

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **The Union of American Hebrew Congregations nominated Rabbi Eric Yoffie to succeed Rabbi Alexander Schindler, who has served as president of the central body for Reform Judaism since 1973. Schindler is scheduled to retire in June 1996. Yoffie is currently the vice president of UAHC and director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism. His nomination must be approved by UAHC's board of trustees, which is slated to meet in Philadelphia in May.**

■ **Secretary of State Warren Christopher said he plans to resume shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East, but does not know exactly when. "I guess I'll be back there before long," he told reporters before a meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. During their meeting, Christopher and Peres laid the groundwork for a summit on Sunday between Peres, his Egyptian and Jordanian counterparts, and Palestinian officials. President Clinton plans to address the daylong summit at the State Department. The Christopher meeting capped off a whirlwind week for Peres in Washington, where he also met with dozens of congressional leaders to press for support for the peace process.**

■ **Israel and the Palestinians made little progress during talks in Cairo. The negotiations on Palestinian elections were meant to pave the way for a summit between Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on Thursday. As the summit drew to a close, Palestinian police continued their crackdown in Gaza, arresting more than 90 activists, many of them members of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Israeli officials also continued their arrests. [Page 4]**

■ **Jewish and governmental leaders criticized the decision of a German court to dismiss a case against two neo-Nazis who used a telephone service to spread Holocaust-denial propaganda. The two neo-Nazis used an outgoing telephone message to claim that the murder of millions of Jews during World War II was merely "an Auschwitz myth." The court ruled that the use of that term did not amount to Holocaust-denial, a punishable offense in Germany. [Page 3]**

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Jockeying for foreign aid: Israel assistance spotlighted**

By Matthew Dorf and Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, Feb. 8 (JTA) — The annual jockeying for pieces of the foreign-aid pie officially began last week, when a coalition of international organizations released a study calling American foreign aid to Israel and Egypt a "nightmarish waste of U.S. tax dollars."

The organizations, calling themselves the Coalition to Rethink Aid to the Middle East, called on Congress to phase out the current \$5 billion-plus aid program to the Middle East in favor of refugee and humanitarian assistance abroad.

Pro-Israel activists were quick to criticize the report.

"This study is a simplistic view of the reality in Washington," said one activist, who requested anonymity.

"The notion that cutting aid to Israel will transfer money to other countries and development programs is not a reflection of reality," the activist said.

More likely, said another, "if aid to Israel is cut, it will be used to fund the deficit, not developmental assistance."

Some Jewish activists dismissed the report's relevancy, noting that several of the groups involved have been outspoken opponents of aid to Israel in the past.

Among the groups involved in the coalition are CARE, as well as some major Christian organizations, including Presbyterian Church (USA), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Churches for Middle East Peace.

Some activists privately express concern about report

Despite the tendency to dismiss the report, some Jewish activists privately expressed concern about it, especially because the report comes amid increasingly vocal expressions of opposition to foreign aid.

This year's foreign-aid debate is being waged in a growing isolationist climate, both on Capitol Hill and beyond the Washington beltway.

The coalition's report was issued just days before President Clinton submitted to Congress his 1996 budget, which calls for \$21.2 billion in foreign aid, including \$3 billion to Israel and \$2.1 billion to Egypt.

Longtime pro-Israel activists say they hope that Congress will come through with the annual aid to Israel and Egypt.

But they say that although not new, the attempt to frame the debate as "either aid for Israel or aid for humanitarian causes" is receiving more attention than it has in the past.

The coalition's report, "Toward a Safer Future for the Children of Abraham: A Proposal for Restructuring U.S. Aid to the Middle East," was distributed to all members of Congress.

"U.S. foreign aid to Israel and Egypt remains locked on to obsolete objectives and fails to meet the opportunities of the new era," said Peter Gubser, president of American Near East Refugee Aid.

The eight-page report, more than a year in the making, calls for a regionwide freeze on arms imports, the converting of economic aid to humanitarian programs and the phasing out of military aid.

Under the group's proposal, aid to Israel — \$1.2 billion economic and \$1.8 billion military — would in essence be phased out.

Jewish officials from the Anti-Defamation League and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism met last week with the report's authors at the coalition's request.

Stacy Burdett, ADL's assistant director in Washington, said she "raised serious objections to the report" at the meeting.

She said she specifically questioned the plan to cut aid to Israel and Egypt at this crucial juncture in the Middle East peace process.

The report was issued on the heels of another recent study that showed that Americans are more supportive of foreign aid for humanitarian efforts than they are of aid to Israel and Egypt.

The study, "Americans and Foreign Aid: A Study of American Public Attitudes," found that when military and economic aid to Israel was

weighed against issues such as aid for child survival or Peace Corps programs, aid to Israel was a less popular cause.

According to the study, 56 percent of those interviewed favored cutting military and economic aid to Israel and Egypt, while only 4 percent favored increasing that aid. The rest favored maintaining current aid levels.

Fully 80 percent agreed with the statement: "The United States should be willing to share at least a small portion of its wealth with those in the world who are in great need."

That study, commissioned by a University of Maryland program on policy attitudes, did not raise major alarm bells in the Jewish community.

Some activists cautioned against blowing the results out of proportion.

"It was one question. It gave no explanation for the aid," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center.

He stressed that the survey showed preferences for different aid programs and was not a condemnation of aid to the Middle East.

InterAction, a non-profit umbrella relief agency of 160 members, publicized the study at a news conference here last week to draw attention to the University of Maryland study.

InterAction includes Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the American Jewish World Service, American ORT, the Council of Jewish Federations and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

The Jewish groups, involved with InterAction to varying degrees, are affiliated with the group because of their international work.

Representatives of the Jewish groups involved with InterAction had mixed views on InterAction's effort to distinguish between aid for Israel and aid for international humanitarian programs.

Some said they felt that both programs should be considered equally. Others suggested that humanitarian aid was more important.

"The kind of stuff where you help developing countries makes a lot of sense," said Howard Cohen, executive director of American ORT, which runs vocational training programs in developing countries.

Cohen said that ORT did not have a position on foreign aid.

But from a personal perspective, he questioned the need for economic aid to Israel.

Is economic aid still necessary?

"Israel is now an incredibly progressive, relatively wealthy, self-sufficient country. You have to wonder, is it still necessary to continue economic aid?" he said.

He also said he believed that the United States should continue its military aid to Israel because it makes Israel a strategic partner in the Middle East.

Richard Jacobs, CJF's associate executive vice president, said his organization's involvement with InterAction did not present a conflict for CJF because his group gives equal weight to aid for Israel's and aid for humanitarian efforts.

"In situations where we see two rights, we push for both and press [Congress] to look for the money elsewhere in the budget," Jacobs said.

He noted that CJF has passed a resolution supporting current levels of aid to Israel.

To many in the Jewish community, foreign aid should not be an "either/or" proposition. The Jewish community should lobby for foreign aid in general, some say.

"In terms of the Jewish community, it's not an either/or choice," said the Reform movement's Saperstein.

Both moral and political factors play a part in the reasoning, Saperstein said.

"It's morally right for Jews to actively fight for America to play a lead role in helping hungry people, sustaining new democracies and working for human rights and sustainable development," he said.

On the political side, Saperstein said, Israel has always been the most popular part of a package that is unpopular.

It is support for aid to Israel that has carried the foreign-aid package in general for years, he said.

"If we care about aid to Israel, it behooves us to fight for foreign aid in general," he said.

Officials with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee said they agree.

"Our main priority is to ensure aid for Israel," said an official with AIPAC, the chief pro-Israel lobbying organization.

"The way you do that is to make sure that we have a viable foreign-aid program. They go hand in hand," the official said. □

Peres calls on U.S. Jewish leaders to press for aid to Arab nations

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Feb. 8 (JTA) — Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres called on American Jewish leaders this week to push for foreign aid for Arab countries supporting the peace process.

"We need American support, not only for Israel, but for the peace process," Peres told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations on Monday.

Such American assistance could prove crucial in bringing about a non-belligerent Middle East, he said, just as the Marshall Plan after World War II helped Europe unite itself and grow prosperous.

He warned of the consequences if the United States were "to become tired and say they cannot afford it."

"Generosity has its own payoff," he said.

Foreign aid was expected to be among the topics being discussed during the conference's mission to Washington on Wednesday.

Peres described the situation in the Middle East, in which political confrontation and violence continue.

But now, rather than being between the Arabs and Israel, the division is between "those supporting peace and those opposing peace," he said.

"The camp supporting peace is Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, the Palestinian Authority and us," he said.

Peres called as well for American Jewish leaders to support the peace process — even if they did not necessarily agree with it.

Peres compared the situation to opposition among non-Zionist American Jewish leaders to David Ben-Gurion's 1942 call for a Jewish state in Palestine.

"When Ben-Gurion came out with the Biltmore Plan, he wasn't applauded by all the American Jewish people. But when it came to doing [on behalf of a Jewish state], we got tremendous mobilization and support.

"Whether you agree with what we're doing or not, please support us. Let's act together," Peres said.

Earlier in the day, members of the Conference of Presidents met for lunch with Jordanian Ambassador Fayez Tarawneh.

This was the first meeting at the conference with an Arab diplomat. □

Canada's high court to hear case on Jewish-school funding*By Gil Kezwer*

TORONTO, Feb. 8 (JTA) — The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that it would allow the Canadian Jewish Congress to appeal lower court rulings on the issue of public funding for private religious schools.

"It was always our belief that the matter would be settled in the Supreme Court of Canada," said Murray Segal, chairman of the Ontario Jewish Association for Equity in Education, a CJC standing committee.

"Given the breadth and scope of Canada's highest judiciary, we believe that the matter will have a fair and complete hearing," he added.

No date has been set for the Supreme Court hearing.

The CJC request to the high court comes as part of a 30-year campaign to win provincial government funding for the secular curriculum at Jewish parochial schools.

The Supreme Court's decision last week to hear the case comes after an Ontario Court of Appeal ruled here in July that the Ontario Ministry of Education's refusal to extend funding to denominational schools other than the Roman Catholic Separate School System is constitutional.

In a unanimous decision, the five judges of the appeals court had dismissed an appeal by five Jewish parents — with children in some of Ontario's Jewish day schools — who argued that the province's policy contravened Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The plaintiffs are also seeking publicly funded health-support services for special-needs children in private schools.

The case was first heard in an Ontario court in 1992.

Estimates for the cost of extending funding to private schools of all faiths range between \$156 million (Canadian) to \$339 million. Some 12,000 of the 70,000 students in independent schools in Ontario attend one of the 21 Jewish day schools.

Tuition at Jewish schools in Ontario ranges from \$6,000 for elementary grades to \$10,000 for high school. Catholic schools are free.

Provincial government funding for the Separate School System, which covers both Catholic and secular studies, dates back to the British North America Act of 1867.

The law, which paved the way for the confederation of four British colonies into Canada, guaranteed the status of religious minorities in Ontario and Quebec.

In an era before mass immigration, Catholics were the only significant minority in the nascent Canadian state.

Today, Canada has become a multiethnic society. Aside from Ontario, virtually every province and territory provides some form of funding for parochial schools.

For Jews, this translates into partial provincial assistance in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec.

The majority of Canada's 356,000 Jews, however, live in Ontario. □

Acquittal of neo-Nazis raises ire of Jewish, German leaders*By Gil Sedan*

BONN, Feb. 8 (JTA) — Jewish and governmental leaders have criticized the decision of a German court to dismiss a case against two neo-Nazis who used a telephone service to spread Holocaust-denial propaganda.

A court in Hamburg dismissed the case over the weekend against the two neo-Nazis, who used an outgoing

telephone message to spread the word that the murder of millions of Jews during World War II was merely "an Auschwitz myth."

The court ruled that the use of that term did not amount to Holocaust-denial, a punishable offense in Germany.

Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, called the decision "destructive." The term "Auschwitz myth" creates the impression that the wartime horrors perpetrated at Auschwitz are a legend, he said.

The sentence was handed down less than a week after commemorations were held in Poland and elsewhere marking the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp by Soviet troops.

Parliamentarian Cornelia Sonntag of the opposition Social Democratic Party said the court's ruling "was unacceptable and must be corrected."

Michael Friedman, chairman of the Frankfurt Jewish community, said the decision was an indication that German judges were still unable to cope with "mental arsonists who were using words as weapons."

Hamburg's Justice Minister Klaus Hardrath expressed confidence that the decision would come under judicial review.

The judge who handed down the decision declined to comment.

After the ruling, the two neo-Nazis prepared a new telephone message in which they said the Hamburg court had proven that there were still "honest judges with civil courage" in Germany.

The prosecution has announced that it will appeal the court's decision. □

Jerusalem rabbi visits Austria 'to create a bridge' to Vienna*By Reinhard Engel*

VIENNA, Feb. 8 (JTA) — Austrian President Thomas Klestil hosted an official reception for a Jerusalem rabbi who is the spiritual leader of a community of Jews forced to leave Austria in 1938.

Klestil used the recent occasion to issue warm words of praise for Rabbi Akiva Ehrenfeld of Kiryat Mattersdorf in Jerusalem. The two men also met last year, when Klestil visited Israel.

The Austrian president told Ehrenfeld that his government would provide financial support to projects in Kiryat Mattersdorf, including a kindergarten and a home for the elderly.

Ehrenfeld, the son of the last rabbi of Mattersdorf in Austria, said he had come to Austria "to create a bridge between Jerusalem and Vienna."

The Austrian city of Mattersdorf, now known as Mattersburg, had been a thriving Jewish community for centuries, Klestil said, calling it "a center of faith and studies."

The Israeli ambassador to Austria, Josef Govrin, and the president of the Austrian Jewish Communities, Paul Grosz, also attended the reception.

"The really moving events in our lives never happen when we expect them," Klestil said at the ceremony, held at Vienna's Hofburg Palace. "I experienced such an event last year when I visited Jerusalem."

During his state visit to Israel in 1994, Klestil went to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and gave a speech before the Knesset. But the most touching experience was his visit to Kiryat Mattersdorf, he said.

"We all did not know what to expect in a community of surviving former Austrians who had escaped the darkness of the Nazi times," Klestil said. □

As talks in Cairo conclude, roundup continues in Gaza*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 8 (JTA) — Israel and the Palestinians concluded talks in Cairo on Wednesday, having made little progress in advance of a summit between Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Rabin and Arafat were scheduled to meet on Thursday.

As the talks drew to a close, Palestinian police continued their crackdown in the Gaza Strip, arresting more than 90 activists, many of them members of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a rejectionist group opposed to the Israel-PLO accord.

The DFLP claimed responsibility for the terror attack earlier this week in which an Israeli security guard was killed and another wounded.

In Washington, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres praised the Palestinian crackdown.

“Over the past few days, the Palestinian Authority started to take seriously the danger of terror coming from Gaza,” he told reporters on Wednesday before meeting with Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

The two days of talks in the Egyptian capital were aimed at arriving at a draft agreement on Palestinian elections in the territories.

Saeb Erekat, the chief negotiator on elections, said he would have nothing to show Arafat.

He said negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians had reached a “crisis.”

But Yoel Singer, the head of the Israeli delegation, was more optimistic.

He said the point of the talks was to come up with a draft document, and that anyone who had expected conclusive results would be disappointed.

The committees on elections agreed to meet in two weeks in Jericho. This would be the first such meeting in the autonomous area.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, Israeli security forces rounded up more than 20 suspected activists from the fundamentalist groups Islamic Jihad and Hamas.

The roundups occurred in the towns of Hebron, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Nablus. □

Trade leaders call for end to barriers, including boycott*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 8 (JTA) — Trade leaders from the United States, Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority concluded an unprecedented meeting this week with a call to end all trade barriers in the Middle East, including the Arab boycott of Israel.

Participants at the discussions on economic cooperation and development issued a communique advocating increased competition, private-sector development and mutual cooperation.

The meeting at Taba, the Red Sea resort, ended Wednesday.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, who was visiting the region and participated in the talks, hailed the meeting as “historic.”

He said it would usher in a new era of economic and commercial ties.

The meeting was described as a follow-up to last November’s regional economic conference in Casablanca, Morocco, and a prelude to a meeting scheduled for next year in Amman, Jordan.

At a meeting in Washington last month, representa-

tives of 39 nations and organizations agreed that Arab countries must lift their boycott of Israel in order to reap the fruits of a proposed Middle East regional development bank.

One joint project that came out of the meeting in Taba was the construction of a power station in the Sinai, which would be built with equipment from the United States.

The station would provide electricity to Egypt, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian autonomous regions, Israel Radio reported.

The parties also decided to establish a computerized database that would provide regional industrial and economic information to potential investors. □

Shas delivers its verdict not to rejoin Labor coalition*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 8 (JTA) — The fervently Orthodox Shas Party has announced that it will not rejoin the governing coalition of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

In a letter sent last Friday explaining the decision, the spiritual leader of Shas, former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, cited Israel’s deteriorating security situation as the reason Shas would not return to the Labor-led coalition.

“We had always aspired to peace, even in return for painful concessions,” Yosef said in the letter. “But the security situation now is insufferable.”

“This is not the peace for which we prayed.”

Shas sources said there was still a possibility they would rejoin the coalition. Shas political leader and former Interior Minister Aryeh Deri said his party’s move did not mean it would automatically vote with the opposition.

Shas left the coalition more than a year ago when Deri was indicted on charges of fraud, bribery and breach of public trust. Deri is currently standing trial on the charges.

Since then, Shas has neither joined the opposition nor returned to the government fold.

Shas has usually supported the government in crucial votes, particularly those relating to the peace process or when no-confidence motions have been brought before the Knesset.

Rabin is expected to reassign the two ministerial portfolios that had previously been held aside for Shas.

The two portfolios — the Religious Affairs and Interior ministries — were expected to go to ministers who would act as caretakers, a move that would leave the door open for future negotiations between Labor and Shas.

Shas’ decision came hours before the High Court of Justice handed down a ruling on a controversial agreement Rabin had made with Shas last year as part of the effort to get it to rejoin the coalition.

A special panel of five justices criticized the agreement, calling it legal but highly improper.

But the court decided not to intervene in the matter, saying it should be determined in the political arena, not in the courtroom.

The judges had criticized a clause in the agreement stating that if the religious status quo were violated — by a High Court ruling, for example — legislation would be enacted to restore it.

One of Shas’ conditions for rejoining the coalition had been a guarantee that the status quo would prevail on religious issues.

The justices said the wording of the clause made it appear that the government would, through the use of legislation, automatically reverse any court rulings affecting religious matters. □