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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Barak: No talks during unrest

Prime Minister Ehud Barak said Israel will not discuss U.S. peace proposals unless the Palestinian Authority reduces the level of violence and incitement against Israel.

Barak addressed his Cabinet hours before Israeli and Palestinian representatives met in Cairo with George Tenet, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, to talk about ways to reduce the violence.

Clinton may give up on accord

President Clinton may abandon his goal of helping negotiate a final Israeli-Palestinian peace accord.

With the end of his term less than two weeks away, Clinton instead may issue a declaration of general principles for an accord that would help guide the incoming Bush administration. [Page 4]

New envoy criticizes Lauder

Israel's new consul general in New York criticized the plans of Ronald Lauder, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, to take part in a mass rally for Jerusalem on Monday.

Alon Pinkas said Lauder's participation represented political intervention by American Jewish groups in Israel's internal affairs.

Israeli Knesset member Colette Avital, a former consul general in New York, issued similar criticism last week.

Several Orthodox groups are planning a rally in New York to coincide with the rally in Jerusalem, arguing that the fate of Jerusalem concerns Jews around the world, not just Israelis.

Shoah report said critical of U.S.

A U.S. report will say the \$500,000 that Washington authorized in 1963 for Holocaust restitution may have been inadequate, according to sources who have read the study.

President Clinton created the Presidential Commission on Holocaust Assets, which is expected to release the report later this month, to probe what became of assets that Nazi victims sent to the United States for safekeeping, and what became of stolen assets that fell into U.S. Army hands at the end of World War II.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Remember Barak's social 'revolution'? Violence, again, has postponed plans

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — When Tsahala Gelfand was brutally strangled to death by her husband recently, Israelis were reminded of a grim domestic issue that has been overshadowed by the crisis with the Palestinians.

But even though the third wife-killing in a week — and the 16th this year — sparked a debate over domestic violence in Israel, the murder did not distract Israel from the No. 1 issue on its agenda: the mini-war with the Palestinians.

Some activists say social issues largely have been left by the wayside. Issues of religion and state have not disappeared, but they are not nearly as prominent as they were before the violence began.

Just 19 months ago, Ehud Barak came to power as prime minister after perhaps the first Israeli election campaign run on a platform that emphasized social, economic and religious issues as much as peacemaking.

But after the election, Barak made peacemaking his top priority.

By his own admission, the premier did little to seriously address pressing issues associated with a society burdened with growing income gaps and a deep religious-secular chasm.

In recent years, the increasing attention Israelis have given to social and religious issues was seen as a natural consequence of the move toward peace with their Arab neighbors and the Palestinians.

Many of these issues had been ignored for years because the public agenda was preoccupied with a perpetual state of war. According to conventional wisdom, the onset of regional peace had freed up Israel to finally address social issues.

Now, as recent violence has again pushed Israel's security problems and political crisis to the top of the national agenda, the growing possibility of a long-term conflict has left some social activists worried.

"Since the beginning of the unrest, the media have been dealing in an almost obsessive way with security and political issues, and this has pushed social issues off the agenda," says Efrat Fink, head of the legal department at Yedid, a nonprofit organization that provides consulting services for disadvantaged Israelis.

"This poses a real threat to civil society in Israel."

Fink says that several pressing issues, which in the past would have been debated intensely, have been completely ignored.

For example, a bill had been proposed in the Knesset to create a "Basic Law" — one that serves in lieu of a constitution — to ensure fundamental social rights to every citizen.

Shas, the fervently Orthodox party that usually supports welfare spending, shot it down.

Nobody noticed.

Meanwhile, the National Council for the Child has compiled a list of shocking stories related to child welfare that it has failed to sell to the media because of the "situation," as the crisis with the Palestinians has come to be known.

The stories range from sexually abused children who are receiving no counseling to tales of doctors who refuse to administer painkillers to seriously ill children.

Shas, which has a constituency of poorer Sephardi Jews, has used the media inattention to push through legislative moves that in normal times likely would be

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arafat agents linked to bomber

A man who detonated a bomb on a Tel Aviv bus last month was recruited and equipped by military intelligence agents of Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority, according to Israeli security sources.

The sources said Sunday that Abdallah Abu Jaber, a Jordanian citizen working in Israel, was recruited and given the bomb by the agents. Abu Jaber was arrested hours after at least two pipe bombs hidden in a duffle bag exploded on the bus on Dec. 28, wounding 14 people, the sources said.

Court prevents orchard uprooting

Israel's High Court of Justice barred the army from uprooting a Palestinian man's olive grove in the West Bank. Sunday's decision came in response to a petition filed by the owner in what was believed to be the first time since Palestinian violence began more than three months ago that a Palestinian turned to an Israeli court to protect his trees.

Since the violence began, the army has uprooted orchards it said Palestinian gunmen used for cover in shooting attacks.

Abdullah backs refugee demand

Jordan's King Abdullah backed Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's demand that a peace deal must grant millions of Palestinian refugees the right to return to homes they fled in Israel's 1948 War of Independence.

Abdullah told Arafat during talks Sunday in Amman that fulfilling the rights of Palestinians was a precondition to any lasting peace in the Middle East.

Israel moves roadblocks

Following a spate of terror attacks, Israel's army moved several roadblocks deeper into the West Bank to increase the security of Israeli population centers. Palestinian officials accused Israel of trying to establish facts on the ground in areas it wants to annex.

controversial. Shas spokesman Itzik Sudri is particularly proud that his party has secured preliminary legislative approval for a bill endorsing a state-sponsored pension plan for every citizen.

This may be a welcome move for Israel's poorer populations.

However, it would cost the treasury — which fiercely objects to the bill— about \$5 billion a year.

Nobody noticed.

"It is definitely easier for us to push these moves through," says Sudri, citing a series of hushed-up victories in the Knesset in recent weeks.

Nevertheless, Sudri and representatives of the liberal Jewish streams do not believe that issues of religion and state have completely disappeared from the agenda.

In fact, they have even emerged as bargaining chips in recent political chaos.

Sudri points out that it was the outbreak of violence in late September that led Barak to shelve his plans for a "secular revolution" that had angered Israel's Orthodox parties.

Shas members, who hold 17 seats in the 120-member Knesset, said they would back Barak only if he abandoned his proposals to weaken the hold of the Orthodox establishment over such matters as Sabbath observance.

"It was buried because of the security crisis — and because we promised the government a safety net," Sudri says.

Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center, agrees on this point.

"The whole area of religion and state is still very much on people's minds," he says. "Every week, you see references to various issues — funding, the abandonment of the civil agenda, the draft of yeshiva students.

"I am not saying we have not suffered, because a reality of peace is a reality in which domestic issues will receive prominence," he says.

"A reality of great security pressure and political instability is a reality in which this issue competes with others."

Regev insists that the "Who Is A Jew?" issue — a dispute over the validity of Reform and Conservative conversions that has colored Israel-Diaspora relations in recent years — is still alive.

The Reform and Conservative movements are awaiting a Supreme Court decision that likely will revive the issue.

At the same time, an important preliminary vote on a landmark bill to ensure religious freedom earned only minor headlines in the nation's newspapers.

Nevertheless, legislator Naomi Chazan, a member of the liberal Meretz Party who initiated that bill, was encouraged by the fact that many Knesset members participated in the recent vote.

There are other signs that the ongoing violence has not destroyed the public's appetite for religious and social issues.

Chazan points out that according to the recent public opinion polls, the Shinui Party, which has an overtly secular platform, likely would get a big boost if new Knesset elections were held even though it has staked out no clear positions on the peace process.

It is not surprising, Chazan explains, that domestic issues get less attention during difficult times.

"It's totally predictable," she says.

"But issues of religion and state, and social justice and equality, are major issues, and they are not going to disappear." □

Polls: Sharon widens lead over Barak

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Polls in Israeli newspapers show Likud leader Ariel Sharon widening his support to 50 percent of the vote, compared with 22 to 32 percent for Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

Israeli political commentators said it would take divine intervention for Barak to win the February election — though polls in past Israeli elections have proven notoriously imprecise. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Lebanese financed Powell lecture

U.S. Secretary of State-designate Colin Powell received a large sum of money to deliver a lecture financed by Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister Issam Fares, the Jerusalem Post reported, citing an unidentified source close to Fares.

A spokesman for Powell said the reported \$200,000 speaking fee was "grossly exaggerated" and that Powell had committed no wrong in giving the speech at Tufts University five days before the November elections.

FBI raids Kahane-linked groups

The FBI raided a Jewish community center in Brooklyn believed to be the headquarters of Kach and Kahane Chai, radical extremist groups linked to the late Rabbi Meir Kahane.

The raid came as Israeli officials warned of the possibility of vigilante violence in response to last week's slaying of Kahane's son, Binyamin Ze'ev Kahane, by Palestinian gunmen in the West Bank.

Court upholds Austria accord

A U.S. appeals court upheld a \$40 million accord that Bank Austria reached with Holocaust families to settle charges it helped the Nazis steal the families' property.

One member of the class-action suit had claimed the settlement was inadequate, but the court's decision clears the way for processing payments to survivors.

Russian Jewish leader re-charged

A Russian court reinstated embezzlement charges against a Russian Jewish leader and media tycoon. Last Friday's move against Vladimir Goussinsky overturned a lower court's decision.

Goussinsky, arrested in Spain last month at the request of Russian prosecutors, currently is free on bail.

Cross erected near Babi Yar

A giant cross was recently planted near the site in Ukraine of a wartime murder of more than 30,000 Jews, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The cross near Babi Yar, where SS officers helped by Ukrainian militias committed the killings in 1941, sits close to a menorah commemorating the atrocity.

German far-rightists protest

Some 10,000 opponents of far-right violence demonstrated in an eastern German town. Sunday's demonstration, held near the site of the former synagogue in the town of Cottbus, followed a series of racist and anti-Semitic incidents. In one of those incidents, a group of youths shouted death threats last week outside the home of an elderly Jewish couple.

ARTS & CULTURE

Holocaust victim's legacy continues through his illustrations from Terezin

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — Amid the gloom of life in the Terezin ghetto, a light shone briefly for little Tommy.

It was Jan. 22, 1944, and his father had just given him an album as a birthday present.

It was no ordinary book.

On the front cover was a picture of a little boy looking out of a window to the outside world.

Scrawled below in Czech were the words, "To Tommy, for his Third Birthday in Theresienstadt," the German name for the Czech transit camp.

What made the book special was that his father, Bedrich Fritta, was a fine cartoonist and illustrator and the pages were filled with dozens of colorful hand-drawn pictures and verses that offered a brighter world than the drab, depressing surroundings of Terezin.

The illustrations include a picture of a boy with his thumb in his mouth and a child playing games.

That album is far from forgotten.

Recently at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, a Hebrew version was granted a special honorable mention as part of the Yad Vashem-backed Ben-Yitzhak awards for illustrations of children's books.

The work is all the more valuable because the Nazis murdered its author in the autumn of 1944.

Fritta was head of the ghetto's technical drawing department, which was used by the Nazis to draw up plans and prepare propaganda illustrations.

The Jewish artists there were tortured after the Nazis found paintings that depicted the grim reality of the ghetto, rather than the family camp image their captors wanted the world to see.

Fritta, whose real name was Fritz Tauzig, was later sent to Auschwitz, where he was killed.

His wife also died during the war after contracting typhoid fever.

Little Tommy survived the war and now lives in Prague.

He became Tomas Haas after being adopted by a Terezin artist named Leo Haas who survived the war.

"I am very pleased that my father's book is being honored," Haas told JTA. "I don't really remember my father but I have very deep impressions in my mind of Terezin.

"The book is optimistic and it is like my father is communicating with me."

Haas, who now works as a teacher at Prague's only Jewish school and who still has the original album, said he was unable to attend the recent award ceremony in Jerusalem.

The album has lasted the test of time as a work of art in its own right.

Ivan Klima, one of the Czech Republic's greatest living writers who wrote additional text for a Czech version of the book, said he believed it was a fine example of children's illustrations.

"Fritta was a marvelous painter and this book was really a personal present for his son," said Klima, 68, who lived in a neighboring room to Fritta and knew the illustrator well.

"There is a lot of optimism in it and it is valuable as an example of the spirit of the ghetto camp."

Over the last 20 years the album has been published in Germany, Belgium, Holland, Sweden, Japan and Israel.

It will be available in the United States in January.

One Hebrew edition is frequently used in teaching kindergarten and first-grade children about the Holocaust, while another is designed for adults. □

Israelis, Palestinians scale back expectations for last peace push

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With the days dwindling until President Clinton leaves office, Israeli and Palestinian officials have lowered their expectations for his peace efforts.

Both Israel and the Palestinians have given their conditional acceptance to a bridging proposal Clinton put forward for a final peace accord. But both sides have a list of reservations to the ideas, and all parties involved are doubting that it will be possible to work out an agreement, or even a framework for an agreement, before Clinton leaves office on Jan. 20.

Instead, it is now believed that Clinton — who is sending his Middle East envoy, Dennis Ross, to the region this week for separate meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders — may issue a presidential declaration summarizing the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations under his presidency, which could serve as a basis for future talks.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami said any declaration must be clear and leave no room for differing interpretations.

“It must provide a solid base for dialogue to reach an agreement” after Israel’s Feb. 6 elections, Ben-Ami said. He added that such a declaration would preferably have the backing of an international gathering that would ease Israeli concerns of pressure from European and other elements for further concessions to the Palestinians.

Both Ben-Ami and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak are working to avoid the appearance that Barak is trying to rush through an agreement in order to increase his prospects in the February election.

Until now, a peace agreement has been seen as the main election hope for Barak, who is trailing badly behind Likud Party Chairman Ariel Sharon in opinion polls.

Israeli negotiator Gilead Sher met administration officials in Washington over the weekend and submitted a formal, detailed Israeli response to Clinton’s proposals.

Clinton has suggested that Israel and the Palestinians split control over the Temple Mount, with each side assuming sovereignty over the sites holy to its religion.

The agreement also would grant the Palestinians control over Arab areas of eastern Jerusalem and 95 percent of the West Bank. Israel would annex settlement clusters that comprise the remaining 5 percent, giving the Palestinians Israeli land in exchange.

In return, the Palestinians would scale back their demand that descendants of the Arab refugees who fled or were expelled in Israel’s 1948 War of Independence — some 4 million to 5 million people — be allowed to return to their former homes inside Israel.

Israel already had given its acceptance to Clinton’s proposals, on condition that the Palestinians accept them as well. The document submitted by Sher gave further detail to Israel’s response. According to reports, Israel’s primary reservations relate to the Palestinian refugee issue and the Temple Mount.

Israel reportedly made clear it would not accept the Palestinian “right of return” but said it would continue, as it has done since 1967, to allow a limited return for humanitarian reasons.

The Israeli daily Ha’aretz quoted a senior Israeli official as stating that the refugee problem was a byproduct of the war the

Arab states launched against the fledgling Jewish state. While Israel is prepared to recognize the Palestinian suffering, it will not accept responsibility for causing the refugee problem, the official said.

The Palestinians have said they cannot yield on the refugee issue. At a meeting last week, the Arab League called the right of return “sacred.”

Regarding the Temple Mount, Israel said it would not sign any agreement granting the Palestinians sovereignty over the disputed area.

It also noted that remnants of the ancient Jewish temples — which would remain under Israeli control under Clinton’s proposals — include much more than the exposed section of the Western Wall.

Palestinian negotiators have sought to limit Israeli authority to those sections of the wall that front the Western Wall Plaza, and sometimes offer even less than that.

The Israeli daily Ha’aretz quoted a political source in Jerusalem as saying that the Israeli document also included alternate Israeli proposals to transfer control over the upper level of the Temple Mount to an international body or group of states.

Israel has stressed that any progress in diplomatic efforts is contingent upon a noticeable Palestinian effort to reduce the level of violence in the territories.

On Sunday, CIA Director George Tenet held talks in Cairo with Israeli and Palestinian officials. The head of Israel’s Shin Bet domestic security service, Avi Dichter, and the head of the Israel Defense Force’s planning branch, Maj. Gen. Shlomo Yanai, attended the meeting, which focused on security cooperation.

Cabinet minister Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, a former army chief of staff, was to have taken part, but Barak’s office said Shahak was needed for important consultations in Israel.

The heads of the Palestinian security services, Mohammad Dahlan and Jibril Rajoub, were among the Palestinian team.

Meanwhile, violence continued in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

On Sunday, a Palestinian boy was seriously wounded in clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian rioters near Ramallah. The same day, Israeli troops neutralized several roadside bombs discovered near the Nahal Oz Crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

Last Friday, a Palestinian girl was killed by IDF fire after Palestinian gunmen fired at a Jewish settlement near Hebron. The IDF expressed regret over the death and said the army had offered medical help, which was refused. In a separate incident that day, soldiers shot and killed a Palestinian man when he tried to scale a boundary fence in the Gaza Strip.

On the political scene, Barak is coming under increasing pressure not to engage in political negotiations during the election period, when his government lacks a parliamentary majority.

Meanwhile, Sharon has come under criticism for failing to detail his political program. Sharon has laid out what he terms his “red lines” with the Palestinians — including no division of Jerusalem, continued Israeli control over the Jordan Valley and no Palestinian right of return — but he says revealing any more would be taken as a starting point for negotiations.

Critics call Sharon’s proposals wildly unrealistic, given the concessions the Palestinians feel they already have won from Barak and Clinton. □