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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Camp David summit begins

President Clinton said Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat "face profound and wrenching questions" as they seek to resolve long-standing differences at their Camp David summit.

The two leaders have not been overly optimistic about their prospects for success. [Page 4]

Poll: Americans back peace goal

Some 77 percent of Americans believe the pursuit of Middle East peace is an important goal of U.S. policy, according to a Gallup poll.

In the survey of 1,000 people, 41 percent said they sympathize with Israel, 14 percent said their sympathies lie with the Palestinian Authority, 5 percent said they sympathized with both and 22 percent had no opinion.

Court: Iran must pay for terrorism

Iran must pay \$300 million to the families of two students murdered in a 1996 suicide bus bombing in Jerusalem, according to a U.S. district court.

The court ruled that the Islamic Republic of Iran must pay damages to the families of Matthew Eisenfeld and Sara Duker. Under U.S. law, American victims of terrorism can sue foreign states that sponsor terrorism.

But President Clinton has previously waived the payment in the interest of national security.

House passes Syrian emigre bill

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that would grant permanent resident status to up to 3,000 Syrian Jews who came to the United States in the early 1990s. [Page 3]

N.Y. has hate crimes law

Gov. George Pataki signed New York state's new hate crimes law, 10 years after a version first passed the state Assembly.

"Sometimes, justice takes a little longer than we would have liked," the governor said at Monday's signing ceremony at the headquarters of the Westchester Holocaust Commission.

The law calls for stiffer penalties for crimes motivated by bias against a victim's race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability or age.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

JNF: Tree planting off center stage, but still provides an 'emotional' link

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — In the aftermath of an Israeli newspaper article accusing it of uprooting tourist-planted trees in Jerusalem, the Jewish National Fund is on the defensive.

It has suspended workers at the tree-planting center in question, appointed a committee to investigate the allegations and said in an official statement that uprooting trees to have other tourists replant them is "in utter contradiction to JNF's policy and regulations."

But whether or not the JNF is pulling saplings out of the ground, it is clear that tree planting no longer plays center stage in the organization's activities or fund raising.

Tree planting is "a good public relations program" and a "good emotional opportunity for people to link to the land of Israel," said Russell Robinson, executive vice president of the JNF's U.S. operations.

Officials are downplaying the impact of the Ma'ariv article last month — and ensuing media coverage in the United States — contending it will have little effect on its fund-raising and public relations efforts in the United States.

Most American Jews have long associated the JNF with trees, dating back to the organization's origins in 1903, when it used trees to stake out Jewish-owned land in Ottoman-ruled Palestine.

Today, an estimated 75 percent of Jewish tours to Israel include an opportunity to plant trees under JNF auspices, and 80,000 trees are planted each year by tourists.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of trees are ordered each year by American Jews who mark life-cycle events by purchasing JNF trees in a loved one's honor.

And trees are featured heavily in the organization's promotional materials, with its Web site featuring an "online tree planting center" from which donors can order trees.

But JNF officials say the "plant-your-own-tree" centers are a small portion of the organization's work and cultivate more good will than forests.

With Israel facing a slew of environmental problems — the need for water being the most pressing — the JNF is planting some 2.5 million trees each year and tending to the 220 million trees that already exist.

But 10 years ago, the JNF planted closer to 4 million trees each year.

Now the organization, known in Israel as Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael, is sinking an increasing amount of its resources into constructing reservoirs and rehabilitating the country's rivers, which are some of the most polluted in the world.

The group has constructed 100 reservoirs in the past decade and is currently raising money to construct another 100 in the coming years.

Twenty-eight percent of the organization's total budget in Israel is spent on afforestation — planting new trees and maintaining existing forests — and 23 percent is spent on developing water resources, according to officials.

JNF officials anticipate that water will soon surpass trees as a spending priority, and the organization will soon offer donors not only the opportunity to plant a tree, but to link a donation to a reservoir or other water-related effort.

The remaining money the JNF spends in Israel goes toward developing communities in the Negev Desert, developing tourist sites, Zionist and ecological education and research.

Last month's Ma'ariv article, entitled "The Great Tree Fraud," suggested that

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel to release prisoners

Israel is expected to release some 30 Palestinian security prisoners during the Camp David summit, an official accompanying Prime Minister Ehud Barak was quoted by Israel Radio as saying. Barak's Security Cabinet this week authorized the premier to release prisoners, but not before the summit's start.

Schroeder criticized on Iran

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder brought up the recent sentencing of 10 Iranian Jews during a meeting with the president of Iran.

But some politicians criticized Schroeder for not making a public statement about Iran's human rights record during Mohammad Khatami's visit to Germany, which began Monday.

Meanwhile, Iran's foreign minister said the Islamic Republic would resist U.S. pressure to free the 10 Jews. Iran will not "pay any price" to normalize relations with Washington, Kamal Kharrazi told the London-based al-Hayat newspaper.

Soldiers suspended for shooting

The Israel Defense Force suspended an army officer and soldier involved in the shooting death of a Palestinian woman in the Gaza Strip on Saturday night.

The woman's husband and two children were wounded when the car they were traveling in was caught in the crossfire when Israeli troops returned fire coming at them from another vehicle.

Lebanese court sentences 57

A Lebanese military court sentenced 57 people to prison for collaborating with or visiting Israel. The sentences ranged from three weeks to life for two people tried in absentia.

More than 800 people have been sentenced by the court on similar charges since Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May.

workers at the JNF's planting center in Jerusalem routinely uproot trees planted by tourists and give the same saplings to the next group of tourists to plant again.

The article also said that few of the trees survive.

JNF officials have responded that if uprooting occurred, it was an isolated incident and not official policy.

But Robinson acknowledged that fewer than half of the trees planted in Jerusalem survive, primarily because of the arid and rocky soil.

Almost 95 percent of the trees planted at the five planting centers outside of Jerusalem survive, he said.

However, the Jerusalem site — with its proximity to other major tourist attractions — is where slightly more than 25 percent of tourists plant.

Robinson also said the JNF's six tree-planting centers — where tourists pay \$10 to plant a tree — are actually money-losing ventures.

"We have to have workers on site, people watering the trees, and when they die we have to replant them," he said, noting that because the tourists are "not professional tree planters," some do not fully or properly plant the trees, which then must be replanted by workers.

While tourists planting trees may not directly benefit the JNF, the activity of "putting a hand in the soil of the Jewish people" helps foster an attachment to Israel and environmentalism, said Robinson.

He said then when he talks to people about the water crisis in Israel, "they see the importance."

Robinson said that in the aftermath of the negative press, only a few donors have called to express concerns about the uprooting allegations and that most who did call ended up buying trees anyway once they were told that the uprootings — if they happened — were isolated incidents.

The controversy comes as the JNF is still recovering from widely publicized reports four years ago that the JNF sent only 20 percent of its revenues raised in the United States to Israel.

An internal probe confirmed that finding and also found "inefficiencies" in its accounting and spending practices.

Those findings undermined the organization's fund raising and image, but in the past three years, officials say, it has significantly restructured, sharply cut its overhead spending and surpassed pre-1996 fund-raising levels. Now, approximately 60 percent of funds raised go to Israel, said Robinson, with the remainder staying in the United States for Zionist education, fund raising and administrative costs.

The JNF in the United States has increased its revenues from \$21 million three years ago to \$33 million this year, brought in several million-dollar donors and now has a total of 450,000 donors, up from 375,000 three years ago, according to Robinson.

In 1994, prior to the internal probe, the organization raised \$26.9 million.

JNF officials credit the organization's president, Ronald Lauder, with contributing generously — officials won't say how much — and helping to bring in many new major donors, including several million-dollar donors.

Lauder, heir to the Estee Lauder cosmetics fortune, is also chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Money raised in the United States by the JNF accounts for only 12.5 percent of the operating budget of Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael.

The second largest landowner in Israel, the KKL gains most of its revenues from real estate holdings and has been criticized in the past for its refusal to rent land to Arabs.

Ruth Hurwitz, a lay leader at Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, who coordinates partnerships between her organization and the JNF, said Hadassah's relationship with JNF will not be affected by the controversy over the tree planting.

In fact, Hadassah is about to contribute \$3 million toward a JNF reservoir, she said. "I have every confidence in the investigation they're doing," she said.

Like Robinson, she praised the plant-your-own-tree ritual, saying tourists "want that experience of planting a tree with their own hands."

"It's extremely meaningful to everyone who does it," she added. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Argentines mixed on Shoah

A majority of Argentines say the Holocaust should be remembered, according to a new survey, but few can answer basic questions about it.

In the survey, conducted for the American Jewish Committee and the Argentine Israelite Mutual Aid Association by Gallup Argentina, 62 percent called it "essential" that "all Argentines know about the Nazi extermination of the Jews."

Yet only one-quarter correctly answered any one of four basic questions about the Holocaust.

Tycoon's offices raided again

Moscow officials raided the media company owned by Russian Jewish leader Vladimir Goussinsky.

In the second such raid since May, prosecutors searched for financial records, particularly those connected with the relationship between Goussinsky's Media-Most empire and Gazprom, Russia's gas monopoly, which allegedly lent \$200 million to Goussinsky.

If Gazprom calls in the debt, it could bring Goussinsky's media empire to bankruptcy.

VW cans 'chutzpah' campaign

Volkswagen discontinued a new advertising campaign that used the Yiddish word "chutzpah" after complaints from the Anti-Defamation League.

The advertisements for the German car company's Beetle, which displayed the car with the slogan, "It's got chutzpah!" appeared on buses in New York City.

Volkswagen, founded by the Nazis, employed Jewish slave laborers during World War II.

German Jew blasts Iran

The leader of Berlin's Jewish community attacked Iran's sentencing of 10 Jews on charges of spying for Israel.

Andreas Nachama called on the German government to appeal to the visiting president of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, for their release.

"Justice has been misused for political goals, which harms human rights," Nachama told Reuters.

Treaty could lead to Nazi trial

Latvia approved an extradition treaty with Australia.

The move could pave the way for bringing suspected Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs back to Latvia for trial. Australia approved the treaty last week.

Kalejs allegedly served as an officer in Latvia's notorious Arajs Kommando unit, which is held responsible for the deaths of some 100,000 civilians, including 30,000 Jews, between 1941 and 1943.

Syrian Jewish immigrants may soon be on the road to full U.S. citizenship

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — After three years at New York's Yeshiva University, Marko Alsaygh received a letter explaining that he would lose \$4,000 annually in financial aid because he didn't have a green card.

Now Alsaygh, a 22-year-old Syrian immigrant living in Brooklyn, is one step closer to obtaining his residence and work permit — a necessary step on the road to citizenship — as a result of legislation in Congress. On Tuesday, the U.S. House of Representatives passed overwhelmingly by voice vote a bill that would grant permanent resident status to up to 2,400 Syrian Jews who came to the United States in the early 1990s.

The immigrants have long enjoyed asylum status, which allows them to work and travel, but with some limitations.

In New York State, where an overwhelming number of these immigrants live, individuals who have asylum status, like the Syrian Jews, cannot work as doctors, dentists or pharmacists, said Maurice Hedaya, the treasurer of the Sephardic Voters League in Brooklyn.

Even those legally qualified for jobs can face trouble.

"I've heard stories that employees will look" at the work papers that Syrians and others with asylum status have and say, "This isn't a green card," said Roberta Herche, the assistant executive vice president for immigrant services at the New York Association for New Americans.

In addition, the waiting exerts a psychological toll on this largely observant community.

"No one wants to feel in limbo," said Rachel Zelon, the associate executive vice president for program operations for the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in New York.

The asylum status stems from an agreement made between the U.S. government and Syrian President Hafez Assad in 1992.

After several years of lobbying, Assad allowed the immigrants to come to the United States in 1992, but only if they were designated as tourists, rather than refugees.

Assad didn't want to admit that Syria was persecuting Jews — even though "they were really refugees in the true sense of the word because they were living in a fishbowl surrounded by the Syrian security police," said Mark Handelman, executive vice president of NYANA. Once in the United States, the immigrants received asylum status, which qualified them to apply for green cards under a quota system that limits acceptances to 10,000 a year.

Under the quota system, about 30 percent of the approximately 4,000 Syrian Jews have received green cards, which in turn allows them to apply for citizenship, according to Hedaya. Some of the immigrants have since moved to Israel.

The experience of Alsaygh, who immigrated to the United States in 1994, suggests that bureaucracy may be part of the problem. His father and his brother have received their green cards from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, but he and his mother have not.

Hedaya said he first realized the scope of the problem a few years ago, when he attended prayer services in Brooklyn and learned that many of the worshipers hadn't received green cards.

With the help of other Jewish activists, Hedaya organized a letter-writing campaign and meetings with U.S. legislators, including Sen. Charles Schumer and Rep. Anthony Weiner, both Democrats from New York.

"We spoke to scores of people," he said.

The measure was introduced in the U.S. House by Rep. Rick Lazio (R-N.Y.), a candidate for U.S. senator from New York, and co-sponsored by several other members of Congress from New York.

A similar measure is expected to be introduced in the Senate soon.

If the bill is eventually signed into law, it "would mean a lot," said Alsaygh, a senior at Y.U. who hopes to attend medical school. "It's the beginning of achieving my goal as opposed to getting stuck in the middle of nowhere." □

NEWS ANALYSIS

On the table: How to carve up Israel's 'united eternal capital'

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Prime Minister Ehud Barak engages this week in Middle East summitry, there is one issue on which he can afford to make the fewest concessions: Jerusalem.

Struggling to hold together the vestiges of his governing majority before leaving for Camp David on Monday, Barak assured the nation on the eve of his departure that Jerusalem would remain undivided under Israeli sovereignty in any peace treaty with the Palestinians. This, the premier declared in a live television appearance, was one of his guiding principles as he entered the historic and crucial negotiations.

Meanwhile, however, Israeli politicians and pundits were busily swapping what they considered reliable information about the concessions Barak is ready to make regarding Jerusalem and other key issues. As evidence, they pointed to the premier's reluctance to share his "red lines" — or the limits of his negotiating stance — with the leader of fervently Orthodox Shas Party.

Along with Shas officials, Interior Minister Natan Sharansky of the Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party has complained that Barak has refused to share his negotiating plans with his coalition partners. On Sunday, Shas, Yisrael Ba'Aliyah and the National Religious Party resigned from the government.

Barak's office, however, maintained that, along with his Jerusalem stance, the premier made his other red lines abundantly clear during his televised address Sunday:

- No return to the borders that existed prior to the 1967 Six-Day War;
- No foreign army inside the West Bank;
- The majority of Jewish settlers would live under Israeli sovereignty;
- No acceptance by Israel of legal or moral responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem.

Barak himself told the nation during the address that it would be prejudicial to the national interest for him to go into detail on any of the key points, beyond the carefully chosen words he had used.

Specifically, he declined to tell reporters whether he is ready to agree to Muslim and Christian control of their holy sites within the walls of Jerusalem's Old City. However, a senior Israeli official presenting Barak's negotiating stance did say that Barak would ensure that the Palestinians allow complete access to any Jewish holy places that may fall inside a future Palestinian state.

When Barak arrived Tuesday at Camp David, he was seriously weakened politically. A day earlier, he survived a no-confidence motion in the Knesset — but only barely.

Barak delayed his departure for the United States by several hours to participate in the Knesset session, during which the opposition Likud Party failed to muster the 61 votes needed to topple Barak's government. However, the opposition did receive more votes than the government. The final tally was 54 in favor of the no-confidence motion, 52 against and seven abstentions.

Commentators said the resignations Sunday of the three coalition parties resulted from their unease over being associated with the still-unknown outcome of Camp David.

Jerusalem and the refugee issue are the two most intractable issues facing the two sides at the summit.

The fact that there will be some changes, though relatively small ones, in the pre-1967 lines is taken in Israel as a given. If Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat sticks to his public demand for a return to the 1967 boundaries, there will be no agreement.

It is also widely believed that the two sides have agreed to a demilitarized Palestinian state and the stationing of Israeli troops at selected key points on the Jordan River.

Similarly, it is also believed that Israel will be able to annex three settlement blocs close to the old border — although the Palestinians are said to be demanding compensatory slices of Israeli territory alongside the Gaza Strip.

This annexation was originally proposed in the "Beilin-Abu Mazen" agreement, an informal accord negotiated during 1995 between Yossi Beilin, now Barak's justice minister, and Abu Mazen, Arafat's second-in-command.

On Jerusalem, the Beilin-Abu Mazen accord envisaged a Palestinian capital, to be called "al-Quds" — or "holy city," the Arabic name for Jerusalem — alongside the city's present boundaries. Those boundaries do not embrace important Palestinian suburbs such as Abu Dis, Azariya and a-Ram. These areas, Beilin and Abu Mazen believed, could develop into a credible Palestinian capital.

The Palestinian position on the eve of the summit is that Beilin-Abu Mazen is deficient.

They insist on control of the Temple Mount and the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. They also insist on control of Palestinian areas within Jerusalem that are close to the Old City walls — such as Sheik Jarrah, the American Colony and Wadi Joz.

Informed Israeli observers said this week that while the question of sovereignty and flags over the Temple Mount is capable of resolution — especially since Jewish religious law forbids entry onto the mount — the question of sovereignty over the Palestinian areas within the city could prevent an agreement from being reached.

These Israeli observers contend that even though the Palestinians are reluctant to admit it, they will concede that the Israeli areas in post-1967 eastern Jerusalem are there to stay — as part of Israel. This applies to Pisgat Ze'ev, Neveh Ya'acov, Ramat Shafat, Ramot, French Hill, Ramot Eshkol, Gilo and — the scene of the most recent controversy — Har Homa. It applies, too, to the large settlements just beyond Jerusalem: Ma'aleh Adumim to the east, Beit El to the north and the Gush Etzion bloc to the south.

The Palestinians must realize, say these observers, that no Israeli government could turn over any of these areas and hope to survive politically.

But the Palestinian negotiators are insisting that the Palestinian people live under their own sovereignty — and this includes not only the 500,000 Palestinians living in the Greater Jerusalem area, but also the 180,000 who live within the present city limits.

But to carve up the city would flatly contradict Barak's pledge of a "united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty."

Hence the intractability of the problem, despite the two sides' purported pre-summit concessions.

A solution will require further flexibility and ingenuity if the sides are to emerge reasonably satisfied — and with their respective declarations of allegiance to the Holy City intact. □