. [Page 1]

N.Y. group tops Jewish charities

New York's Jewish federation ranked as the top Jewish charity in America, according to The Chronicle of Philanthropy's latest list of America's top 400 philanthropies.

In addition to the UJA-Federation of New York, which ranked 44th, some 26 other Jewish organizations made the annual list.

Some 15 local Jewish community federations, two Jewish defense organizations, two American universities and three "friends" of Israeli universities are included.

Russia rejects calls on Iran

Russia's prime minister rejected Israeli calls for Moscow to stop the transfer of nuclear technology to Iran. Speaking at a joint news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak after they met Tuesday in Oslo, Vladimir Putin offered to ease Israeli concerns by forging a joint committee to deal with the issue.

But at the same time, he said it would be "stupid" to allow Russia's defense contractors to be "forced out of the very attractive and lucrative market" and be "replaced by other suppliers, mostly from the West."

Publisher withdraws Shoah book

A publisher withdrew the English translation of a highly acclaimed Holocaust memoir whose authenticity has been questioned.

Schocken made its decision regarding Benjamin Wilkomirski's "Fragments" after a draft of a study commissioned by his agent indicates that Wilkomirski was a Christian child who lived in Switzerland during World War II and not a Jewish orphan who survived concentration camps.

"The enormous impact that "Fragments" has had upon its readers must not blind us to the truth about the book," Schocken said in a statement.

The memoir, published in English in 1996, won a National Jewish Book Award.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Oslo summit set the tone for the toughest talks yet

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Unlike previous efforts at Middle East summitry, this week's Clinton-Barak-Arafat meeting in Oslo did not aim at achieving any dramatic breakthroughs.

Instead, the three leaders had the more modest goal of creating a positive atmosphere as Israel and the Palestinian Authority embark on their most difficult negotiations to date — the final-status talks.

Given these goals, President Clinton had little difficulty in hailing his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

"We have just completed a very good meeting. I feel we have revitalized the peace process," Clinton said after Tuesday's meeting, which took place amid commemorations in the Norwegian capital of the fourth anniversary of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

He offered no details about the hour-long meeting, which was intended to lay the groundwork for the final-status talks.

Those discussions — which will tackle such seemingly intractable issues as the future of Jerusalem, Jewish settlements, Palestinian refugees and final borders — are slated to begin next week in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Barak and Arafat have agreed to reach a final peace agreement by September of next year. They have also set an interim Feb. 15 deadline for achieving an outline of that pact.

Clinton also said Tuesday he would hold another summit with Barak and Arafat to work on the outline, adding that they "agreed with me that we might well have a summit at the end of this process if enough progress has been made" in the weeks before the February deadline.

Earlier in the day, the three leaders invoked Rabin's memory in a bid to kick-start the final-status talks.

Yet, for all three of the principals who assembled along with other leaders in Oslo — where secret Israeli-Palestinian talks led to a historic breakthrough in 1993 — the summit was a high-stakes diplomatic poker game.

They knew that if they were unable to create the appropriate mood music in Norway's placid setting, the task of negotiating the really tough issues back home in the pressure cooker of Middle East politics would be far more difficult.

No one was underestimating the enormity of the task ahead, the consequences of failure — or the very real benefits that success will bring.

For the Israelis, a final settlement with the Palestinians will still leave unfinished business in Syria and Lebanon, but it will remove the major obstacle to normalizing relations with much of the Arab world and help secure the legitimacy that has eluded the Jewish state in the region.

For the Palestinians, a settlement would mean not just a homeland but, for the first time in history, the very real likelihood of an independent Palestinian state, with the promise of international diplomatic recognition and aid for reconstruction and development.

For Clinton, it is his last best chance to redeem his presidency and associate his name in history with the achievement of a lasting peace in the Middle East.

A hint of Clinton's eagerness to score this achievement could be detected at the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinians blast Oslo summit

Radical Palestinian leaders based in Damascus blasted the U.S.-Israeli-Palestinian summit being held in Oslo.

George Habash, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and Nayef Hawatmeh, head of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said Palestinian aspirations would be given short shrift at the summit. Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat has recently attempted to get the Damascus-based groups to unite behind him before the start of final-status negotiations with Israel.

Barak rejects Likud accusations

The Israeli prime minister is rejecting criticism that he is revealing too much of his negotiating positions in public.

Responding to accusations from Likud leader Ariel Sharon, Ehud Barak said he had articulated many times Israel's stand on such issues as refugees, final borders, Jewish settlements and Jerusalem.

Barak laid out these positions in a meeting Monday night with President Clinton in Oslo.

Citibank plans applauded

Advocates for the deregulation and privatization of Israeli banks are cheering Citibank's recent decision to open a branch in the Jewish state.

Jacob Frenkel, president of the Bank of Israel, called the decision "one of the most significant financial events in the history of Israel" and said other foreign banks would follow suit.

Paper to appeal to Israeli Arabs

The Palestinian Authority plans to publish a daily newspaper aimed at the Israeli Arab population, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported. The newspaper would be included as a supplement to the official Palestinian Authority daily, Al-Ayam, and be distributed in the self-rule areas and Israel.



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Oslo town hall before the summit, when he joined other speakers in paying tribute to Rabin's legacy.

"If Rabin were here with us today he would say, 'There is not a moment to spare. All this honoring me and these nice words, they're very nice — but please finish the job,'" the president told the hundreds who had gathered to pay homage to Rabin.

"We have now a chance, but only a chance, to bring real and lasting peace between Israel and her neighbors," Clinton said. "If we let it slip away, all will bear the consequences."

Both Barak and Arafat joined in the drama played out before a cast of dignitaries that included Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Rabin's widow, Leah.

Representatives from the European Union and senior officials from several Arab states, including Jordan and Morocco, also attended the ceremony.

"I vow to you, Yitzhak, a soldier who fell in the battle for peace, that we are determined to give your death meaning by following your legacy until we achieve peace," declared Barak.

"We will strive to ensure Israel's security interests and vital needs; but, at the same time, we will seek to achieve a fair settlement which reflects the needs and sensitivities of our neighbors.

"All disagreements must be resolved only through negotiations. This is our duty towards our children and future generations of the entire region."

He said "the peace we seek is not only the diplomats' peace but the people's peace" and pledged to defend Israel's "security interests and vital needs" while acknowledging, "Peace entails difficulties and pain, but it is preferable to all.

"Together with my partner, Chairman Arafat, we will strive to overcome the difficulties and to reach our common goals."

Arafat, who saluted a life-size portrait of Rabin before and after his address, proclaimed "the birth of a new age in the Middle East," and indicated that he regarded Barak as Rabin's true heir.

"We are approaching a stage of real partnership," he said.

"Let us continue together the path of peace and pursue together the promise of the peace of the brave.

"Let us together remove the obstacles that face us."

But he struck a harsher, perhaps more realistic, note when he focused on issues that will dominate the final-status negotiations.

He called on Israel to return to its pre-1967 borders and declared that peace means resisting "violence, terror, occupation, exile and settlements."

In Gaza, Palestinian officials later defended Arafat's decision to make his demands clear at the Rabin memorial ceremony.

"We are more than a year behind an agreement which should have already been completed," Palestinian official Hisham Abdel Razek told Israel Television.

"Yasser Arafat must use every forum to present the needs of the Palestinian people."

Meanwhile, Peres, speaking to Israel Radio from Oslo, came out in favor of a Palestinian state, adding that Israel needs a Palestinian state alongside the Jewish state.

Earlier in the day in Oslo, at a formal royal banquet hosted by Norway's King Harald V in Rabin's memory, Leah Rabin received a standing ovation from the 220 guests when she urged Clinton, Barak and Arafat to fulfill the dream of peace for which her husband had given his life.

"It's up to you now," she said. "Is that too much too ask?"

What is at stake in the final-status negotiations are core issues that go to the heart of a seemingly intractable dispute.

In the coming 10 months, as Israeli and Palestinian negotiators face those issues, they will know that the destinies of their peoples will be riding on the outcome of their deliberations.

They will know, too, that this is a rare opportunity to strike a deal — if, indeed, a deal is politically possible for the two sides.

History will weigh heavy on their shoulders.

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

'Sesame Street' shows muppets can help play a role in peacemaking

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Cookie Monster and his friends are breaking down stereotypes Israeli and Palestinian children have of each other.

That's the conclusion of a group of educational media experts who met in Jerusalem this week to evaluate the first 18 months of "Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim," the joint Israeli/Palestinian versions of the popular U.S. educational children's television show "Sesame Street."

As Israeli, Palestinian and U.S. officials gathered to push the peace process forward in Oslo this week, the experts were learning that colorful Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking muppets can play a role in peacemaking, too.

"We believe tolerance begins at home," said Michal Arbel, director of Israel Educational Television, which produced the Israeli version. "We have opened a small window" of "mutual respect for Palestinians and Israelis."

Lewis Bernstein, vice president of special projects for Children's Television Workshop, the U.S. producers of "Sesame Street," said researchers — who presented studies of the show's impact at the gathering on Monday — found that Israelis and Palestinians develop stereotypes early in life.

After watching the show, Bernstein, who was CTW's project manager for the Israeli-Palestinian program, said of the children, "they are willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the other side."

The programs were designed to address problems unique to each culture and society as well as relations between Israelis and Palestinians. For example, "Rechov Sumsum," the Israeli version, took on the issues of integration of various immigrant communities and relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel.

For the Palestinians, the primary goal was emphasizing Palestinian culture.

"Palestinian identity and self-respect will have to come before mutual respect," said Daoud Kuttab, the Palestinian executive producer.

To achieve this goal, the show's developers had to develop creative programming techniques amid difficult political and social realities. Since Palestinian and Israeli children almost never meet, programming directors felt a credible mechanism had to be devised for children and muppets from both streets to come into contact on the show.

They devised "crossover" segments in which an event led them to visit the other's street. For example, an Israeli boy on a bicycle gets a flat tire and finds himself on "Shara'a Simsim," the Palestinian street, looking for help — or a Palestinian comes to "Rechov Sumsum" to visit an Israeli Arab cousin.

In one study of the show's impact, an international team of Israeli, Palestinian and American experts surveyed more than 600 Jewish Israeli, Arab Israeli and Palestinian children aged 4 to 7 who had watched the show.

"Exposure to the program was linked to an increase in the use of pro-social justifications (such as friendship) to resolve conflict," wrote the researchers. "Other findings included a rise, after exposure, in children's use of positive attributes to describe members of the other group."

The results showed, for example, that before the show began, 61 percent of the Palestinian children surveyed had negative stereotypes of Israelis while 19 percent of Israeli Jews had negative stereotypes of Palestinians.

After viewing the show, children from all test groups tended to use more positive attributes to describe the other, but Palestinians had developed additional negative attitudes as well.

The study also showed that in "conflict resolution" scenarios, such as an Israeli or Palestinian child confronting someone from the other side on a swing, both had developed a greater tendency to choose a friendly solution to resolve the conflict.

In addition, although both Israeli and Palestinian children tended to choose their own muppets as potential friends, about one-third of the Palestinian children wanted to be friends with Dafi, the purple Israeli girl muppet, and 25 percent of the Israelis would choose to be friends with Haneen or Kareem, her Palestinian counterparts. □

Nazi-era documents declassified

A U.S. government panel released previously classified documents that could shed light on Nazi-era war crimes.

Some 126,000 pages were released Monday after agencies such as the FBI and CIA searched their records for information relating to possible Nazi-era war criminals and looted assets.

Police cleared of August shooting

The mother of a man killed by police in a Brooklyn Orthodox neighborhood in August is disappointed by a grand jury decision not to indict the officers involved in the case.

Doris Busch-Boskey made her comments Monday after prosecutors announced no charges would be brought against the officers who fired 12 shots at Gideon Busch. According to witnesses, Busch had broken free of police and was swinging a claw hammer.

Groups reject prayer resolution

Some Jewish groups are calling on Congress to reject a resolution that would call on the Supreme Court to allow student prayer before sports events at public schools. The American Jewish Congress and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism both say the resolution would violate the constitutional separation between church and state.

Claims Conference offers grants

A survivors group is offering grants to groups that provide social services for elderly Holocaust victims.

The deadline for applications to the New York-based Claims Conference, which will also give money to projects that carry out research on the Holocaust, is March 9. Application forms can be requested at gregs@claimscon.org.

O.U. backs Holocaust funds act

The Orthodox Union is supporting an act sponsored by a U.S. congressman that would offer federal money for Holocaust education. The Holocaust Education Assistance Act, sponsored by Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.), would provide grants through the Department of Education for centers and organizations that teach about the Holocaust.

'J'Accuse' goes on auction block

A rare copy of a famous denunciation of French anti-Semitism is to be auctioned in London this month. Christie's auctioneers estimate Emile Zola's "J'Accuse" will sell for \$6,600. The 1898 letter by the novelist denounces the imprisonment of Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus on false charges of spying for Germany.

NEWS ANALYSIS**Public peace negotiators lined up, but nitty-gritty talks will be secret***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A series of key diplomatic appointments has injected new vigor into the slowly reawakening Middle East peace process.

Israel and the United States appear to be regrouping their envoys and officials in advance of a new year in which Israeli-Palestinian negotiations for a final peace agreement will either sink or swim.

With final-status talks expected to begin in earnest Sunday, Israel has appointed one of its most experienced Mideast hands, Oded Eran, to lead its negotiating team.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat recently named his information minister, Yasser Abed Rabbo, to serve as his chief negotiator in the final-status talks.

But observers see this as a ceremonial rather than substantive appointment and expect the nitty-gritty negotiation to be controlled — whether in person or behind the scenes — by Arafat's deputy, Abu Mazen.

In addition to the formal talks, there are also bound to be behind-the-scenes contacts and back channels to hasten matters forward if there is a breakthrough in the formal talks and to pick up the pieces if there is a breakdown.

This, after all, was the pattern established in the Oslo process, when formal negotiations were conducted in Washington while the more productive back-channel talks went on in the Norwegian capital.

Now, too, it is believed that Prime Minister Ehud Barak is ready to deploy trusted aides to maintain discreet contacts with the Palestinians.

Eran's appointment was generally welcomed in Israeli political and diplomatic circles, and also by U.S. and Palestinian officials.

A Foreign Ministry veteran who was most recently Israel's ambassador to Jordan, Eran has long been closely involved with peace moves and is intimately familiar with the final-status issues, which include the topics that Israel and the Palestinian Authority have long delayed confronting — Jerusalem, final borders, settlements, Palestinian statehood.

As is well known, Eran was not Barak's first choice.

That distinction was held by Gilad Sher, a private lawyer with much negotiating experience who led the Israeli side in the talks that led up to the September land-for-security agreement signed in Egypt.

The premier wanted him to stay on, but Sher was forced to resign under civil service rules that prevented him from keeping his law practice, which he wanted to do, while serving in a government position.

Jerusalem insiders say the premier will continue to make use of Sher's services and advice, and that if there is a back channel opened up as the final-status talks progress, it is likely to be Sher who will work that channel on Barak's behalf.

In a parallel appointment, as yet unannounced, Barak has named an old friend and rival from his army days, Maj. Gen. Uri Saguy, as head of Israel's team to the still-suspended peace talks with Syria.

According to Ze'ev Schiff of the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Barak has not wanted to seem too anxious to appease the Syrians and has therefore not made a public announcement of Saguy's appointment.

In practice, however, as soon as there is some movement on the Syrian track, Saguy will be the leading figure for the Israeli side.

The Syrians have not named a chief negotiator for the talks, which they are refusing to resume unless Israel pledges to withdraw from the Golan Heights back to the border that existed prior to the 1967 Six-Day War.

In any case, the appointment of a chief Syrian negotiator will presumably have to await the return to active work by Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa, who is recovering from recent open-heart surgery.

The mood of optimism in Jerusalem immediately following Barak's election victory in May on the chances of restarting the talks with Syria has now given way to more circumspection, as Damascus and Jerusalem are still locked in both procedural and substantive wrangling.

Another interesting and not widely anticipated appointment recently announced by Barak was that of David Ivry, a former Israeli air force commander and director general of the Defense Ministry, as Israel's ambassador to Washington.

Barak respects Ivry, who most recently served as head of Barak's National Security Council, but is not seen as close to him.

It is therefore believed that Ivry will not serve as the main conduit between Barak and the Clinton administration in peace negotiations.

Instead, he is expected to be the linchpin in Israel's parallel effort to ensure that any future peace treaties with the Palestinians or other Arab states be shored up by a solid and expanding defense relationship with the United States.

The function of conduit will be filled, observers say, by a recent and unexpected appointee: Martin Indyk.

The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee held confirmation hearings last week on President Clinton's nominations of Indyk to be ambassador to Israel and Edward Walker to take over Indyk's current post, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs.

Bringing the nominations one step closer to confirmation, the hearings were attended by two senators who said there was no opposition to the appointments. If the two are confirmed, they would swap jobs.

Indyk, the first Jew to be U.S. ambassador to Israel, served in the position from April 1995 until October 1997.

According to reports in Jerusalem, Barak requested that Indyk be renamed ambassador — a request to which Clinton readily agreed. The Australian-born Indyk has won respect in Washington and in Middle Eastern capitals for his expertise in regional affairs as well as his diplomatic qualities.

While occasionally in the past there have been slurs in some Arab quarters centering on Indyk's Jewishness, his appointment at this time seems to be welcomed in the top echelons of the Palestinian Authority, where he has close contacts.

Plainly, Barak and Clinton are casting him in a cardinal role if the peace process does indeed move to center stage.

The knowledge that he will have the president's ear and is trusted by the Israeli premier can only help the process. □