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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

West Bank clashes rage on

Clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian stone-throwers continued in several West Bank towns as a U.S. envoy tried to restore calm to the region.

One of Tuesday's confrontations took place in Ramallah, where U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross met with the president of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat.

The violence was less intense than the day before, when three Palestinians were killed and hundreds more wounded in clashes that also left 15 Israeli soldiers wounded.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak spoke by telephone with Arafat to discuss the outbreak of violence. [Page 1]

Families seek trial for militant

Families of Americans killed by Hamas terrorists wrote to President Clinton urging him to press Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to transfer a Hamas militant to the United States for prosecution.

The move came following Israeli media reports that Palestinian security officials had arrested Mohammed Deif, who tops Israel's most-wanted list.

Israeli officials have called on the Palestinian Authority to put Deif on trial.

U.S. may help fund withdrawal

The United States plans to contribute \$50 million of its annual foreign aid package to Israel to help fund the planned troop withdrawal from Lebanon, according to a report in the Israeli daily Globes.

An Israeli official confirmed that Prime Minister Ehud Barak and President Clinton are scheduled to discuss the aid next week in Washington.

Jews may appeal Belarus ruling

A court in Belarus upheld an earlier ruling in favor of a book that relies on the 19th-century forgery, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

In making the ruling, the judges in the case ruled that the lower court was correct in deciding that the book, "A War According to the Laws of Viciousness," is of "scientific importance."

A group that monitors the rights of Jews in the former Soviet Union, the NCSJ, said it would support efforts by the Belarus Jewish community to appeal the decision to the country's Supreme Court.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Barak will head to U.S. with his coalition, and troops, under fire

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — When Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak travels to the United States next week, he'll leave behind faltering peace talks, a government in jeopardy and violent flare-ups with the Palestinians.

Barak hopes his May 21-23 trip will invigorate peace talks with the Palestinians — a goal shared by President Clinton, who wants to achieve a Middle East peace accord before he leaves office. The prime minister will also use the trip to draw attention to U.S. support for Israel's planned troop withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Barak plans to meet with American Jewish leaders, many of whom are as confused and divided about the peace process as Barak's constituency back home.

The trip comes after Barak secured approval from the Israeli Cabinet and Knesset this week to transfer three Arab villages outside Jerusalem to full Palestinian control. This gesture, which was aimed at building confidence among the Palestinians, may have cost Barak his ruling coalition.

And in a dark convergence of events, the decision Monday to hand the towns to the Palestinians came on the day gunfights erupted between Israeli troops and Palestinian police officers in the worst violence in the territories in two years.

Monday also witnessed the first mass right-wing protest against Barak since he was elected a year earlier. Hours after the Knesset vote, tens of thousands of Jewish settlers converged on Jerusalem's Zion Square, where Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon told the crowd that the Barak government "has bowed to the Palestinian rioters."

Earlier that day, demonstrations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip spun out of control and took a deadly turn.

Similar protests had taken place on and off for more than a week in the territories. Those earlier protests, marked by repeated clashes between Palestinian stone-throwers and Israeli soldiers firing rubber bullets, had focused on the Palestinian demand that Israel release more prisoners.

On Monday, the protests marked the "nakba" — Arabic for "catastrophe" — as the Palestinians call the May 14, 1948, establishment of the state of Israel.

Israeli officials said the clashes escalated that day when Palestinian snipers joined the stone-throwers, prompting shooting from Israeli soldiers. It is unclear whether Palestinian police were among the original snipers, but they were later seen exchanging fire with Israeli troops.

Palestinian witnesses claimed — in some cases proudly — that the first live bullets had come from Palestinian civilians.

By the end of the day, the clashes — which were at their worst in Ramallah — left at least three Palestinians dead and hundreds more wounded. Fifteen Israeli soldiers were wounded in the violent exchanges, at least two by Palestinian police fire.

Most of the Palestinians were wounded by rubber bullets fired by Israeli troops to disperse rioters throwing Molotov cocktails and stones.

The violence was the worst in the territories in two years, when several Palestinians were killed in clashes during similar disturbances marking the "catastrophe."

Barak discussed the situation on the phone Monday night with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, who Israeli officials said had encouraged the protests. For their part, Palestinian officials called the street demonstrations a public outpouring of frustration over slow progress in the peace negotiations. But with the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Talks to focus on radar sale

An Israeli delegation was scheduled to fly to Washington on Wednesday to seek a compromise in a dispute over Israel's planned sale of an advanced airborne radar system to China.

Israel reportedly wants to reach agreement on the sale of the system before Prime Minister Ehud Barak's visit to the United States next week.

Israel transfers outposts to SLA

Israel transferred two military outposts in southern Lebanon to its ally in the region. The transfers to the South Lebanon Army came as part of Israel's plan to withdraw its troops from Lebanon by July.

Kodak buys Israeli R&D company

Eastman Kodak bought a company with research and development facilities in Israel that provides technology for a digital developing service offered by the U.S. photo giant.

Picture Vision's services allow customers to bring a roll of film to a photo lab and the company posts the photos over the Internet.

Israel, Egypt discuss gas pipeline

Israel and Egypt are again discussing an underwater pipeline to supply natural gas from Egypt to Israel.

If completed, the proposed pipeline would carry gas from Egypt to Turkey with exits at Israeli power plants. The talks, which resumed last month, have followed the ups and downs in peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Yemen leaders cool on Israel

Yemen's top religious leaders issued an edict banning the normalization of relations with Israel.

The move followed the government's recent decision to allow visits to the country by Jews of Yemenite origin.

volatile turn of events, reports said the Palestinian Authority tried to restore order.

On Tuesday, however, clashes continued in Ramallah and several West Bank towns, but the violence was less intense than the day before.

Tuesday's confrontations took place as U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross returned to the region and held meetings with both sides in an effort to restore calm and help move peace talks forward.

The already-troubled talks appeared to have hit another glitch, with reports that the chief Palestinian negotiator, Yasser Abed Rabbo, had tendered his resignation to Arafat, in anger over his exclusion from back-channel talks Israel and the Palestinians held in Stockholm this week.

Monday's violence came as the Israeli Cabinet and parliament approved a proposal to transfer the Arab villages of Abu Dis, Al-Azariya and Sawahara outside Jerusalem to total Palestinian self-rule.

Right-wing legislators oppose the idea, saying it will jeopardize Jerusalem. But Barak urged legislators during Monday's stormy Knesset session to remember that "Jerusalem did not fall because Abu Dis was not part of it."

The Cabinet voted 15-6 for the proposal, which Barak described as necessary to prevent "stalemate and deterioration" in the negotiations. Barak wants the areas handed over in order to persuade the Palestinians to delay a third Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and instead focus on a final peace agreement.

But the Cabinet decision sparked a coalition crisis, with the hawkish National Religious Party announcing it is pulling out of the coalition.

"From now, the National Religious Party will act to bring down the government. It will be in the opposition," said Housing Minister Yitzhak Levy, who announced after the vote he was suspending his participation in the government pending a formal party decision to quit the coalition.

The departure of the five-member NRP faction came as no surprise, since the party, a founder and champion of Jewish settlement, has long protested that Barak's peace policies went against its ideals.

But the development raised the stakes regarding the future of two other coalition partners, the fervently Orthodox Shas Party and the conservative Yisrael Ba'Aliyah immigrant rights party. A departure by either faction would leave Barak's government, which until now held 68 seats in the 120-member Knesset, without a parliamentary majority.

Both Shas and Yisrael Ba'Aliyah refrained from taking a clear stand Monday, and the motion passed the Knesset 56-48 with backing from moderate opposition and Arab parties. Barak said the handover of the Arab villages would be delayed due to Monday's violence.

"We decided to present the proposal for confirmation but we will delay the execution of the transfer itself until the reasons for today's violence are clarified," he told the Knesset. □

Gay Yeshiva students lose appeal

NEW YORK (JTA) — Gay and lesbian students, having lost the latest round in their legal battle with the nation's oldest and largest Jewish university, are vowing to take the case to New York's highest court.

The vow came after the appellate division of the New York State Supreme Court denied an appeal by two lesbian students and the gay and lesbian student organization claiming that Yeshiva University's Albert Einstein College of Medicine discriminates by barring same-sex couples from its married student housing.

The plaintiffs, backed by the American Civil Liberties Union, sued the Bronx, N.Y., medical school in 1998.

Yeshiva University is commonly thought of as an Orthodox institution, but — except for its Orthodox rabbinical school — it is nonsectarian and thus must comply with all anti-discrimination laws.

The case against Yeshiva was dismissed last year, and earlier this month, the appellate division ruled that the university's policy does not have a disparate impact on homosexuals. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Raid on Russian Jewish oligarch spurs fear of anti-Semitic backlash

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A caller to the Russian State Radio Service's Jewish program made no attempt to hide her venom.

"You Jews have seized the TV and the radio and the newspapers. You are everywhere, you annoy everybody," said the caller, who identified herself as Yelena K.

Her words were just one of many recent anti-Semitic calls to Jewish Radio in which ordinary Russians expressed displeasure with the high-profile role played by Jews in the Russian media.

While the scale of anti-Semitism in Russia is sometimes exaggerated in the West, many of the nation's 145 million people have mixed feelings — at best — about the "Jewish influence" in the mass media, which proved a powerful political force in Russia's recent parliamentary and presidential elections.

After the recent search of the offices of one of Russia's most powerful media figures, Jewish leader Vladimir Goussinsky, some Jews are worried that a crackdown on Goussinsky and his fellow tycoons — many of whom are Jewish — could foment anti-Semitism and harm Jewish activities in Russia.

The raid itself appears to have been politically motivated — and had little to do with anti-Semitism.

Goussinsky, who in addition to heading the Russian Jewish Congress, owns a set of influential newspapers and radio stations, including the national TV channel NTV, is seen as a bastion of an independent media.

During last year's presidential campaign, Goussinsky's media empire, Media-Most, openly supported Grigory Yavlinsky, the liberal opposition contender.

Goussinsky may have piqued the Kremlin further by publicly criticizing Russia's war against Muslim separatists in the Caucasus, calling on the government to grant independence to Chechnya. One of Goussinsky's main media rivals is Boris Berezovsky, a Kremlin insider with Jewish roots who is widely believed to be the main schemer behind Vladimir Putin's meteoric rise to the country's presidency.

In addition to owning a number of influential newspapers, Berezovsky controls the state-owned national TV channel ORT.

Russian Jews have a generally negative view of Berezovsky.

He renounced his Israeli citizenship — which he had acquired in the early 1990s, when his political position was shaky — and was baptized. Moscow's chief rabbi, Pinchas Goldschmidt, called him "a double traitor of the Jewish people."

But to many ordinary Russians, he is the archetype of the opportunistic Jew who schemes behind the scenes with unclear but destructive goals.

Some observers see the raid as the first step in a campaign against Goussinsky, which may lead to a broader crackdown against Berezovsky and other media moguls as well. Putin, after all, has vowed to chase the oligarchs, as they are known here, from the corridors of political power. But, as is always the case in Russia, there is concern about exacerbating anti-Semitism. Many Jews think that any clampdown on the Jewish oligarchs would strongly harm the Russian Jewish community.

Such moves would further the stereotypes about the "Jews, who have sucked out and used to their own benefit all Russian resources, including the mass media, and now are being rightfully wiped out," said Alexey Vayman, a 26-year-old Moscow university student. "All of us would be held guilty for their real or alleged crimes."

A further crackdown on Goussinsky would particularly harm the community, say observers, since he is the driving force behind the Russian Jewish Congress.

The RJC, a major supporter of Jewish life throughout Russia, is the most financially self-sufficient Jewish organization in Russia.

But at least one observer is optimistic. Leonid Katsis, a Jewish political analyst, said he thinks Goussinsky will manage to come to terms with the government.

"A strong state in Russia will manage to keep the Jewish oligarchs in control in a civilized manner without provoking an anti-Semitic wave. And Putin really seems to be in favor of a strong state." □

Paris court hears Yahoo! case

A prosecutor told a Paris court that Yahoo! should face legal penalties for allowing the sale of Nazi memorabilia on one of the Web sites it hosts.

The International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism brought the case against the Internet portal in April in a bid to stop the sales from appearing in France.

The judge is expected to issue a ruling next week.

List angers German firms

German firms are angry over their inclusion in a list of 60 companies that have not donated to a compensation fund for Nazi-era slave laborers.

Some of the firms say they are being asked to pay too much. Others say they should not pay because they did not exist during World War II.

Poll: Americans OK vouchers

A majority of Americans are comfortable with using government vouchers at private schools run by religious groups, according to a recent poll.

Some 52 percent of those surveyed did not feel that the use of vouchers would violate the constitutional separation of church and state.

Polish town honors citizens

A leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and a World War II envoy who told the West about the Holocaust were among those named honorary citizens of the Polish city of Lodz. In addition to Marek Edelman and Jan Karski, film director Roman Polanski was also honored by Lodz, where some 200,000 Jews lived before World War II.

Romanian journalist sentenced

A Romanian journalist accused of writing anti-Semitic articles received a two-year suspended prison sentence, according to local media reports.

A Bucharest court ruled that Mihai Bogdan Antonescu, 35, had written anti-Semitic articles in 1997 and 1998 in a weekly newspaper where he was deputy editor in chief. One article he wrote called members of the government "dirty Jews" and Gypsies.

Spielberg funds Anne Frank film

The director of "Schindler's List" is taking on a project about Anne Frank.

Steven Spielberg, whose film about the German businessman-turned-rescuer-of-Jews won the Academy Award for best picture in 1993, is the executive producer of a television film about the Dutch Jewish girl known for her World War II diary.

The film is tentatively scheduled to be broadcast in the United States next May.

U.S. Supreme Court ruling could affect hate crimes law

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — This week's U.S. Supreme Court decision that affects a woman's right to sue an attacker may have broad implications for the future of hate crimes legislation, a legislative priority for a number of Jewish organizations.

On Monday, the Supreme Court narrowly struck down a key provision of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act, which allowed rape and domestic violence victims to sue their attackers in federal court.

The decision sent a message that the court intends to keep Congress' actions in check and return power to the states.

Many Jewish groups had filed briefs in support of the act, arguing that state courts failed to take suits involving domestic violence seriously and that the act provided additional protection for victims of gender-based violence.

In its 5-4 decision, however, the Supreme Court said Congress had overstepped its bounds and should not be able to regulate gender-motivated violence based on its impact on interstate commerce.

The justices are continuing a trend to restrict Congress from authorizing federal intervention in criminal investigations unless there is an economic impact.

The National Council of Jewish Woman was one of several Jewish groups expressing disappointment in the decision, saying the court's decision "assures that women will have one less option for safety and survival."

But aside from the issue of women's ability to sue in federal courts, some groups believe the court's decision could adversely affect hate crimes legislation.

The legislation, which is being promoted by the Clinton administration but is bogged down in Congress, would allow federal investigations into bias-motivated crimes based on gender, sexual orientation or disability.

The case, *U.S. vs. Morrison*, continues a "troubling and disturbing" trend toward restricting congressional authority, according to Jeffrey Sinensky, director for national affairs and legal counsel for the American Jewish Committee.

Some observers fear for the future of hate crimes legislation as long as the current court's majority remains in place, Sinensky said.

Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department, said, "If you were to pass federal hate crimes legislation tomorrow, it would be challenged immediately."

Stern believes the Supreme Court's latest hold on federalizing criminal behavior will have a great impact on the legislative agendas of Jewish organizations that tend to focus their attention on Washington.

"The Jewish community will have to reorient itself toward the states," Stern said.

But Michael Lieberman, counsel for the Anti-Defamation League, believes that the hate crimes prevention bill will not encounter legal problems as a result of the court's ruling because unlike the Violence Against Women Act, each individual crime prosecuted under the hate legislation must affect interstate commerce. □

U.S. pushes Austria to settle issue of Jewish property looted by Nazis

By Agnes Bohm

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States is stepping up pressure on Austria to settle a broad range of Holocaust-era issues.

The chief U.S. official on Holocaust restitution issues, Stuart Eizenstat, made the American stance clear before traveling to Vienna, where representatives of seven countries are talking about creating an Austrian fund for Holocaust-era slave laborers.

"While I'm pleased with Austrian commitments on this topic, the Austrian government and Austrian companies also need to address property restitution," Eizenstat, the U.S. deputy treasury secretary, told JTA.

He said Austria could appoint a special representative to deal with property issues and announce interim measures to deal with gaps in past restitution programs.

Eizenstat said he also expects Austrian insurance firms to join an international effort to make payments on policies dating back to the war years.

He said the United States is monitoring developments in Austria closely to ensure that the Austrian government lives up to its promises.

"We look at what the Austrian government does, as well as what it says," Eizenstat said. "One important benchmark in this regard is how this government will deal with unresolved Holocaust issues."

Austria has made clear that it wants to compensate Holocaust-era slave and forced laborers.

But it has been far less forthcoming when it comes to paying for property looted from Jews under the Nazis' so-called Aryanization program.

Jewish groups and lawyers representing Holocaust survivors have responded to what they view as Austrian intransigence with volleys of criticism.

Last Friday, Eizenstat joined the fray with his call for Austria to begin resolving claims regarding Jewish-owned property looted by the Nazis.

The Claims Conference, which has been spearheading efforts to get Austria to address the property restitution issue, was pleased to see the United States weighing in on the topic.

"We welcome Eizenstat's comments," said Gideon Taylor, the group's executive vice president.

"We were very much concerned by the statements coming out of Austria on the restitution issue."

While in Vienna this week, the U.S. deputy treasury secretary was scheduled to meet with Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel and Maria Schaumayer, the Austrian official in charge of slave labor restitution.

During two days of meetings, which will also include representatives from Central and Eastern European countries including Hungary, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, Austria will try to reach agreement on a compensation package for slave and forced laborers.

Eizenstat was not optimistic that this week's discussions would be sufficient.

"I doubt that there will be a full agreement," he said. "We still have many issues to resolve." □