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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Source: World to press Arabs

President Clinton and other world leaders are expected to press Arab states in the next 48 hours to encourage Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat to show greater flexibility on Jerusalem, according to an Israeli source.

The source spoke after Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's meeting with Clinton in New York. [Page 1]

Clinton, Barak address summit

President Clinton told world leaders attending the U.N. Millennium Summit that Israel and the Palestinian Authority "need your support now more than ever to take the hard risks for peace."

Clinton also warned that the chance for reaching a final peace accord "is fleeting and about to pass. There is not a moment to lose."

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak asked the more than 150 world leaders gathered at the United Nations to play an active role in the Middle East peace process.

Barak called on U.N. member states to encourage reconciliation and oppose a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood. [Page 1]

Court affirms denaturalization

A U.S. appeals court ruled that a 79-year-old man should be stripped of his U.S. citizenship because he helped Nazis find Jews during World War II.

The case against Algimantas Dailide was brought by the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, which charged that he served in the Saugumas, the Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian security police.

Dailide, who immigrated from Lithuania 50 years ago, previously worked in the real estate business in a Cleveland suburb and now lives in Gulfport, Fla. His lawyer said he would likely appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Palestinian gets life in jail

An Israeli court on Wednesday sentenced a Palestinian man to two life sentences plus five years for the brutal murder of two Israeli women three years ago. The women, both in their early 20s, were attacked and stabbed to death while hiking in the Judean desert.

Barak takes his case for peace to world body

By Michael J. Jordan

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) — Amid a last-ditch push to salvage his peace efforts between Israel and the Palestinians, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak this week asked a unique gathering of world leaders here to play an active role in the Middle East peace process.

Speaking to more than 150 heads of state at the U.N. Millennium Summit on Wednesday, Barak said Israel is prepared to accept less than 100 percent "of its dreams."

Israel has demonstrated a willingness to "make painful decisions for the sake of peace," he said, citing as examples the negotiations with Syria and the Palestinians and the complete withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Barak called on U.N. member states to encourage reconciliation and discourage or oppose any unilateral measures — a reference to Sept. 13, when Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat has threatened to declare statehood.

His public comments came as he engaged in some private diplomacy as well. His U.N. speech came after meetings with Cuban President Fidel Castro, Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid and South African President Thabo Mbeki, and preceded consultations with President Clinton and French President Jacques Chirac.

Politically embattled at home, Barak's visit to the United States is being seen as his last attempt to achieve a peace deal following the collapse of the Camp David summit in July.

The summit failed after the two sides could not agree on the future of Jerusalem.

Clinton met Wednesday afternoon separately with Barak and Arafat, apparently in an effort to see if there was enough movement to warrant future negotiations.

Following Clinton's meeting with Barak, the Israeli side said it expected the U.S. president and other world leaders to press Arab states in the next 48 hours to encourage Arafat to show greater flexibility on Jerusalem.

In his six-minute speech to the assembled dignitaries, Barak singled out by name Arafat, who was seated in the audience behind a placard bearing the name "Palestine."

"We are at the Rubicon, and neither of us can cross it alone," Barak said in his measured and staccato English.

"History will judge what we do in the next days and weeks: Were we courageous and wise enough to guide our region across the deep river of mistrust, into a new land of reconciliation or did we shrink back at the water's edge, resigned to lie in wait for the rising tide of bloodshed and grief?"

Barak, following the premier of Belize to the podium, had opened his speech by reciting, in Hebrew and in English, the famous biblical "beat their swords into ploughshares" quote from the prophet Micah.

Barak went on to state both the centrality of Jerusalem in the history and faith of the Jewish people, and its spiritual and emotional connection to other peoples of the world.

"Jerusalem, the eternal capital of Israel, now calls for a peace of honor, of courage, and of brotherhood," said the Israeli premier.

"We recognize that Jerusalem is also sacred to Muslims and Christians the world over, and cherished by our Palestinian neighbors.

"A true peace will reflect all these bonds. Jerusalem will remain united and open to all who love her."

Throughout Barak's speech, Arafat looked on impassively.

In Arafat's speech a short while later, the Palestinian Authority president said: "We

MIDEAST FOCUS

Attorney general criticizes rabbi

Israel's attorney general criticized the spiritual leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party for recent remarks he made about Holocaust victims. But Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein said Rabbi Ovadia Yosef cannot be prosecuted for the comments.

Rubinstein also said Yosef's remarks that the 6 million who perished in the Holocaust were the reincarnated souls of sinners did not befit a figure of Yosef's stature.

Shas officials responded that Rubinstein, who is religiously observant, had joined the ranks of those persecuting Israel's fervently Orthodox community.

Legislators threaten El Al boycott

Israeli legislators representing the fervently Orthodox community threatened a boycott of the national airline, El Al, if plans go ahead to allow flights on the Jewish Sabbath.

The threats came after Transportation Minister Amnon Lipkin-Shahak said El Al could begin Sabbath flights even before the company is privatized.

Shahak said the airline had to provide services comparable to those offered by other airlines in order to survive.

Shin Bet may name spokesman

In an effort to improve its public image, Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service is considering appointing an official spokesman and public relations consultant.

Until now, the leader of the Shin Bet has given background briefings to select journalists, but there was no official public spokesman for the organization.

Israel ends Bezek's monopoly

Israel ended its state telephone company's monopoly on domestic and Internet service.

The move comes just months before the government plans to divest its stake in the \$5 billion firm.

remain committed to our national rights over East Jerusalem, capital of our state and shelter of our sacred sites, as well as our rights on the Christian and Islamic holy sites."

Arafat countered that his people, too, had made concessions, agreeing to establish a state "on less than a quarter of the historical territory of Palestine."

He added: "We have made a strategic decision committing ourselves to the peace process, offering significant and painful concessions in order to arrive at a reasonable compromise acceptable to both sides."

Meanwhile, the historic gathering of world leaders provided a golden opportunity for activists to promote their cause celebres outside.

Among the Jewish protesters were members of Americans for a Safe Israel and followers of the late, militantly anti-Arab leader Meir Kahane.

During the afternoon, their ranks swelled from half a dozen just before Barak addressed the United Nations, to several dozen after. But they were assigned, ironically, a spot adjacent to the Communist Party of Iran. So, to be heard over the Iranian communists, the Kahanists were forced to scream their "Barak is a Traitor!" and "Palestine Never!" slogans.

A few sections down, Bob Kunst had no need to yell.

The president of Shalom International of Miami was there solo, sandwiched between the Free Tibet movement and a group of angry Korean doctors.

But Kunst was busy giving interview after interview to the American and foreign media drawn to his signs, which read "No More Nazism" and "Remember the Holocaust."

His target was Poland and its government's consent for a disco and a shopping center near Auschwitz.

"I have to schlep all the way from Miami Beach because nobody's got the cojones to speak out on this," said Kunst, who noted one exception, AMCHA — The Coalition for Jewish Concerns, which had recently demonstrated outside the Polish consulate in New York.

"Where is Israel on this one, where are the American Jewish leaders?" he said "Why are they allowing dancing on Jewish graves?" □

Missing Iranian Jewish teens may be alive in Tehran prison

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — As American Jews and various governments lobby Iran to release the Iran 10, a revelation has emerged: There may be more Jewish prisoners.

Seven years ago or so, 11 Iranian Jewish teen-agers were arrested, allegedly for trying to leave Iran illegally.

They were reportedly found in border areas, perhaps indicating they were on their way out, said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

After a time, nothing was heard about them again, and the families presumed they had been executed.

However, Hoenlein, who is in steady contact with sources within Iran, said a recently released prisoner from a Tehran jail revealed that he had spotted several of the missing boys.

They would now be in their mid- to late-20s.

The disappearances were not raised with the Iranian authorities earlier, said Hoenlein, because Jewish activists were focused on freeing 10 Iranian Jews who have been imprisoned for more than 18 months on charges of spying for Israel.

Yet Hoenlein confirmed that he broached the subject last week during a face-to-face discussion with Mehdi Kharroubi, the speaker of Iran's Parliament. Hoenlein met with Kharroubi at an event in New York hosted by the Iranian American Council.

Kharroubi told Hoenlein that he "was unaware of the case, but he was very receptive to helping."

"He took down the information," Hoenlein said, "and at the end of the evening, came up to me and said he would follow up on it." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Neo-Nazis seek Shoah Day permit

Some neo-Nazis are seeking permission to demonstrate next January at the site of Germany's planned national Holocaust memorial in Berlin.

The neo-Nazis want to demonstrate on Jan. 27, the anniversary of the Auschwitz death camp's liberation, which is when Germany holds its annual memorial day for the victims of Nazism.

School creates Holocaust chair

A small, church-affiliated institution near Los Angeles added to its growing reputation as a center for Holocaust studies by establishing a permanent chair in Holocaust Education.

The first holder of the chair at Chapman University is Prof. Marilyn Harran.

An expert on the Protestant Reformation, Harran has been instrumental in creating the university's Holocaust program.

Neo-Nazis protest in Germany

Some 400 neo-Nazis recently marched through a German city to protest a decision to close a restaurant advertised on the Internet as a meeting place for extremists.

About 150 protesters held a counterdemonstration and threw stones at the neo-Nazis.

The proposed closing of the restaurant comes as Germany intensifies its crackdown on extremist groups in the wake of several violent incidents.

Meanwhile, four people were injured and 24 arrested in a Moscow sports stadium when some spectators watching a big-screen soccer broadcast made Nazi-style salutes, ripped up seats and threw them at police.

Banks ban extremist accounts

Two of the Swiss banks involved in last year's \$1.25 billion settlement with Holocaust survivors said they would not accept accounts from a German extremist political party.

But the Swiss Bankers Association said it would not issue a warning to its members not to accept accounts from the National Democratic Party.

The comments came amid rumors that the party may transfer some money to Switzerland because of German government efforts to declare the party illegal.

Moroccan Jewry exhibit to open

An exhibit on the 2,000-year-old history of Moroccan Jewry will open later this month at the Jewish Museum in New York. More than 180 objects, including paintings, jewelry and costumes, will be on display in "Morocco: Jews and Art in a Muslim Land," which will show from Sept. 24 to Feb. 11.

U.S. report on religious freedom offers criticism, praise for Israel

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A new State Department report accuses Israel of discriminatory practices against non-Jewish groups.

The second annual report on international religious freedom, released Tuesday, lists Israel among countries whose governments "implemented laws or regulations that favor certain religions and place others at a disadvantage."

At the same time, the report — mandated by the International Religious Freedom Act passed by Congress in 1998 — praises the Jewish state for improvements with respect to religious freedom.

Most non-Jewish citizens in Israel are Arabs, and they are subject to various forms of discrimination, the report charges. The Israeli government does not provide Israeli Arabs, who make up 20 percent of the population, with the same quality of education, housing, employment opportunities and social services as Jews. Government spending and financial support are proportionally lower in predominantly non-Jewish areas than in Jewish areas.

But, the report notes, "it is not clear that whatever discrepancies exist in the treatment of various communities in Israeli society are based on religion per se."

Relations between different religious groups often are strained, both between Jews and non-Jews, as well as among the different branches of Judaism, the report says.

The report says that evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses and Reform and Conservative Jews suffered some incidents of harassment, threats and vandalism against their facilities, reportedly by fervently Orthodox Jewish groups. Members of these groups have complained in the past that police have been slow to investigate such incidents.

Other "instances of ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups verbally or physically harassing Jewish citizens for 'immodest dress' or other violations of their interpretation of religious law are not uncommon," the report said.

The number of incidents increased from July 1999 through June 2000, the period covered by the report. But the report did not say by how much.

At the same time, the U.S. report says there were improvements in religious freedom in Israel.

It cites the March 2000 visit of the pope for contributing to increased religious tolerance in Israel.

In that same month, the High Court of Justice ruled that the government could neither allocate land on the basis of religion or nationality. The case involved the quasi-governmental Jewish Agency for Israel, whose bylaws prohibit the sale or lease of land to non-Jews — although the report incorrectly linked the case to the Jewish National Fund.

In June 2000, the Israeli government proposed a plan to redress spending for non-Jewish areas, which has been substantially below that in predominantly Jewish areas. Also, harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses declined in 2000.

As part of the mandate to investigate religious freedoms worldwide, Robert Seiple, the U.S. ambassador for international religious freedom, visited Israel in December 1999 and met with government officials and religious leaders to discuss religious freedom issues, including allegations of persecution of Christians, intrareligious conflicts within the Jewish community and concerns of the Islamic community.

The State Department report, which covers 194 countries, also noted:

- The Iranian government continued to abuse the religious freedom of minority groups, including Jews. At the trial this year of 10 Jewish defendants, ultimately convicted and sentenced to prison terms ranging from four to 13 years on charges of spying, the Revolutionary Court "deprived the accused of almost all legitimate means of defense, and its conduct worsened societal attitudes toward the Jewish community."

- The number of Jews leaving Russia for economic reasons and fear of persecution more than doubled in 1999. Jews continue to encounter societal discrimination, and the report suggested a sustained pattern of intensified anti-Semitism. □

Biblical prohibition on farming land makes its way into modern politics

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Sephardi chief rabbi was quaking with emotion.

In a meeting with President Moshe Katsav on Monday, Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron said, "I don't want to resign, but I am afraid they will excommunicate me."

The chief rabbi was explaining why he was buckling to pressure from the fervently Orthodox, or haredi, community regarding an issue that springs from the Torah.

At issue were the biblical injunctions regarding the laws of shmita, which holds that every seven years farmers in Israel must allow the land to lie fallow for an entire year.

The injunctions raise obvious economic problems for religious farmers, who find themselves unemployed for a year. Those who observe the laws of shmita, which will be in effect when the new Hebrew year, 5761, begins later this month, refrain from buying local agricultural products. For years, the issue has long been the subject of religious controversy.

The haredi rabbis had threatened to revoke the kashrut certificates of all groceries, restaurants and hotels that sold any agricultural products grown during the sabbatical year. The move could have cost farmers \$5 billion.

Fervently Orthodox Ashkenazi rabbis follow the Torah's shmita regulations to the letter.

Sephardi rabbis, as well as Zionist Ashkenazi rabbis, circumvent the rule by using a "sale permit" under which farmers sell their land symbolically to a non-Jew for the sabbatical year. The move allows the farmers to continue cultivating the land — and customers to continue purchasing agricultural products.

This year, the two chief rabbis, as well as the spiritual leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, ruled that farmers could indeed use the "sale permit" and continue their work during the coming sabbatical year. Their ruling conflicted with that of the leading authority in the fervently Orthodox Ashkenazi world, Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv.

When Bakshi-Doron gave farmers the green light to go ahead and work during the sabbatical year, the haredi newspaper Yated Ne'eman, leaked threats that he would be excommunicated. He and his family were also threatened with ostracism, which would have meant that no member of the haredi community could have contact with them.

The threats prompted Bakshi-Doron to meet with Katsav.

"This is a reality I cannot face," Bakshi-Doron said. "Neither I nor my family.

"Very important and dear-to-me elements have ruled against me," he said. "I am afraid of excommunication. I know what excommunication means, and I am afraid of it. I live within my people, and I simply cannot live with such excommunication."

Elyashiv had also threatened that Bakshi-Doron would no longer be recognized as a rabbi if he continued to support the "sale permit" ruling.

Bakshi-Doron felt he had no choice. Despite open support from Katsav — as well as from Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who called Bakshi-Doron from New York this week — the Sephardi chief rabbi came out with a statement that gave the literal biblical

interpretation of the haredi rabbis preference over the "sale permit" ruling. His statement was perceived as a total surrender to the haredi community.

"This is yet another expression of an ongoing controversy between the haredi and Zionist rabbis," said legislator Shaul Yahalom, a member of the National Religious Party. "The haredim are imposing themselves on the community." □

Civil rights group tries to sue Aryan Nations into bankruptcy

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Using a strategy developed together with the Anti-Defamation League, a civil rights organization is attempting to bankrupt the Idaho-based hate group called the Aryan Nations.

In a civil case heard last week in Kootenai County, the Southern Poverty Law Center is arguing that the white supremacist group should be held responsible for a 1998 incident in which a teen-ager and his mother were chased down and beaten outside the Aryan Nations' 20-acre compound.

Two men were sentenced to prison in the attack.

A U.S. judge ruled this week that the group was negligent in the attack. The ruling paves the way for a jury to assess punitive damages in the case.

If the Southern Poverty Law Center has its way, the hate group — which calls non-whites "mud people" and Jews "children of Satan" — would be bankrupted and forced to cede control of its compound.

According to the ADL, Aryan Nations was founded in the mid-1970s and has a following of several hundred people, including Buford Furrow Jr., who opened fire on a Jewish community center in Los Angeles last summer.

The tactic of suing hate groups for civil damages debuted in 1990, when the ADL and Southern Poverty Law Center successfully sued hatemonger Tom Metzger, of California, for inciting the 1988 murder of Mulugeta Seraw, an Ethiopian immigrant. An Oregon jury rendered a \$12.5 million judgment against Metzger.

That case "established the principle that one way to deal with hatemongers is to deal with them civilly and in the pocketbook, making them responsible for their words," said Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director.

The ADL is not involved with the current lawsuit, but has expressed its willingness to help, Foxman said.

The tactic is part of a larger trend of civil lawsuits in areas previously addressed solely in criminal courts. One of the most famous examples of this trend was when the families of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman successfully sued O.J. Simpson for damages after he was acquitted of murder in a criminal court.

"It's a delicate strategy," Foxman said. "Certainly the fact that it's out there is good" and means some hatemongers "will think twice" before inciting violence.

Staunch defenders of the First Amendment have criticized this strategy, saying it infringes on the right to free speech, but "we've never been 100 percenters," Foxman said.

"There are times when society should enter in to restrain or curb" hateful and inciting language. □