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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Some of 'Iran 10' may be freed

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Report: Clinton used secret plan

President Clinton used a "secret plan" drawn up in 1995 between top Israeli and Palestinian officials as a basis for his negotiations at Camp David, according to *Newsweek* magazine.

The magazine published what it calls the complete text of the plan agreed to by Yossi Beilin, then a top aide to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and Abu Mazen, Yasser Arafat's deputy.

Rabin was assassinated before he had a chance to read the plan, which is available at www.msnbc.com/news/461335.asp.

Meanwhile, Arafat told President Clinton at the July summit that he feared assassination if he dropped his demand that the Palestinians control all of eastern Jerusalem, according to a seven-part series of articles published in the Palestinian Authority's official newspaper.

The *New York Times* reported that the articles, written by an Arafat confidant who attended the summit, also claim that the Palestinians believed that U.S. officials were biased in favor of Israel.

Pittsburgh man ruled competent

A man accused of killing five minorities, including one Jewish woman, near Pittsburgh in April was ruled competent last Friday to stand trial.

Anti-psychotic drugs and counseling improved the condition of Richard Scott Baumhammers, his psychiatrist said.

Nazareth controversy flares up

Christian leaders in the Holy Land reportedly launched a campaign to protest Israel's role in the construction of a mosque in the Israeli town of Nazareth.

After two years of tensions, Israel brokered a compromise agreement that would allow a mosque smaller than one originally planned to be built in the town revered by Christians as the boyhood home of Jesus.

Israeli minister tries to heal bitter religious-secular strife

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's minister in charge of religious-secular issues has weighed in with a set of ideas aimed at ending a strident debate on the relationship between religion and state.

The proposals Rabbi Michael Melchior introduced Sunday came after Prime Minister Ehud Barak introduced a set of proposals earlier this month intended to usher in an era of secular reforms.

One of Melchior's proposals attempts to solve the ongoing rift over the acceptance of conversions performed in Israel by the Reform and Conservative movements, while another would shorten the Israeli work week.

It was not immediately clear whether Melchior's proposals were made in an effort to soften the impact of the premier's controversial ideas. Dubbed by the press a "secular revolution," the "civic agenda" that Barak proposed was criticized by some in the Orthodox community as an attempt by the premier to wreak revenge on the religious parties that dropped out of his coalition on the eve of July's Camp David summit.

On the other side of the spectrum, secular Israelis have long been maintaining that limits need to be set on the power of the religious parties.

During a visit to New York last week, Barak defended his proposals — which include abolishing the Ministry of Religious Affairs and allowing El Al to begin flying on the Jewish Sabbath — and said he "never initiated a secular revolution."

Instead, he added, "We intend to separate religion from politics."

A poll published in the *Jerusalem Post* last Friday showed that 64 percent of Israelis support lifting the ban on Shabbat flights while 34 percent object.

There was also strong support for another Barak proposal, allowing public transportation on Saturdays. But Israelis were more split on other issues.

Some 53 percent said they support opening stores and malls on Shabbat, compared with the 45 percent who were opposed. A sweeping majority of observant Jews opposed Barak's proposals across the boards.

Speaking at a news conference Sunday in the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem, Melchior criticized certain elements of Barak's plan — such as allowing El Al to fly on Saturdays. But, he said, he believed his proposals — aimed at building a consensus and creating a "completely new modus vivendi for Israeli society" on religion and state — would elicit Barak's support.

Melchior, who as minister for Israeli society and world Jewish communities has tackled religious-secular issues for the Barak government, also said several political parties support his proposals.

According to Melchior, an internal poll conducted by the Prime Minister's Office indicated that 83 percent of Israelis believe religious-secular tensions are an existential threat to Israel. Some of the main proposals put forward by Melchior include:

- Israel will officially adopt a five-day work week, giving the nation a day off on Saturdays as well as Sundays — a move aimed at enabling Israelis to avoid doing shopping and other weekend chores on the Sabbath;

- Cultural activities, entertainment and sports facilities will be open on Saturdays, but all nonvital commercial and business activity will be closed;

- Organized professional sports activities will be moved from Saturday to Sunday;

- Public transportation lines will be launched on Saturdays in line with the needs of each local population;

MIDEAST FOCUS

Gaza clashes erupt after protest

Seven Palestinian students and one Israeli soldier were wounded during clashes outside a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli officials barred Palestinian trucks from entering the Jewish state on Sunday after the violent clashes erupted at the Netzarim settlement.

Palestinian students began protests outside the settlement a day earlier to mark the 18th anniversary of the massacres of Palestinian refugees at the Sabra and Shatila camps in Lebanon by pro-Israel Christian Lebanese forces.

In Lebanon, Palestinian refugees marked the anniversary with chants of "Death to Israel."

Rallies back refugee return

Peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will be impossible if Palestinian refugees are not allowed to return to homes they abandoned during Israel's 1948 War of Independence, speakers said at a demonstration Saturday outside the White House.

That same day, some 100 Palestinian youths hurled stones at Israeli soldiers during similar demonstrations in the West Bank town of Bethlehem.

Five hurt in Tel Aviv explosion

At least five people were hurt in a Tel Aviv explosion that was believed to be a criminal, not terrorist, act.

One of the victims of Sunday's attack is in serious condition, and four others are in moderate condition.

Anthem proposal creates furor

Israeli nationalists are criticizing a proposal by a retired Supreme Court justice that Israel should designate a "national song" to encourage Israeli Arabs to celebrate the country's Independence Day.

Miriam Ben-Porat made her comments Sept. 14 in Jerusalem during a convocation ceremony of Reform rabbis.



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- Israel will change the Law of Return so that the non-Jewish grandchildren of Jews will not automatically be entitled to citizenship;
- Clauses stating a citizen's nationality and religion will be eliminated from identity cards;
- A framework for civil marriages will be initiated; and
- New efforts will be made to draw up a national constitution.

Melchior said the proposals would only work if they are accepted as a single unit, since they include ideas to balance the conflicting demands of both sides of the religious-secular debate.

However, shortly after the report was announced, Yossi Sarid, leader of the secular Meretz Party, said he would object to any attempt to shut down shopping centers on Shabbat. Itsik Sudri, spokesman for the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, said he had not yet seen the package, but added that Shas would object to anything that threatens the Jewish character of the country.

The proposal to remove the nationality clause from identity cards was made in an effort to solve the dispute over conversions.

If implemented, said Melchior, it could lead the Conservative and Reform movements to rescind their petitions from the Supreme Court since the state would no longer be responsible for defining who is a Jew.

Changing the Law of Return is designed to ensure that non-Jews with absolutely no connection to the Jewish people or Israel would not be automatically granted citizenship. □

Jewish leader promises to hold Austria's feet to fire on restitution

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — In February, Austria announced plans to rapidly resolve all Holocaust restitution claims against it.

Vienna's enthusiasm for settling these claims came days after the European Union imposed sanctions against Austria for including a far-right party in its new government.

Several American Jewish leaders rejected the about-face, charging it was a naked attempt to defuse criticism of Austria's lurch rightward.

With the E.U. announcement last week that it has lifted sanctions against Austria, some wonder whether the wheels of restitution will, coincidentally, grind to a halt.

The president of Austria's 6,500 Jews, for one, intends to keep Austrian feet to the fire. Ariel Muzikant was in Washington last week for the fourth round of negotiations among representatives of Jewish groups and the Austrian and U.S. governments.

Austria is notorious for its failure to fully face up to its Nazi past. But in May, months after a similar settlement by Germany, Austria agreed to pay \$395 million to roughly 150,000 former slave and forced laborers.

That is pocket change compared with what negotiators for victims are pursuing now: "tens of billions of dollars" for the property stolen from Austrian Jewry, which numbered 200,000 before World War II, said Muzikant. Austria has reportedly countered with an offer of \$150 million. "It's a joke," said Muzikant, "but I'm not going to break my head over it, if the other side's being ridiculous."

In addition, Austria is reportedly attempting to separate the property restitution issue from compensation for slave and forced laborers, and to secure "legal closure" to prevent any further claims against Austria.

It seems that Austrian industry is nervously looking on, fearing it will be targeted for those firms that may also have profited from forced labor. Neither effort will succeed, said Muzikant. Negotiators want the two issues to remain linked so Austria cannot place one restitution deal under its belt, then drag its heels on the second.

It's unclear what percentage of pro-restitution Austrians are driven by guilt, a sense of moral obligation — and how many are simply fed up with being pressed on the issue, said Muzikant.

In any event, Muzikant remains optimistic that progress will continue.

"Don't forget," he said, "for 55 years there wasn't even an offer." □

JEWISH WORLD

Some of 'Iran 10' may be freed, says Iranian Jewish lawmaker

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Some of the 10 Iranian Jews sentenced to jail terms for spying for Israel may be freed and others may have their sentences reduced, according to the Jewish community's official representative in the Iranian Parliament.

Speaking in Persian to some 400 Iranian Americans in Los Angeles during Saturday morning services at the Eretz Cultural Center, Maurice Motamed said the trial had shattered the dignity and respect of Iran's 25,000 Jews and had increased Jewish emigration from the Islamic Republic.

Motamed's 10-day visit is part of Iran's attempt to persuade the American government to lift economic sanctions against Iran, particularly as regards Iran's oil resources, sources told JTA.

Motamed said the lifting of such sanctions would benefit Iran, and by extension, the country's Jewish community, these sources said, referring to private conversations they had with Motamed.

Tehran apparently believes that if the Iranian Jewish community could be persuaded to lobby for the lifting of sanctions, it would persuade the general American Jewish community to do likewise. The broader community, in turn, would convince the White House and Congress.

While the scenario may appear simplistic and unrealistic, the Iranian government's belief in unlimited Jewish clout in Washington may prove helpful to the Jewish community in Iran, one source commented.

A report that Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi will visit Los Angeles and meet privately in the coming days with local Jewish leaders in the Iranian-American community lends some credence to this understanding of Tehran's intentions.

After services Saturday, several congregants said they doubted Motamed was able to speak freely about conditions in Iran.

During his visit, Motamed was reunited with his mother and four sisters, all of whom live in Los Angeles. He also met privately with leaders of the U.S. Iranian Jewish community.

Motamed, who painted a generally sympathetic picture of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in his address Saturday, also said he had asked U.S. Jewish leaders in New York not to press Iran to divulge what happened to 11 Jewish teen-agers arrested some six years ago while trying to cross the border into Pakistan until the appeals in the "Iran 10" case are resolved.

The 10 were sentenced in July to terms of four to 13 years. Three other Jews were acquitted of the charges.

A judiciary panel hearing the appeals of the prisoners has delayed its decision, which was slated for early September.

Motamed, who chose his words carefully Saturday, seemed to assert the prisoners' innocence.

"In our presence of 2,700 years in Iran, Jews have never betrayed Iran, and our roots are so deep that they cannot be cut off," said Motamed, a tall, elegant man of 55.

Jewish emigration is also being increased by the government's refusal to employ Jews and other religious minorities, Motamed said.

Motamed himself continues to work for the government as a civil engineer and urban planner — "But not everyone is as lucky as I am," he said.

After meeting with Khatami, the Jewish community in Iran has been successful in regaining controls over Jewish schools, Motamed said, and there are hopes that property confiscated from the Jewish community and individuals will eventually be restored.

Motamed also said he was trying to facilitate travel to Iran for Iranian Jews now living abroad, but the suggestion was received coolly by Pooya Dayanim, spokesman for the Council of Iranian American Jewish Organizations, which sponsored Motamed's appearance at Saturday's service.

"I do not think we should encourage travel as long as Iran opposes Israel and the Middle East peace process," said Dayanim. □

Czechs OK Shoah money

Czech legislators approved a government proposal to donate \$7.3 million to a national fund that would compensate for property stolen during the Holocaust era.

The Endowment Fund for Holocaust Victims, established by the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities, will also be used to provide social and health care for Holocaust survivors and help in the reconstruction of Jewish memorials.

German demonstrators arrested

German police arrested 120 counter-demonstrators who attacked neo-Nazis rallying to try to save a club known as a meeting place for right-wing extremists. Local authorities withdrew the operating license of Club 88 as part of Germany's crackdown against neo-Nazism.

U.S. presses Austria on survivors

U.S. officials pressed Austria to use a planned \$150 million fund to make payments to all Austrian Holocaust survivors whose assets were looted by the Nazis.

During talks last Friday in Washington, Austrian negotiators said the fund should be used to pay only those survivors whose valuable apartment leases were plundered.

Supremacists may meet in Pa.

A white supremacist group that recently lost a \$6.3 million judgment may move its annual conference from Idaho to Pennsylvania. The Web master for Aryan Nations wrote on the group's Web site that if the group loses its Idaho compound as a result of the lawsuit, it would meet in rural Pennsylvania.

Lieberman walks on lighter side

On a late-night talk show, vice presidential candidate Sen. Joe Lieberman showed his lighter side when he was urged to come up with better campaign slogans. Lieberman offered a few ideas, some of which have been circulating as jokes on the Internet for weeks: "A matzah ball in every soup," "Gore-Lieberman. No bull. No pork," and "With malice toward none, but a little guilt for everyone."

Israeli researchers win prize

Two researchers from the Technion — Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa won a prize considered a good predictor of the Nobel prizes in medicine. Dr. Aaron Chiechanover and Dr. Avram Hershko are sharing the \$50,000 Lasker medical awards with Alexander Varshavsky of the California Institute of Technology for their work in showing a key way cells get rid of proteins.

NEWS ANALYSIS**Crowds outside Shas leader's cell may spell further trouble for Barak***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Ehud Barak is facing a huge and growing outdoor happening southeast of Tel Aviv.

Outside the walls of the prison where Aryeh Deri, the former leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, has begun serving his term, hundreds of Deri supporters have set up camp in an empty lot near the jail.

Each night, they are joined by thousands — sometimes more than 10,000 — sympathizers from around the country who come to pray, sing and otherwise demonstrate their demand that Deri be freed.

The fallen Shas leader and longtime senior Cabinet minister was sentenced last year to four years' imprisonment for accepting bribes and misappropriating state funds.

In July, the term was reduced to three years by the Supreme Court on appeal.

Earlier this month, Deri entered the Ma'asiyahu Prison in Ramla to begin serving his sentence.

"I have full confidence in the mayor of Ramla, Yoel Lavie, whom I know from army days, and in the Ramla police," Barak said last week.

"They will ensure that the law is observed."

While Barak brims with confidence, residents of the area adjacent to the jail are having a hard time sleeping, as nocturnal selichot services — special pre-Rosh Hashanah prayers — go on into the wee hours, relayed over a powerful address system so that those within the prison walls can join in the refrains with those outside.

Stalls and booths have also sprung up to sell items of temporal and spiritual sustenance to the crowds.

These — like the tents and awnings and makeshift synagogues that have sprung up — are all illegal structures.

Nor has a license been obtained for the open-ended mass gathering itself, which officials of the predominantly Sephardi Shas Party say will continue as long as Deri is behind bars.

Justice Minister Yossi Beilin has proposed that the police be ordered to dismantle the encampment and disperse the throngs — by force if necessary.

For the moment, Beilin's remains a lone voice, and the general feeling in government circles is that ordering in the police would trigger a violent confrontation.

But "Yeshivat Sha'agat Aryeh," or "The Lion's Roar Yeshiva," as the pro-Deri activists have named their encampment, could be much more than just a law-and-order problem for the local police — as well as for the government and the entire political establishment.

Remarkably, many of the demonstrators who flock to the site each night are not Shas supporters at all — nor are they even Sephardim.

Rather, they are Ashkenazi haredim, most of them Chasidim. They seem to regard Deri's cause as an all-haredi cause, worthy of their active support and involvement.

This has led observers of the Orthodox scene to suggest that the incarcerated Deri is becoming in jail a haredi leader on the

national level, transcending the traditional Sephardi-Ashkenazi divide. Of course it is still early, and the mass movement at the prison gates may yet dissipate.

The test of this new mass movement's resilience will come after Yom Kippur, when the annual selichot and penitence season is over and people want to spend the family festival of Sukkot back at their own homes.

Will the tent camp then be forsaken? Or soon after, when the weather begins to change and colder, wetter nights make roughing it in the open air less comfortable?

While the longer-term scenario is still uncertain, there can be no doubt that Barak's recently announced agenda aimed at secular voters has had the side effect of drawing in the crowds to Ramla and firing up the rabbis and Orthodox politicians who address the faithful outside the prison walls.

Barak is proposing a series of radical changes in the decades-long "status quo" arrangements governing state and religion in Israel.

His agenda includes civil marriages, at least for those whom the Orthodox establishment refuses to marry religiously. He wants public transportation on the Sabbath, as well as El Al flights on the day of rest — like every other international airline. He wants fervently Orthodox schools, which are funded mainly by the state, to teach secular courses.

For the haredim, this catalog amounts to a declaration of war on the position of Orthodox Judaism as the established state religion.

For the thousands milling around outside Ma'asiyahu Jail, Barak's ideas are the major talking point — and they provide a focus of resentment.

The people there know that in order to implement his new agenda, the premier would have to set up an all-secular government that excludes the National Religious Party, Shas and United Torah Judaism.

Granted, many political pundits see the whole exercise as one designed to prepare an election platform rather than a realistic program of legislation in the present Knesset, which looks increasingly likely to seek new elections when it returns from its recess in October.

By the same token, these pundits say, any breakthrough in the now-faltering peace negotiations with the Palestinians would sweep all the premier's talk of a "civil agenda" into instant oblivion.

But for the moment, it is fueling a new and unprecedented mass protest movement that could make its own impact on party alignments in the present Knesset — and on the outcome of the next election. □

Cultural tolerance honored

WARSAW (JTA) — Poland's president has awarded the nation's highest noncitizen honor to the chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad.

At a Sept. 13 ceremony, Aleksander Kwasniewski honored Michael Lewan for his work encouraging cultural understanding among Poles, Jews and Americans.

Lewan, a Roman Catholic with Polish roots, chairs a commission dedicated to documenting, restoring and sites of religious importance to Americans in Eastern and Central Europe. □