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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel, Palestinians try again

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators began a new round of talks in Egypt aimed at advancing the peace process.

The talks at the resort town of Taba are taking place with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak trailing in polls leading up to Israel's prime ministerial election on Feb. 6.

It's not clear whether an accord with the Palestinians — which likely would entail deep Israeli concessions — would help or hurt Barak against opposition leader Ariel Sharon. [Page 3]

O.U. official resigns amid scandal

The Orthodox Union's executive vice president resigned in the wake of a commission report that confirmed abusive behavior toward children by a senior rabbi in the movement's youth group.

Rabbi Raphael Butler, a former head of the National Council of Synagogue Youth, was accused of knowing of the alleged abuse by Rabbi Baruch Lanner, but not acting on the information.

Butler said the commission's recommendation must be implemented.

He added that his resignation is an attempt to prevent divisiveness within the O.U.

Clinton fails to pardon Pollard

The wave of pardons issued before President Clinton left office on Saturday did not include Jonathan Pollard, who is serving a life sentence in a U.S. jail for spying for Israel.

Clinton also failed to pardon junk-bond king Michael Milken, formerly jailed for securities fraud, who is a supporter of Jewish day schools in the Los Angeles area.

Britain to pay for Nazi-looted art

The British government will soon make its first payment to heirs of a Holocaust victim whose Nazi-looted art now hangs in a British museum.

The government will pay \$185,000 to the son of a German Jewish banker shot by the Nazis in Dusseldorf in 1937.

The family was forced to sell the painting, Jan Griffier the Elder's "View from Hampton Court," after the banker, whose name is not being released, was killed.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Despite his persistent efforts, Middle East prize eluded Clinton

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Eight years after walking into the White House, President Clinton leaves with significant accomplishments in the Middle East.

Clinton and his team of negotiators and advisers were unable to put the final nail in the coffin of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

There are tangible changes in the region, however, and hope remains — despite the latest flare-up of violence — that the two sides will continue the progress they have made since the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference.

Still, it may be years before we can truly assess the Clinton era's impact on the Middle East peace process.

"I would like to think that when historians look back on this period, they will say this 10-year period created a foundation on which a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict could be based," said Aaron Miller, who was deputy special Middle East coordinator in the Clinton State Department.

It's still unclear what role Miller will play in the Bush administration. Maps of the Middle East rest on the floor of his State Department office as he awaits his next assignment. Those maps, the blueprints to the Clinton team's work over the last eight years, await a new owner.

Miller and the U.S. Middle East envoy, Dennis Ross, were the point men on the Clinton team who forged many of the relationships and hammered out many of the agreements in the region.

Ross, who is leaving the State Department, said he believes the parameters for peace that Clinton set forth before leaving office will form the framework of an eventual agreement.

"He took on the greatest taboos and helped to demystify them," Ross told JTA last week in New York after addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "I'm not sure that anyone else could have done it."

Middle East analysts credit Clinton for his ability to appeal to both Israeli and Palestinian leaders, gaining their respect and trust.

"No matter how it turns out, he will be considered the person who defied the laws of political gravity," said David Makovsky, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Affairs and former editor of the Jerusalem Post. "He did it by working this issue personally, devoting an enormous amount of time and not just being content to do photo-ops and signing ceremonies."

Makovsky calls Clinton the most pro-Israel president ever — and the most pro-Palestinian. He developed a father-son relationship with the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and was the first American president to enter the Gaza Strip.

Clinton devoted more hours to meetings with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat than with any other international leader, Makovsky said.

But it was more than just time.

Clinton used the same attributes in the international arena that won him praise domestically — an ability to reach out and touch people, empathize with their problems and show a genuine interest in aiding them.

"There is a quality in negotiations that I would describe as empathy, which is critically important for a mediator," Miller said. "It's the capacity and ability to listen and to understand each side's perspective without necessarily sympathizing or agreeing

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arrest made in Web murder

Israel arrested a Palestinian woman in connection with the death of an Israeli teen-ager following an Internet romance.

Sunday's arrest of Amana Jawad Mona Najar, 25, was made in an area of the West Bank under Israeli security control. Israeli agents reportedly used information from the computer of Ophir Rahum, 16, to track down Najar.

Rahum was killed Jan. 17 after he went to meet Najar, whom he apparently knew as an American tourist named Sally.

Israel ends ties to U.S.-led panel

Israel froze cooperation with a U.S.-led committee probing the outbreak of violence in the territories.

The move came after a team working for the Mitchell Committee visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem without prior coordination with Israel, contrary to agreement.

The team was escorted by the Wakf, or Muslim religious trust, appointed by the Palestinian Authority.

Settler gets no time for murder

A Jewish settler convicted of beating a Palestinian boy to death in 1996 was given six months of community service and a 15-month suspended jail sentence.

The sentence came after a plea bargain with Nahum Korman, who said he did not mean to kill the 10-year-old. Korman, who was also fined \$17,000, served eight months in jail during his trial.

Clinton says shalom to Mideast

President Clinton sent farewell messages that were published in Israeli and Palestinian newspapers a day before he left the White House.

Clinton told the Palestinians not to seek revenge but to pursue peace through negotiations, and told Israelis not to give up on the peace process despite the ongoing violence.

to the point where you eliminate your ability as a mediator. That capacity was his real strength."

Despite his negotiating qualities, part of Clinton's success stemmed simply from the fact that he appeared at the right point on the Middle East timeline.

"He was handed a remarkable gift when the Israelis and the PLO secretly signed the Oslo agreement, brought it to the White House and asked him to bless it," said Shibley Telhami, who holds the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland.

As a legal adviser to Israel's Foreign Ministry, Joel Singer was one of the negotiators of the Oslo accords. He said Clinton used the opportunities to his advantage.

"Even though the circular history began to be ripe for negotiations between Israel and its neighbors during his presidency, Clinton was quick to grasp the opportunity and was always ready to jump into the cold water," Singer said.

But Clinton's personal attributes sometimes have backfired on him.

He has been widely criticized for bringing Arafat and Barak to Camp David last summer to try to seal a deal before the Oslo interim agreement's deadlines passed. Clinton believed his powers of persuasion would be enough to push the two sides toward an agreement, Makovsky said.

Ultimately, the time proved unripe. Arafat walked away from a deal, Barak's willingness for compromise cost him his majority in the Knesset, and the standoff eventually erupted in the violent Palestinian uprising of the past four months.

Miller, who was part of the Camp David negotiating team, said bringing the sides together was an attempt to prevent the situation from spinning out of control.

"Had we not gone to Camp David, and had we ended up with violent confrontation in September, the same critics who now accuse us of not understanding the nature of the difficulty would have said to us, 'Why didn't you try?'" Miller said.

"In the end, policy very often becomes the choice between very imperfect alternatives," he said.

Clinton's actions in the Middle East were far from perfect.

Even supporters like Itamar Rabinovich, a former Israeli ambassador to the United States and current president of Tel Aviv University, said the peace negotiations erred in focusing solely on the actions of the leadership, rather than on selling the peace proposals to the people.

Speaking to JTA by telephone, Rabinovich also said the Clinton administration was mistaken not to punish one side or the other for flouting the agreements or leaving the bargaining table.

"Each side has to take into account that in the end, peace is not just the purview of the elites," Miller said. "It has to be the property of the public."

Clinton also has been accused of trying to move too fast in peace negotiations, and forcing the parties to adapt to his timetable.

That charge was made indirectly by President George W. Bush during the presidential debates, and was illustrated in the last few months of Clinton's administration, as he rushed to bring the parties together before his term ended.

"The role President Clinton played in trying to have his own proposals — although with a great deal of input from the Israelis and Palestinians — might have put more pressure on the whole process," said Ronald Lauder, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "The future role of the American president should be as a facilitator, not as an originator."

Despite Clinton's years of work, his departure from office is overshadowed by several months of violence, the worst to hit the region since the Oslo accords. Analysts said the latest violence is not unexpected because the leaders are now focusing on permanent solutions to the most difficult issues.

As Bush assumes the White House, the end of the Clinton saga may not be imminent. The door is open for him to continue to play a role in negotiations. If an agreement is reached in the near future, Clinton's efforts will be heralded, Telhami said.

"If the Israelis and Palestinians manage to get an agreement between them, even on George W. Bush's clock, it will be because of the ground Clinton made," Telhami said. "History will look back and say, 'This was an amazing period.'"

(JTA staff writer Michael J. Jordan in New York contributed to this report.) □



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JEWISH WORLD

Official: Swiss search necessary

Swiss banks should allow a database of 4.1 million accounts to be searched for account holders who may have been Holocaust victims, a New York finance official said last Friday. Some of the banks, which have allowed 46,000 accounts to be searched, say most of the other accounts were opened by people with Swiss addresses and therefore could not have been opened by Hitler's victims.

Exhibit spotlights hate crimes

The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles unveiled Globalhate.com, a \$5 million exhibit to combat the proliferation of Internet sites by hate groups. Visitors to the exhibit see eight large screens, illustrating some of the most heinous hate crimes of the last few years and community responses to them.

Group donates to quake victims

The American Jewish Committee donated \$25,000 to the victims of the recent earthquake in El Salvador. More than 700 people were killed in the Jan. 13 quake.

Goussinsky's property impounded

Russia impounded all the personal property of a media tycoon and Jewish leader who has been charged with fraud. Vladimir Goussinsky is currently under house arrest in Spain pending a Spanish High Court decision on his possible extradition to Russia.

Swastikas painted in Germany

Vandals sprayed dozens of swastikas throughout a town in western Germany. Police said they had no leads in Saturday night's incident, which came after the country launched a crackdown against extremism.

'Mein Kampf' publisher charged

Slovak state prosecutors charged the publisher of a Slovak translation of Hitler's "Mein Kampf" with supporting a movement suppressing the rights and freedoms of citizens, according to Slovak television.

Agnes Burdova faces up to eight years in prison if convicted.

Film depicts WWII Bulgaria

A new documentary tells how many of Bulgaria's Jews were saved from deportation and death during the Holocaust.

The rescue of 49,000 Jews by legislators and church leaders, who urged Bulgaria's king not to allow the deportation, is the best-kept secret of World War II, said the director of "Beyond Hitler's Grasp."

Bulgaria did deport Jews living outside its prewar borders.

Two weeks before Israeli vote, peace talks resume amid doubts

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Israeli-Palestinian talks resumed this week, Prime Minister Ehud Barak was caught between a rock and a hard place.

On the one hand, a peace deal could be just what the premier, trailing badly in the polls, needs to boost his chances when Israel elects a prime minister Feb. 6.

On the other hand, Barak could suffer if voters believe he made too many concessions in order to reach a hasty pre-election accord.

On Sunday, Barak made two promises that appeared to cover this bind.

Speaking on Israel's Army Radio, he vowed to try to reach an accord that would "end the occupation and the rule over another people."

Barak then promised not to make any concessions on two key Palestinian demands.

"Israel will not accept under any circumstances the right of return" of Palestinian refugees to Israel, he said.

"As prime minister, I will not sign any document which hands over sovereignty on the Temple Mount to the Palestinians," he added.

Speaking hours before talks began at the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba, Barak held no illusions about the likelihood of reaching an agreement, considering his stance on the two issues and the Palestinians' stated unwillingness to compromise.

Describing the talks as the "story of a painful divorce, of surgery without anesthesia," Barak said that in the short time left before Israel's elections, "with the gaps that exist, the chance of bridging them is not great."

Palestinian officials likewise were less than optimistic about what might emerge from the Taba talks.

"We hope the Israelis will change their positions, because we can't make concessions regarding the right of return," Palestinian negotiator Nabil Sha'ath said Sunday.

"We are not going to make an agreement just because time is running out" before the Israeli elections, Sha'ath said.

The talks at Taba are expected to last about 10 days.

The Israeli team includes Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami, Barak aide Gilead Sher and Cabinet ministers Yossi Beilin and Amnon Lipkin-Shahak.

Sha'ath, senior negotiator Saeb Erekat, legislative speaker Ahmed Karia and Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo are leading the Palestinian team.

Beilin said the two sides would discuss the proposals President Clinton set forth in the month before he left office Saturday.

Clinton's proposals call for far-reaching concessions by both Israel and the Palestinians.

Most controversial for Israelis is a proposal to cede control of Jerusalem's Temple Mount to the Palestinians. Israel also would divide Jerusalem, with Arab neighborhoods coming under Palestinian rule.

In exchange, 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 be allowed to return to their former homes inside Israel. Even the most dovish Israelis consider this a veiled call to eliminate the Jewish state.

Israel's "Peace Cabinet" — which includes a team of ministers dealing specifically with the peace process — agreed on Saturday to the Taba talks. Nevertheless, most of the ministers expressed doubts that any agreement could be reached before the elections.

It was at Taba that the two sides held marathon negotiations before reaching the 1995 Interim Agreement. Under that accord, the Palestinian Authority gained control over the major Arab population centers in the West Bank.

Compounding the difficulties facing the two sides, opposition leader Ariel Sharon — the runaway front-runner in election polls — has made it clear that he will not consider himself bound by an accord reached on the eve of the vote.

Though Palestinians often have claimed that they see no difference between the left-of-center Barak and Israel's harder-line Likud politicians, some analysts believe the Palestinians may now be eager for a deal, realizing they would get far more from Barak than from Sharon. □

German's road to Jewish studies prompted by Anne Frank's diary

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The globalization of trade and communications may soon be joined by a new globalization of anti-Semitism, according to a German scholar.

"The anti-Semitic virus may now be less virulent in Western Europe, but it is taking hold in new places, like Japan, and spreading in South America and throughout the Islamic world," says Johannes Heil.

The 39-year-old historian is one of a small core of scholars who are expanding the boundaries of their field at the Center for Research on Antisemitism at the Technical University in Berlin.

The center's academics and graduate students investigate the roots and permutations of anti-Semitism across the centuries — including the Holocaust — but they are adding a key factor.

"You cannot fully understand anti-Semitism unless you compare it with other forms of prejudice and group hatred," says Heil. "We look at anti-Semitism as a paradigm for ethnic discrimination and persecution, genocide, forced migrations, nationalistic exploitation of racist beliefs and xenophobia."

The center maintains close ties with other targets of prejudice in Germany, among them organizations representing Turkish and other foreign workers, Gypsies and gays. While Heil endorses anti-Semitism's usefulness as a "comparative tool" of study, he acknowledges its uniqueness, if only for its tenacious durability.

A medieval historian by training, Heil is accustomed to taking the long view, and his special interests include anti-Semitic "conspiracy theories" of the 14th to 17th centuries, forerunners of the infamous "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a 19th-century forgery that purports to detail an international Jewish conspiracy to rule the world.

"We are still asking why anti-Semitism has lasted as long as it has, why it represents such a historical continuum," he says.

Heil, who grew up in a Catholic family in a Frankfurt suburb, suspects this his interest in Jews began when his father gave the 9-year-old boy a copy of "The Diary of Anne Frank." Later on, "by chance," he took a university course on the history of Jews in Frankfurt, Germany, Anne Frank's birthplace.

Now fully engaged in Jewish study, he went to Israel and, after taking a Hebrew-language crash course, enrolled in classes at Tel Aviv University and the University of Haifa over a five-year period.

While there, he met and married Deborah, an Israeli architect. The couple's two young daughters attend the Berlin Jewish day school, where they stand out because of their fluent Hebrew.

The center, the only one of its kind in Europe, was founded in 1982, with the financial support of the Berlin municipality. The Technical University, of which the center is a part, focuses on the sciences and engineering, but each student is required — under an old Allied occupation rule — to take two humanities courses.

In this way, the center attracts students from other disciplines, as well as from other universities.

Currently, there are five Americans studying for a doctorate at the center, and at any time scholars and post-doctoral students from foreign countries are enrolled under research grants and scholarships.

These recently included Russians comparing their country's historic anti-Semitism to ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, and Japanese researchers for a project on the "politics of memory" to help their fellow citizens accept responsibility for Japan's transgressions in the 20th century.

The center's archives include collections of anti-Semitic newspapers and Jewish community periodicals in Germany, beginning in the 18th century. A clipping service scans 10 contemporary German newspapers for articles on neo-Nazi and right-wing propaganda.

The center also collects memoirs by Berlin Jews during the Nazi period and houses a project on "Unsung Heroes" — Gentile Berliners who aided Jewish citizens.

Along similar lines, the center has become a major resource for the German media, whose preoccupation with the country's Jewish past and present seems to increase with the years.

In a perverse way, says Heil, the media focus encourages publicity-hungry neo-Nazis and skinheads.

"They know that if they kill a foreign worker, they'll get an inside story in the local paper," he says. "But if they vandalize a Jewish cemetery or lob a Molotov cocktail at a synagogue, there'll be front-page headlines in every German paper and the German chancellor will visit the scene of the crime the next day." □

Slovak Jews press government to pay for WWII property seizures

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — Slovak Jewish leaders are optimistic that a commission will soon be established to consider compensation claims for property seized from Slovak Holocaust victims.

Slovakia's Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities has been pressing the government to set up a commission for the past year without success.

But following a meeting with Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda last week, Slovakia's Jewish leaders said they believe the government is taking the matter seriously.

Dzurinda promised the Jewish leadership that "the government will talk about the issue at its next meeting and that a commission should be established in the near future," said Jozef Weiss, director of the Central Union.

Weiss said the Central Union wanted the commission to include local and international Jewish representatives as well as government officials.

Participants at the meeting also discussed the issue of persuading Germany to pay compensation for the millions of dollars the wartime Slovak government allegedly stole from Jews and paid the Nazis to transport more than 58,000 Jews to death camps during the war.

Last year, the Central Union discussed the issue with officials from Germany when German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder visited Slovakia. The Central Union claims Germany reneged on a promise to hold further talks within two months.

In October, Slovakia's Jewish leaders launched a lawsuit against Germany, claiming payment of as much as \$3.9 million they say was paid to the Third Reich by the Nazi-puppet Slovak state. A Berlin court is scheduled to hear the case at the end of March. □