



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

West Bank withdrawal imminent

Israel was expected to withdraw from a further 5 percent of the West Bank in the next few days.

The move comes after Israel and the Palestinians ended their deadlock over the size of the next redeployment.

Under the accord, the withdrawal follows the original map presented by Israel. Israel, however, will reportedly be open to Palestinian requests for the next withdrawal, slated for Jan. 20.

Barak, Sharaa meet face to face

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa met Tuesday for their first substantive encounter since resuming their peace talks in West Virginia.

The meeting, which also included President Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, came after the two sides overcame a "procedural hurdle" about what to discuss first.

U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said "all of the issues will be discussed in the coming few days." [Page 1]

U.S. probing more Israel aid

President Clinton said the United States is "attempting to ascertain what the general outlines of the costs" of an Israeli-Syrian deal would be.

He was responding to an Israeli newspaper report that Barak has already asked the United States for \$17 billion in aid to cover the security costs of a peace treaty with Syria.

The request reportedly includes funding for new Apache helicopters, a ground station for gathering information from U.S. satellites and Tomahawk cruise missiles, which would give Israel the ability to strike distant countries. [Page 1]

Activists protest in West Virginia

Protesters opposed to an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights demonstrated in West Virginia, where the second day of talks between Israel and Syria were being held.

The Associated Press reported that about 40 people from New York made the trip.

"The Golan is our security," said protest leader Levi Huebner. "Peace will be in security and trust in our neighbors."

As predicted, peace talks follow an up-and-down path

By Michael Shapiro

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Predictions that peace talks between Israel and Syria would be difficult appeared to be on the mark as officials got down to business this week.

As the talks resumed Monday in Shepherdstown, W.Va., the United States was already playing down expectations that the new round of talks would lead to an agreement.

"I think it's fair to say that Charles Dickens' novel 'Great Expectations' is not the novel that is being read by the negotiators and the working-level officials," State Department spokesman James Rubin said Monday, shortly after the talks began.

"We do not expect to be able to achieve a core agreement in one round of negotiations," he said of the talks, which have been billed as intensive and open-ended.

Israeli and Syrian negotiators, who were expected to get down to the nitty-gritty negotiations that could pave the way for a peace deal that would end their 50-year state of war, had trouble agreeing on where to start the talks.

Israel wanted to discuss normalizing relations and security arrangements first while Syria wanted to begin with discussions on an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The two sides are also expected to discuss water rights.

Their differences led to the cancellation Monday evening of an expected three-way meeting between President Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa.

By Tuesday afternoon, however, Rubin said Dickens' "Bleak House" also was not an appropriate novel—and the joint meeting was held later that day.

During his daily briefing at Shepherd College, Rubin announced that the "procedural hurdle" had been overcome and that "all of the issues will be discussed in the coming few days."

He did not say what the hurdle was, but said committees had been formed to deal with the key topics.

Rubin said U.S. officials were not surprised by the talks' slow start.

"We always expect there to be problems in this kind of a negotiation, and that's why we're here to overcome them," he said.

For his part, Clinton described both sides in the talks as "very serious."

"I think they both want an agreement," he said at the Oval Office on Tuesday, taking questions after nominating Alan Greenspan to another term as chairman of the Federal Reserve.

Asked about reports that Israel is seeking at least \$17 billion in aid to cover the security costs of a peace treaty with Syria, Clinton said the United States is "attempting to ascertain what the general outlines of the costs would be."

The Israel daily Ha'aretz reported on Monday, without citing sources, that Barak has already asked the United States for \$17 billion in aid.

The request includes funding for new Apache helicopters, a ground station for gathering information from U.S. satellites and Tomahawk cruise missiles, which would give Israel the ability to strike distant countries.

The aid request includes funding to help transfer army camps from the Golan to inside Israel's pre-1967 borders, the paper reported.

Rubin called the reports "wildly premature."

But the president, who flew back to Shepherdstown on Tuesday, acknowledged that

MIDEAST FOCUS

Women to serve in combat

The Israeli Knesset passed a law that opens the way for women to serve in combat units in the Israeli army.

The law, which could also extend the number of years women serve in the army from two years to three and allow them to serve reserve duty, gives legal backing to a trend already under way in the army to have women in increased fighting roles.

Rabin memorial defaced

A memorial sign near the entrance to Yitzhak Rabin Boulevard in Jerusalem was vandalized.

The incident Monday night occurred several days after Jewish extremists threatened to damage Rabin's grave in retaliation for the dismantling of a memorial plaza at the grave of Kiryat Arba resident Baruch Goldstein, who murdered 29 Muslim worshipers in a Hebron mosque in 1994.

In the wake of the threats, security guards were stationed around Rabin's grave.

Yeltsin to arrive in Israel

Boris Yeltsin was expected to make his first trip to Israel and the Palestinian self-rule areas on Thursday to celebrate the Russian Orthodox Christmas.

The first president of Russia, who resigned his post last week, was slated to take part in the service in Bethlehem along with the presidents of Ukraine and Belarus.

Peres backed for president

Senior Labor Party officials support former Prime Minister Shimon Peres as candidate for president if the current president, Ezer Weizman, leaves the post, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

A probe into nearly \$500,000 that Weizman received from a French millionaire has prompted speculation in Israel that he may be forced to step down.

there will be costs associated with an Israeli-Syrian peace deal.

"As I have made clear, we need to make a contribution, as do our friends in Europe and hopefully some in Asia, toward the long-term economic development of a regional Middle East economy," he said.

"So there will be some costs involved there over a period of years, not just in one year. We are trying to determine exactly what that should be."

Clinton said he would have to have a "serious consultation with the congressional leadership, before I can do more than say I would support this."

Republican leaders in Congress were upset that Clinton promised Israel, the Palestinians and Jordan \$1.9 billion during the 1998 Wye talks without consulting with them.

Pro-Israel activists have said that it is crucial for the Clinton administration to work closely with Congress on any potential aid package, given the battle over the Wye aid seen during the budget battle this past fall.

On Monday, Clinton kicked off the talks with a photo-op stroll with Barak and Sharaa. The three leaders walked across a bridge in the woods of the National Conservation Training Center, which sits on 540 acres primarily used by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The talks were being held in a virtual media blackout. Only the White House and State Department spokesman are expected to hold daily briefings, but they are not expected to provide any real details of the negotiations.

Rubin said that members of the Israeli and the Syrians delegations even agreed to surrender their cell phones so they would not be bothered by pesky reporters seeking details.

"We're here to make a peace agreement, not to make a headline," Rubin said. "And if that means that news is scarce and cell phones are turned off or they don't exist, that's a small price to pay for the outcome, at which time there will be plenty of time for the leaders of Syria and Israel and the United States to explain what the agreement is, what its impact will be." □

Latvian war crimes suspect to leave Britain, return to Australia

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A Latvian war crimes suspect allegedly involved in the deaths of up to 30,000 Jews during World War II is expected to leave Britain voluntarily after the British government announced that he would be deported.

Konrad Kalejs, who has previously been deported from the United States and Canada, is likely to head for Australia, where he acquired citizenship after posing as a refugee immediately after the war.

But the 86-year-old Kalejs is unlikely to face charges in Australia, where judicial officials have already determined there is insufficient evidence against him.

Latvia, which previously ruled there was not enough evidence to prosecute Kalejs, has reopened its case against him, according to British Jewish leader Lord Greville Janner.

Kalejs, who was identified last month as living in a retirement home in central England, allegedly served as an officer in Latvia's notorious Arajs Kommando unit.

The militia is held directly responsible for the deaths of some 100,000 civilians, including 30,000 Jews, between 1941 and 1943.

Efraim Zuroff, head of the Israel office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, told the JTA he regards the British decision not to try Kalejs as a "missed opportunity for justice." Zuroff appealed to Home Secretary Jack Straw to change his mind and indict Kalejs in Britain.

"I believe that Britain has a historic obligation to help prosecute Kalejs," he said. "His presence should be viewed as an opportunity to bring one of the Holocaust's terrible criminals to trial and strike a blow for justice."

Kalejs has described his accusers as "liars and storytellers" and insists that he was a student throughout the war. □



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JEWISH WORLD

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israeli political scandals linked to debate over peace

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Even as Israel and Syria were locked in a diplomatic struggle in West Virginia over how to begin tackling the thorny issues that divide them, Israelis back home were engaged in a more rancorous debate that presumed a deal was done.

So intense is the domestic political atmosphere that many pundits and ordinary citizens were convinced financial allegations that surfaced this week against President Ezer Weizman were somehow linked to the president's outspoken — and controversial — advocacy of a pro-peace position.

An investigation into Prime Minister Ehud Barak's election campaign finances is also being attributed by some in his *One Israel* movement to political opponents determined to weaken him in advance of the planned national referendum on a Syrian peace deal.

Barak, for his part, continues to exude confidence that he can strike a deal "that will strengthen, not weaken, Israel's security" — and that when he brings home that deal, he will be able to persuade a solid majority of the Israeli public to vote for it.

A meeting between the premier and Golan Heights settlement leaders just before the Israeli party embarked for the United States on Sunday produced no change of position on either side.

But Barak is taking care to keep the channels of communication open, anxious not to face the charge of alienating or disparaging the settlers, as Yitzhak Rabin was accused of doing as he pursued a peace deal with the Palestinians.

Even amid reports that the resumption of talks were off to a rocky start, opponents of the evolving Golan-for-peace accord were slated to join forces for a mass demonstration in Tel Aviv on Wednesday night.

The public struggle for the Golan was complicated this week with ugly allegations against both Weizman and Barak involving alleged financial impropriety.

Weizman, already the focus of a storm of protest over his unequivocal endorsement of the government's position on the peace process, was accused by an Israeli journalist of receiving some \$450,000 between 1988 and 1995 from French industrialist Edouard Seroussi and failing to declare the gift.

State Attorney Edna Arbel announced Monday that her office would look into the Seroussi affair — a decision that Weizman said he welcomed.

The president insists that the money, and the entire relationship between his family and Seroussi, was private and unconnected with his public roles during that period as a Cabinet minister and a Knesset member, and later as president.

Media reports said Weizman used the money for the care of his late son Shaul, who was wounded as a soldier in 1970 and later was killed in a car accident. Nonetheless, the influential Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* on Monday called for Weizman's immediate resignation, which Weizman said Tuesday he would not do.

There is little doubt that Weizman's discomfort was welcomed by the political right, which has bristled at the president's public position supporting the Barak government's peace initiatives. Although the president ostensibly stays neutral, Weizman has repeatedly taken public stands on such issues during his tenure.

Hence there is suspicion on the left that the timing of the disclosures against him were connected with the resumption of the talks with Syria.

A similar suspicion hangs over an inquiry, launched last week by the Justice Ministry, into a slew of charitable foundations linked to Barak's election campaign last year.

The investigators will be looking into the funding of these foundations, and whether their activities contravened existing election funding legislation.

Labor members charge that the Justice Ministry official involved in the probe is a Likud activist, and that the inquiry — or at least its timing — is connected to the battle looming over referendums on any peace deals with Syria and the Palestinians □

Swede calls for Nazi commission

A top Swedish politician is calling on his country's prime minister to set up a historical commission to investigate revelations that more than 250 Swedes were members of the Nazi SS.

The comments by Alf Svensson, the leader of Sweden's opposition Christian Democratic Party, came after a television documentary this week made the revelation — and before Sweden hosts an international conference on the Holocaust later this month.

Officials thank Central Americans

A delegation of Jewish organizational officials traveled to Costa Rica and El Salvador to express appreciation to those nations, the only two to maintain their Israeli embassies in Jerusalem.

The delegation, which left Tuesday, includes Ronald Lauder and Malcolm Hoenlein, the president and executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The group was slated to meet with the presidents of each country, as well as with Jewish community and Israeli officials.

Mussolini calendar distributed

A local politician in southern Italy printed 2,000 copies of a calendar featuring fascist slogans and pictures of wartime dictator Benito Mussolini.

"Benito Mussolini — With You in the Third Millennium," reads the front cover, above a portrait of the dictator, who came to power in Italy in 1922 and was deposed in 1943.

The calendar was produced by Mario De Cristofaro, a member of the rightist National Alliance Party, whose leaders distanced themselves from the calendar.

Ecumenical action urged

A Reform Jewish leader is calling on all faith groups to intensify their cooperation in the new millennium.

In a statement sent last week, Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, the president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, urged Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Islamic organizations to expand their dialogues into programs to fight hunger, disease and prejudice.

Christians open kosher cafe

Two Egyptian-born Christian siblings opened a kosher cafe in Minneapolis.

Jacob and Sue Botros, who serve dairy food at the Calypso Cafe, were helped by a local Jewish woman who was born in Beirut, Lebanon.

She spoke with the pair daily in Arabic as they mastered the details of kashrut.

Web helps Jews walk in their relatives' footsteps

By Ruth E. Gruber

CLUJ, Romania (JTA) — A name and date in a yellowing ledger. An inscription on a crumbling tombstone. A birth certificate. A walk along a dusty street in an Eastern European village. A faded family photograph. Sometimes a newly discovered relative.

These are rich prizes for tens of thousands of Jews worldwide who dedicate time, energy, and sometimes considerable amounts of money, to researching and documenting their family history.

Interest among Jews in tracing their roots emerged in the late 1970s, but it has been in the decade since the collapse of communism that Jewish genealogy has come into its own.

For the first time since before the Holocaust, the fall of the Iron Curtain opened up ancestral Eastern and Central European Jewish homelands to travel and research.

Conditions are still difficult in some places, but people now can physically walk in the footsteps of their ancestors, as well as consult local documents such as birth, marriage, death and census records that were long kept off-limits to outsiders.

At the same time, the growth of the Internet opened up vast new resources, enabling roots-seekers to tap into ever-expanding databases and keep in touch via e-mail with fellow researchers and contacts in Eastern Europe, including newfound family.

"The number of people doing genealogy has grown enormously in the past decade," said Sallyann Amdur Sack, editor of Avotaynu, the International Review of Jewish Genealogy, now in its 15th year of publication. "Absolute numbers are hard to get, but certainly it is at least double, but probably closer to triple."

In 1990, there were 39 Jewish genealogy societies worldwide.

Today there are 75, with 8,000 registered members. They represent only a fraction of Jews who are interested in tracing their roots, however — some 30,000 people are registered with a "family finder" service on the leading Jewish genealogy Web site, www.JewishGen.org.

This interest has made Jewish genealogy a growth industry, with an ever-increasing number of books and other publications, special-interest groups, computer databases, Web sites, home pages and forums, software programs, conferences, lectures, workshops and information exchanges devoted to Jewish family history.

There is also an increasing number of professional genealogists and genealogical services specializing in tracing Jewish family trees, researching Jewish family roots, translating Yiddish documents and leading Jews on trips to their ancestral towns.

"I got involved when people started to contact me by e-mail asking me to check information, to do some research," said Ladislau Gyemant, a Jewish and European history professor at Babes Bolyai University in Cluj, Romania, who carries out professional genealogical work in Romania and Hungary.

"They found out it was possible to obtain the information they needed, and the number of requests increased," he said. "Finally I was contacted by the Jewish genealogy group specializing on Romania, and I am constantly in touch with them."

Jewish genealogist Miriam Weiner has been a major force in the movement. She negotiated agreements with post-Communist Polish and Ukrainian state archives to allow American Jews on-site access to genealogical data. A former private detective, Weiner

began researching her own family history more than two decades ago. She got so involved that she became the first certified Jewish genealogist — and turned her personal interest into a business.

Her home base in New Jersey is crammed with books, publications, maps, foreign phone directories, old photographs and postcards and other material about Eastern Europe. She lectures and writes a syndicated column, and has written and published comprehensive books on Jewish genealogical resources in Poland, Ukraine and Moldova. Weiner regularly travels to Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Moldova to carry out research for clients and also takes individuals or groups on research trips.

"Most people who travel to their ancestral towns want to experience a walk in the footsteps of their ancestors," Weiner said. "They want to see what remains of the old life: original buildings, Jewish sites — cemeteries, synagogues, Holocaust memorials."

For those who can't make the trip, Weiner brings back copies of documents as well as photographs, souvenirs and videotapes of the ancestral town.

Sometimes, too, she puts American clients in touch with long-lost kin. This happens very rarely in Poland, where few Jews remain, but, she says, it is not uncommon in countries of the former Soviet Union.

"Often, I share their tears and pass on their hugs to my clients," she said. "There are hundreds of thousands of Jews in the former U.S.S.R. In more cases than we can imagine, their ancestors are 'cousins' of our ancestors who came to the U.S."

Today's Jewish genealogy phenomenon is part of a general boom. Two years ago, Time magazine ran a cover story on the genealogy craze, noting that millions of people of all ethnic backgrounds are looking for their roots. This is related to an burgeoning sense of ethnic identity and awareness in recent years.

"Two major upheavals have characterized Jewish life of the past two centuries: massive emigration and the Holocaust," said Sallyann Amdur Sack. "Both have provided significant impetus for the growing interest in tracing one's roots. Most Jews do not live where their families lived 150 years ago. Ties, knowledge, rootedness — all have been torn, especially by the events of the Holocaust."

Jewish genealogical research in the post-Communist period, with its vast and ever-growing networks of databases and dense maps of family connections, may have new, practical implications that go far beyond personal family history.

Jewish genealogists, their research and resources have become active in efforts both to redeem Holocaust-era insurance policies and recover Holocaust-era assets.

Avotaynu, Inc. has formed a partnership with two other companies, Risk International Services, an insurance archeology and claim recovery firm, and Ancestry.com, a genealogy company, to help Holocaust survivors and heirs recover family assets. Their Living Heirs Project stems from a database of 29,000 names of individuals with unclaimed or confiscated Holocaust-era Jewish assets posted to the Avotaynu Web site.

The project's goals are to use genealogy research to help identify ancestors with documented assets, to document and value confiscated assets, and to document heirship by developing family trees that demonstrate kinship. □

For more information, see the Web sites www.JewishGen.org, www.avotaynu.com. Miriam Weiner's Web site is www.rtrfoundation.org.