

**RABIN IN INTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS
TO AVERT BREAKUP OF HIS COALITION**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 6 (JTA) -- In an effort to avert a major political crisis, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has been holding intensive meetings with leaders of his two coalition partners, which are engaged in a bitter feud with one another.

The Orthodox Sephardic Shas party has threatened to quit the government Sunday, if Shulamit Aloni, leader of the left-wing Meretz bloc, is not removed from her post as education minister.

Shas believes Aloni's many controversial statements have demonstrated a demeaning and insulting attitude toward religion and Judaism, and should be cause enough for her dismissal.

Rabin met with Aloni on Thursday and was scheduled to meet later that night with the head of the Shas party, Interior Minister Aryeh Deri. He had plans to meet again with Aloni on Sunday before the weekly Cabinet meeting.

Rabin's fragile coalition has been dogged by crises throughout its tenure, most of them focusing on Aloni's controversial utterances and Shas' objections to them.

In the past, Rabin has managed to smooth over the problems, but the current crisis appeared to gather sudden and unexpected momentum this week when sources inside the Labor Party began to feel that "this time it's for real."

"It's no mere tactical ploy," Labor Knesset member Hagai Merom said Thursday.

Merom said the government's ability to conduct the ongoing peace negotiations with Palestinians and Arabs is more important than what portfolio Aloni holds.

Rabin himself expressed exasperation that a party so dedicated to pushing forward the peace process would jeopardize it by insisting on certain political appointments.

'The Die Is Cast'

The present crisis was triggered when Aloni criticized Rabin for reciting the "Shema Yisrael" prayer at an anniversary commemoration last month for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Aloni criticized the recitation for being fatalistic.

Shas' insistent demand that Aloni be removed from her post is also a product of pressure exerted on it by rival Orthodox parties.

This was made clear to the prime minister, according to press reports here Thursday, during his lengthy, warm, but low-key conversation with Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Shas' spiritual leader, at Yosef's home last Saturday night.

Rabin gave the sage a detailed report on the progress of the peace talks, to which Yosef listened with interest. But his reply was to reach for a piece of paper and read from it a catalogue of Aloni's recent provocations, culminating with the "Shema Yisrael" episode.

Labor Knesset member Avraham Burg said in a radio interview Thursday that, as far as he could make out, "the die is cast" for Aloni to be reassigned in a Cabinet shuffle.

Burg, chairman of the Knesset Education Committee and a leading supporter of Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, said the best solution

would be to move Aloni to the Foreign Affairs Ministry and appoint Peres as minister of defense, a portfolio currently held by Rabin himself.

But Burg immediately added that he knew "those who make the decisions," a reference to Rabin, were not thinking along those lines.

Rabin's desire to continue holding onto the defense portfolio and not vest this key and powerful post in the hands of his longtime rival Peres has made it difficult to solve the Aloni problem by proposing to move her to a post of equal or higher status.

'Meretz, Too, Has Its Red Lines'

Meretz politicians, meanwhile, have been making a predictable show of unity and strength, issuing dire warnings that they will not accept any diminution of Aloni's status.

Dedi Zucker and Ran Cohen, two prominent Meretz Knesset members, vehemently denied media reports that, despite such public protestations of support, Meretz was quietly telling Labor behind the scenes to reassign Aloni.

Environmental Protection Minister Yossi Sarid of Meretz, who is known to have an ambivalent and sometimes stormy relationship with Aloni, also rallied to her side Thursday, urging that Shas recognize that "Meretz, too, has its red lines, beyond which we cannot and will not go."

Meretz Secretary-General Mordechai Virshubski said it was absurd for "the tzadik of the generation," a sarcastic reference to Deri, to dictate terms regarding Aloni's continued tenure.

"He says he can't sleep at night with her at Education," Virshubski quoted Deri as saying. "I suppose his lack of sleep affects his performance at his police interrogations the next day."

Virshubski was referring to the fact that Deri has been under police investigation for more than two years in connection with allegedly improper government funding of Shas religious institutions and suspected personal financial irregularities.

Some political pundits have suggested a link between the crisis and the ongoing police interrogation of Deri.

"Deri knows charges will be filed against him soon -- that's why he wants to shake up the government now," said one political observer at the mass-circulation newspaper Yediot Achronot.

**ISRAELIS BAFFLED BY MIXED SIGNALS
COMING FROM PALESTINIAN NEGOTIATORS**
By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, May 6 (JTA) -- While Israeli officials are generally pleased with the way the negotiations here are progressing, they are baffled by the mixed signals the Palestinians are sending.

On Wednesday, for instance, Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi gave a fairly upbeat briefing for reporters during which she described the talks with Israel as "substantive and businesslike."

She said the Palestinians have found during this round of negotiations there is a willingness on the part of the Israelis to "discuss issues previously considered taboo or undiscussable."

But later the same day, the Palestinians

announced they were suspending discussions with the Israelis in the joint working group on human rights issues until next week.

Israeli delegation spokesman Yossi Gal, in a statement Thursday, responded to the move with "dismay and regret."

Gal said that the Palestinians had "opted not to continue the work of the committee before the question of the review of the 400 deportees is resolved."

He was referring to the fate of some 400 Palestinians whom Israel deported to Lebanon last December. The issue delayed the start of the current round of peace talks by a week and threatens to disrupt it further if the matter remains unresolved.

Briefing reporters Thursday, Gal expressed bafflement as to why the Palestinians would suspend discussions of the working group on human rights, since they were the ones that requested the panel in the first place.

"It does not make sense," he said.

Israel Presents Plan To Lebanon

When asked what the Israelis felt about the Palestinian desire to return home with some concrete accomplishments, such as an end to the closure of the territories, Gal said that such issues would have been discussed in the now-suspended human rights working group.

He asked how "our Palestinian friends" could expect the Israelis to deal with these concerns if they suspend the talks on those issues.

But Gal said he was in accord with the Palestinians on one issue.

He said he agreed with Ashrawi that it was impossible to assess the progress of the talks on a daily basis because the two sides were now dealing with serious "core issues" of the negotiations.

While attention here was focused on the Palestinian track, there were signs of possible progress in the negotiations between Israel and Lebanon.

Gal said the Israelis had presented a proposal to the Lebanese this week that provides a "political contour for dealing with the outstanding security issues between us."

The plan reportedly includes an Israeli pledge to withdraw from the border security zone it controls in southern Lebanon if security arrangements can be made to prevent guerilla attacks on Israel's northern border.

Richard Haass, the chief Middle East expert in the Bush administration's National Security Council, said Thursday that this news was important because "it underlines Israel's commitment to withdraw from Lebanon."

"Israel has said it has no aspirations to remain in Lebanon," said Haass, now a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

POLICEMAN SLEEPING IN CAR IS SHOT BY ARAB TERRORISTS

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, May 6 (JTA) -- An Israeli policeman was shot and badly wounded early Thursday by Arab gunmen while he slept in his car on the road between Ramla and Rehovot.

Later in the day, a 7-year-old Palestinian boy was reported shot and killed during stone-throwing clashes between the Israeli army and

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The army said it was investigating the killing.

In the earlier attack, the Israeli policeman, a senior officer who heads the national volunteer department in the civil guard, was returning home after a period of reserve training at an army base in the south when he was assaulted.

He told police investigators it was about 4 a.m. when he became tired and decided to stop and rest at a junction south of Rehovot.

He said a car with Israeli license plates stopped next to his. Two men got out of the car, walked toward him while speaking Arabic and began shooting.

At least five bullets hit him.

Despite his injuries, the policeman tried to drive after the gunmen, who had fled in their car. But he soon abandoned the effort because he was afraid of losing consciousness.

After his car came to a halt on the road, a man who thought it was a police roadblock stopped and discovered the wounded police officer.

The man took him to the hospital, where his injuries were described as moderate. Three of the bullet wounds were said to be superficial.

Police Commissioner Rafi Peled said the incident was similar to the shooting deaths several weeks ago of two police officers who had been sleeping in their car near Hadera.

It was the Hadera attack that led Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to seal off the West Bank. The gunmen in that attack have not been caught.

After the latest attempted killing, police said they were launching a widespread search for the attackers.

ISRAELI ARAB LAWMAKER ACCUSES THE KNESSET OF DISCRIMINATION

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, May 5 (JTA) -- An Arab Knesset member has accused the Israeli parliament of discrimination against him because of efforts to restrict his access to classified documents dealing with the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic intelligence agency.

Hashem Mahmud of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality is a member of the Knesset's State Control Committee and was asked by the committee's chairman to sign a pledge that he will not attend meetings dealing with the Shin Bet or look at minutes of the meeting that deal with the agency.

Mahmud contends he is being discriminated against because he is an Arab and has threatened to take his complaint to the Supreme Court.

"If I don't have the same privileges as other Knesset members," Mahmud said at a news conference, "I want the Knesset to say officially that Arab Knesset members aren't trustworthy on security and on ethnic grounds."

Mahmud said he would not agree to the request by the committee chairman, Likud Knesset member Dan Tichon.

Mahmud said Likud Knesset members and other members of the hawkish opposition treat him like a "second-class" Knesset member and that the Labor-led ruling coalition "does nothing to uphold my rights as a parliamentarian."

Mahmud, whose party is not part of the governing coalition, said he expected the Knesset to trust his "common sense decisions" on meetings he attends and documents he wishes to review.

PAPER SAYS BOMB SUSPECT TOLD AGENTS IT WAS NOT NOSAIR WHO KILLED KAHANE

NEW YORK, May 6 (JTA) -- Police and federal law-enforcement officials are refusing to comment on a report in the New York Post that they are investigating the possibility that a man other than El Sayyid Nosair assassinated Rabbi Meir Kahane in November 1990.

According to an article in Thursday's Post, Mahmoud Abouhalima, a suspect in the February bombing of New York's World Trade Center, told authorities during his interrogation in Egypt that Nosair took part in the assassination, but that another man actually pulled the trigger and killed the militant rabbi.

In related news, authorities said a West Bank Palestinian who has been held in federal custody here since last September may have links to the group that carried out the World Trade Center bombing.

The man, 27-year-old Ahmad Muhammed Ajaj, arrived in the United States with a forged passport and many books on explosives.

In response to the Post reports about new information on the Kahane murder, FBI spokesman Joe Valiquette said, "There is no way I can comment on what Abouhalima may or may not have said."

And New York City Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly said at a news conference Thursday that he could not comment on the Post article.

According to the Post account, Abouhalima, who was arrested first in Egypt before being placed in U.S. custody and flown to New York, confessed to Egyptian authorities about his participation in the Trade Center bombing and named several accomplices who all had close ties to the blind Egyptian cleric Omar Abdel Rahman, living in New Jersey.

Actual Gunman Supposedly At Large

With regard to the Kahane murder, Abouhalima reportedly told investigators that Nosair's role was to divert attention away from the real killer and allow him to escape.

Abouhalima is said to have named the actual gunman, but police here and in Egypt have not yet found him, the Post said.

Nosair was charged with the murder, but was convicted only of gun possession and shooting of a post office policeman who tried to stop Nosair from fleeing the area after the shooting. He is now serving a jail sentence on those charges.

The Post account maintains that the New York Police Department reopened its investigation of the Kahane case two months ago after receiving the new information from Abouhalima.

In the investigation of the World Trade Center bombing, Ajaj, the Palestinian held in custody since September, has not been charged in connection with the case.

However, in an administrative detention order filed by the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, authorities said Ajaj was being placed in a high-security section of his Manhattan prison out of suspicion that he was connected to the February bombing.

Ajaj was arrested upon his arrival in the United States from Pakistan.

He was released two days after the bombing and then re-arrested on March 9, according to his lawyers.

Ajaj's lawyers said he is being held unfairly, as no charges have been made against him.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BILL CLEARS HURDLE IN SENATE JUDICIARY PANEL

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, May 6 (JTA) -- The Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a bill that would make it harder for government to encroach on the free exercise of religion, was given a stamp of approval by the Senate Judiciary Committee this week and sent to the full Senate for consideration.

The bill, supported by a broad coalition of Jewish and other religious groups, is designed to circumvent a 1990 Supreme Court ruling that gave states greater leeway in outlawing certain religious practices.

The Judiciary Committee voted 15-1 on Thursday to send the bill to the Senate floor, following the lead of the House Judiciary Committee, which voted in March to send its version of the bill to the floor of the House.

The only issue that could harm the bill's chances for passage at this point, observers say, is the question of whether prisons would be exempt from the proposed new standards, which would require governments to prove a compelling interest before regulating a religious practice.

If an amendment exempting prisons is added to the Senate version of the bill, some observers think this could derail the legislation. But others expect this issue to be resolved satisfactorily and hope for quick passage in both chambers.

Attorney General Janet Reno has strongly backed the bill, and President Clinton has indicated he would sign it.

ISRAELIS SPURNED KORESH ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH CULT BRANCH THERE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 6 (JTA) -- David Koresh, the cult leader who died last month in a blaze of fire with dozens of his followers in Waco, Texas, tried to establish a branch of his sect in Israel three years ago, but failed, according to Rabbi Avraham Peled, who is involved with stemming cult influence on Jews.

Peled, who actively works to "win back" Israelis and Jews who join missionary sects, said he had first met Koresh when Koresh was on a recruiting mission in Israel in 1990.

Peled, in an interview with the Ma'ariv newspaper Wednesday, said he found Koresh playing guitar in the streets of Jerusalem, singing songs about Jews, Judaism and Jesus.

The charismatic cult leader had managed to recruit 12 young Israelis, persuading them to return with him to his Waco ranch by offering them free plane tickets and music-connected jobs there.

Peled said he befriended Koresh and the young recruits, persuading most of them to give up the idea and warning Koresh to abandon his efforts, "telling him he would anyway not succeed in making any followers here."

Koresh managed to win only one convert here, Pablo Cohen, who perished in the April 18 fire in Waco.

Peled said he had discussed Koresh's activities with the Interior Ministry and, in coordination with the ministry, had sent Koresh a letter, informing him that his visa had expired and that he should leave the country immediately.

Peled said that to his knowledge, there are currently scores of Israelis belonging to about 10 missionary cult groups in the United States.

UKRAINIAN RABBIS ESTABLISH RABBINATE, RABBINICAL COURT

By Jed Sunden

KIEV, Ukraine, May 6 (JTA) -- In another sign of the rebirth of Jewish life in the post-Communist age, the rabbis of Ukraine announced this week they are forming an official rabbinate.

Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, the chief rabbi of Ukraine, explained that the forming of the rabbinate will "help to strengthen religious life in the country, first and foremost through education, as well as building lasting institutions in Ukraine."

The formation of a Beth Din, a religious court, was also announced. Rabbi Yitzhak Yoffe of Kharkov, the oldest rabbi in Ukraine, was elected as its honorary president.

It is hoped that the formation of the Beth Din will help resolve some of the questions arising as a result of the lack of rabbinical marriages and divorces under the Communist regime.

Both announcements were made Tuesday at a conference of the Union of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, a major umbrella group representing the estimated 500,000 Jews of Ukraine.

As it stands now, the rabbinate has 16 members representing 11 cities throughout the country. The main priorities of the body will be coordinating education programs, both for adults and children, overseeing the production of kosher food products, organizing Hevra Kadisha burial societies as well as working to encourage emigration to Israel.

Since 1989, tens of thousands of Jews have emigrated from Ukraine. Though over 1,000 Jews a month are still immigrating to Israel, the rabbinate hopes to discourage the growing immigration to Germany and the United States.

Meanwhile, the Union of Jewish Religious Organizations has also increased its activities. It was established last November in an attempt to bring order to the proliferation of Jewish groups formed since the downfall of the Communist regime.

Today the union and the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine are the country's two most influential Jewish umbrella groups.

Property Restitution A Priority

Earlier this year, in conjunction with the Canadian Foundation for the Education and Welfare of Jews in the Soviet Union, the union successfully distributed over 100 tons of matzah and other food products for Passover to every Jewish community in Ukraine.

The union has also helped to arrange the procurement of religious articles for communities and individuals and financial help for smaller communities.

At the union's conference this week, a program was presented concerning the restitution of the hundreds of synagogues and other communal Jewish property confiscated by the Communist government.

The Ukrainian government has so far returned only a small fraction of the buildings, but has promised the return of all such property.

Vladimir Maslov, a lawyer working with the union on this program, has requested that all communities make a list of the property confiscated, so that it can be presented to the government.

Maslov, referring to both the law passed by

the Parliament and the presidential decree concerning confiscated property, expressed hope that the problem would be resolved by year's end.

The governing board of the union also discussed the need for Jewish chaplains in the Ukrainian armed forces and the formation of a Jewish Officers Club, both of which were not possible under the Soviet government.

It was also announced that the Jewish communities of Drugobich and Chelnitsky have paired with sister congregations in Manchester, England and Colmar, France, respectively.

HUNGARIAN CHIEF RABBI'S OUTBURST MAY LEAD TO ABOLITION OF HIS POST

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST, May 4 (JTA) -- The leadership of the Jewish community here has approved a proposal to abolish the post of Hungarian chief rabbi in an effort to settle a controversy caused by remarks made by the incumbent, Gyorgy Landesman.

Landesman caused an uproar when he was quoted in a government newspaper as saying that "without Jewish contribution to Hungarian culture, that culture had nothing but peasant's trousers and apricot whiskey."

Immediately afterward, Prime Minister Jozsef Antall warned that the "comments of Rabbi Landesman could cause the outbreak of anti-Semitism in Hungary."

Antall also asked David Kraus, the Israeli ambassador to Hungary, to use his influence to obtain Landesman's resignation.

In response to the controversy, the Association of Hungarian Jewish Congregations approved the proposal, apparently made by the chief of the Hungarian Rabbinical Seminary, Rabbi Avraham Schweitzer, to abolish the post of chief rabbi altogether.

The proposal, which must still be approved by the Hungarian rabbinate, was seen as a sort of compromise solution, as Landesman will not be forced to quit his post in favor of another rabbi.

The post of the chief rabbi did not exist in Hungary before World War II and was created only afterward, following the model of the Catholic Church.

The Hungarian Jewish community has been divided over the Landesman case, with one faction saying Landesman should not be forced to resign and others saying his behavior was offensive not only to Hungarians but also to the Jewish community here.

Landesman himself is presently abroad.

The head of the Hungarian Zionist Association, Tibor Engender, has vigorously opposed proposals to force Landesman to step down.

Engender said the Zionist movement prefers Jews in Hungary to act on their own and not bow to outside pressures.

SWEDISH JEWISH CEMETERY VANDALIZED

PARIS, May 6 (JTA) -- A Jewish cemetery near Stockholm, Sweden, was desecrated Sunday.

Some 124 headstones were overturned by the unknown vandals, according to Salomon Berlinger, the head of the community.

It was the second such desecration in Sweden since last November.

Berlinger said this latest desecration is believed linked to the recent distribution of anti-Semitic pamphlets in 15 schools of Stockholm.