



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Martin Indyk was sworn in as the next U.S. ambassador to Israel** at a ceremony at the State Department. Indyk, the first Jew to hold the post, is scheduled to arrive in Israel next week.

■ **Cardinal William Keeler assured Jewish leaders in a letter that he did not wish to interfere in the discussions over Jerusalem**, which are scheduled to take place as part of the final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Jewish interfaith leaders said the letter largely allayed their concerns and put Catholic-Jewish relations back on track. [Page 3]

■ **The head of the Israeli team negotiating with the Palestinians in Cairo played down reports that an agreement was imminent**. Yoel Singer said the most difficult issues connected to the holding of Palestinian elections have yet to be dealt with. Both sides "have a long way to go," he added.

■ **Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization must make greater progress in their negotiations if Middle East peace is to be achieved**, Morocco's King Hassan II said during a meeting with President Clinton at the White House. Clinton praised Hassan, saying he had "worked tirelessly" to secure a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

■ **Israeli sappers safely detonated several bombs found along an Israeli security fence bordering the Gaza Strip**. One remote-controlled device was found some five minutes before Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat was due to drive by. [Page 2]

■ **Tourism ministers from Israel, Jordan and Egypt outlined plans for a Middle Eastern "Riviera"**. The officials were in Berlin at the world's largest tourism trade fair. [Page 4]

■ **Israel signed cooperative health agreements with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, former Soviet republics**. The agreements regulate exchanges of medical information and experts and will enable Israeli manufacturers to operate in the two countries. [Page 3]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Rabin prepares home ground amid talk of new Syrian talks

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 15 (JTA) — With Israel and Syria set to resume direct negotiations in Washington, Israeli leaders are now attempting to prepare domestic opinion for the prospect of withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

The dramatic announcement of the talks' resumption came after Israel and Syria engaged this week in intense, sustained and detailed negotiations mediated by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Syria's pledge to reopen talks capped an eight-day trip of shuttle diplomacy that took Christopher to Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria.

Getting the stalled Washington talks restarted was the immediate goal that Christopher and his aides had set, acutely aware that time was slipping away.

"Time is of the essence," Christopher told reporters when he announced the talks' resumption Tuesday.

With both Israel and the United States set to enter a campaign season later this year for their respective national elections in 1996, many believe that there is little time left for a breakthrough on the Israeli-Syrian track.

Although the ambassadorial-level talks were scheduled to resume as early as this week or next, it was still unclear as Christopher flew home Tuesday after a long and grueling day in Damascus when or whether negotiations between the military chiefs of staff of the two countries would be held again.

In December, Syrian President Hafez Assad suspended both the political and military negotiations in Washington.

In Jerusalem, the mood among senior government policy-makers brightened markedly early in the week as it became clear that the secretary's shuttling between Jerusalem and Damascus had touched upon some concrete issues.

Talks focused on security procedures

The talks reportedly involved recommendations for specific security procedures that would go into effect after an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

According to observers, little of the discussions had to do with the extent or timing of the Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, discussion that, in the past, had led to a deadlock in the negotiations.

The fact that this time Assad was interested in getting down to details with the secretary was seen, both by the Americans and the Israelis, as a cause for optimism.

This was the case especially because U.S. officials, from Christopher to former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, had learned over the years that it is entirely possible to spend six or seven hours closeted with Assad and manage to discuss virtually nothing of substance.

As the signs from Damascus brightened, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres issued a series of deliberately crafted statements designed to ready domestic opinion for the need to confront the prospect of a Golan withdrawal.

In forceful remarks Tuesday after a briefing with the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Rabin pointedly spoke of the then-Likud government's decision in 1978 to cede all of the Sinai in return for peace with Egypt.

Rabin dubbed that move a "precedent" and insisted that Likud, which now stands in opposition to his government, cannot now shrug off that historic decision as a mistake.

"This government knows that there is no chance to attain peace without withdrawal," Rabin told reporters outside the committee room Tuesday.

For his part, Peres, in remarks Monday to the Labor Party's Knesset caucus, vowed that the government would move toward peace — and pay the territorial price — despite its sliding standings in the opinion polls. Ulti-

mately, Peres said, it would be the success of its peace program that would decide Labor's fate at the ballot box.

In reaction, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu ordered his party to introduce a bill in the Knesset next week calling for the dissolution of the Knesset and early elections.

In remarks to reporters, Netanyahu underscored the current poll readings, asserting that if elections were held now, Rabin would "lose, and lose big."

Coupled with their planned and coordinated effort to win back public opinion for a possible resumption of progress on the Syrian track, Rabin and Peres also have been careful to hedge their determined-sounding statements with caution.

Thus, while pointing to the Sinai as precedent for territorial withdrawal, Rabin insisted in his briefing to the Knesset committee Tuesday that the Israeli position was "almost not changed."

To prove his point, Rabin stressed that there was still no agreement on the key elements that form the backbone of an eventual peace treaty with Syria.

Those areas include: border demarcations, a timetable for withdrawal, security arrangements and a testing period that would usher in some form of normalized relations such as diplomatic relations.

Peres was similarly cautious, saying the new Israeli proposals were in the realm of "breaking through psychological barriers" rather than in the realm of substance.

Hopes for military leaders to join talks

On the procedural plane, Washington and Jerusalem are hoping that a resumption of talks between the Israeli and Syrian ambassadors in Washington will be followed by more talks between the army chiefs of staff of the two countries.

The negotiations will involve the two countries' ambassadors to the United States, Itamar Rabinovich of Israel and Walid Muallem of Syria.

Rabinovich, while toeing the cautious line laid down by his superiors, noted publicly this week that the secretary's negotiations in Damascus had been "more serious and covered a larger area" than before.

But Syria has not agreed to follow up with such high-level military meetings, or to accept an Israeli proposal that the talks be raised to a foreign ministerial level.

Christopher's Middle East specialist, Dennis Ross, is scheduled to return to the Middle East within the next two weeks in an effort to get the Israeli and Syrian chiefs of staff to rejoin the negotiations.

The new note of determination sounded by Rabin and Peres in regard to Syria this week echoed a similar tone they adopted with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli track, which has also faced near-stagnation in the recent past.

Just hours before Christopher's arrival in Israel on March 9, Peres met with Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat at the Gaza border.

After that meeting, Peres declared that a "breakthrough" had been reached, with the two sides agreeing to a target date of July 1 to reach an accord on the redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank, Palestinian elections and the transfer of further areas of responsibility to the Palestinians in the West Bank.

The initial reaction among many seasoned observers was one of skepticism; Israeli-Palestinian target dates have come and gone in the past with no real progress made.

Arafat himself, in the days after his meeting with Peres, tended to play down the magnitude of the supposed breakthrough.

But it was clear from the way Rabin and Christo-

pher publicly welcomed the agreement that they were determined to use it as a way of rebuilding momentum and a sense of buoyancy in the region.

In addition to the progress he ascribed to the Israeli-Palestinian and the Israeli-Syrian tracks, Christopher also was upbeat about his shuttling ventures elsewhere in the region.

In Egypt, he held what he described as valuable talks with President Hosni Mubarak on the issue of nuclear weapons in the region.

In Jordan, he assured King Hussein that his kingdom will get full relief of its outstanding debt to the United States despite recent congressional opposition to the move.

And in Saudi Arabia, he got the Persian Gulf states to agree to back continued sanctions against Iraq — a move that was approved by the U.N. Security Council a day later.

He also reportedly secured long-promised financial from the Gulf states for the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority. In his meeting with Arafat, Christopher also outlined new American aid for the Palestinians in the form of military trucks and expertise.

He also received assurances from Arafat that the Palestinians would take new measures to "pre-empt terror." □

IDF chief meets with settlers after six bombs found in Gaza

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, March 15 (JTA) — The Israel Defense Force chief of staff met this week with Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip to discuss security issues after six explosive devices were discovered in the area in one day.

Lt. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak told the settlers Monday that preventing terror in the area is high on the list for the IDF, but that there is no absolute security against terror attacks, even in Jerusalem.

The settlers expressed concern about the rise in attacks against Israelis. Shahak said he would look into the issues settlers raised regarding security measures.

Six roadside bombs were found in Gaza on Sunday. Israeli sappers safely detonated all of them.

One of the bombs, found near the Israeli settlement of Kfar Darom, reportedly may have been planted to kill Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat.

The bomb, which was hidden in a plastic barrel used as a road divider, was found only five minutes before Arafat was due to drive by on his way back to Gaza City from talks in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

No group claimed responsibility for planting the explosives.

In another development, Peace Watch, an independent group monitoring the Palestinian self-rule accord, has released figures on Israeli casualties killed in terror attacks since the accord was signed by Israel and the PLO in September 1993 in Washington.

The group said 123 Israelis had been killed in terror attacks since the signing, an increase of 85 percent over those killed in the 18 months preceding the historic event.

Eighty-one people were killed within Israel during the period, compared with 42 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Although the number of Israelis killed had increased, the number of fatal attacks remained unchanged, the report said. The higher death tolls resulted from attacks with multiple casualties, particularly suicide bombings, according to the report. □

Jewish concerns largely allayed by Keeler letter on Jerusalem

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, March 15 (JTA) — Jewish interfaith leaders said their concerns have been largely allayed and Catholic-Jewish relations put back on track by a letter issued by Cardinal William Keeler this week clarifying his stance on the status of Jerusalem.

Keeler's letter came one week after he signed a statement, along with other church leaders, criticizing Israel's assertion that Jerusalem will remain the "eternal and undivided capital of Israel."

The eight Christian leaders called on President Clinton to pressure Israel to limit its presence in Jerusalem.

The statement set off a storm of protest from Jewish groups and Israeli leaders.

This week, the Christian Coalition, the powerful evangelical group, weighed in with its own objection to the statement. In a letter to Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), the group's executive director, Ralph Reed, wrote: "This statement does not represent the sentiments of our organization nor, we believe, the beliefs of the millions of evangelical Christians who cherish the security of the State of Israel as one of their top foreign policy concerns."

"We recognize the Holy City as the undivided capital of the State of Israel," Reed wrote.

History of close relations with Jews

A meeting was hastily arranged this week between Jewish interfaith leaders and Keeler, who is president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and who has had a long history of close relations with representatives of Jewish groups.

Jews left the March 13 meeting, held at Keeler's residence in Baltimore, not fully satisfied that the Christian leaders understood how central the issue of Jerusalem is to the Jewish community. The Jewish participants were anxious to see the contents of the letter that Keeler promised he would write to them.

Keeler issued the letter the next day. In it, he sought to assure Jewish leaders that he did not wish to interfere in the discussions over Jerusalem, which are scheduled to take place as part of the final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians in 1996.

"The intent of the statement was not to suggest that the negotiators, in this instance the Israelis and Palestinians, should change their agreed schedule as to when the issue of Jerusalem will be formally addressed," Keeler wrote.

"Nor was it the intent of the statement to endorse any particular position on the permanent status of Jerusalem. Rather, it was to preserve all options and possible solutions until the principals could address them.

"Similarly, we did not intend that outsiders should enter the peace process but that in the matter of Jerusalem, representatives of the local religious communities should be involved in discussions pertinent to their rights and needs as religious communities," the cardinal wrote.

Keeler's letter said the original statement was prompted by "the increasing fear expressed to us by Christians in the area that certain 'developments on the ground' in and around Jerusalem might preclude vital aspects of the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians."

Several of those to whom the letter was addressed said they were not wholly satisfied with the cardinal's response. But, they said, it did put the Catholic-Jewish dialogue "back on track."

"Dealing substantively, it's helpful, and in effect

reverses what was there before," said Michael Kotzin, director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Chicago.

"We might still have differences, but this falls within parameters where there can be differences of perspective and that can be talked about, but won't be damaging to the peace process, as the first statement could have been," he said.

"The fact that Cardinal Keeler responded with alacrity to our concerns is a good thing," said Jerome Chanes, co-director for domestic concerns at the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, an umbrella group of Jewish agencies. "It's clear that he takes very seriously the consultative process and the fact that there was a lapse in that process," said Chanes.

There is a tacit agreement between Catholics and Jews engaged in dialogue. Before either group issues a position on an issue considered sensitive by the other, that group will consult, or at least warn, its dialogue partner about the impending announcement.

This time, Jews who have had warm relations with Keeler for decades did not even get a warning about the statement he was planning to sign about Jerusalem, an issue at the heart of Jewish concerns and passions. His position shocked several Jewish leaders, particularly because from the top levels of the hierarchy to the grass roots, they describe the Catholic-Jewish relationship as the best interreligious or interethnic relationship in the country.

"There was bewilderment and surprise and sadness" on the part of Jews that the cardinal had taken the position he did by signing on to the original statement, said Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee.

Kotzin described the outcome as a good example of the strength of dialogue between Catholics and Jews.

"It provides an example of using the process to correct a glitch in it. But the [original] document is still there, so there is still something problematic out there with his signature," he said. □

German choir's Israel concert canceled due to lack of funds

By David Kantor

BONN, March 15 (JTA) — A well-known men's choir based in Berlin last week canceled a friendship concert at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, apparently because of a lack of funds.

The choir is the successor of the Erich Weinert Ensemble of the former East German army, which was notorious for its anti-Israel standpoint. The event at Yad Vashem, which was scheduled for April 17, was planned as a special, highly symbolic gesture of reconciliation toward the Jewish state.

The budget committee of the Bundestag decided to cease funding the Carl Maria von Weber men's choir. Even a "plea for mercy" by President Roman Herzog of Germany failed to change the position of the federal assembly. □

Israel, ex-USSR republics sign health pacts

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, March 15 (JTA) — Israel has signed cooperative health agreements with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, former Soviet republics.

Israeli Health Minister Ephraim Sneh signed the accords during a short visit to the Central Asian countries this week. The agreements regulate exchanges of medical information and experts and will enable Israeli manufacturers to operate in the two countries. □

Agency warns emissaries in wake of killing in Kiev

By Lisa Glazer

MOSCOW, March 15 (JTA) — The Jewish Agency for Israel is urging renewed caution for all its employees in the former Soviet Union in the wake of a killing of one of its emissaries in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev.

Shimon Feingold, 46, died Saturday afternoon after he approached a neighbor to complain about loud music, according to the police.

The 21-year-old neighbor was arrested the next morning and confessed to hitting Feingold in the head. The blow caused Feingold to slip and fatally injure himself on the stairs, officials said. The neighbor, who was studying physical education at Kiev State University, admitted that he was very drunk at the time, officials said.

He has been charged with manslaughter.

"This is very hard for us, very draining, because Shimon was a very good man, a very good teacher," said Yoseph Tropiansky, the head of the Jewish Agency's operations in Ukraine.

"We are asking our envoys to be very careful. People here can be very aggressive," he said. Tropiansky said the Jewish Agency now has 92 envoys posted in different parts of the former Soviet Union.

"This situation had nothing to do with Shimon being a Jew or an Israeli," he added. "It was a dispute between two neighbors and one was very drunk."

The assessment was echoed by a spokesman for the Ukrainian Interior Ministry, who said, "There was no political content to this incident."

Feingold had been living and working with Jewish youth in Kiev for about a year before his death, Tropiansky said. Feingold, whose body was flown to Israel for burial at this Kibbutz Hazerim near Beersheba, is survived by a wife and two children. □

Tourism ministers plan a Middle Eastern 'Riviera'

By Miriam Widman

BERLIN, March 15 (JTA) — Imagine a "Riviera" stretching from the Jordanian port city of Aqaba through Eilat in Israel to Taba and Sharm el Sheik in Egypt.

Or a special trip for sailing enthusiasts and windsurfers, who could bob up and down on the Red Sea, gliding unhindered along the Jordanian, Israeli and Egyptian borders.

These are just some of the projects in the works, according to the tourism ministers of Israel, Jordan and Egypt, who convened here last week for their first joint news conference.

The three talked to reporters March 6 at the International Tourism Boerse, the world's largest trade fair for the tourism industry. Elias Freij, the official in charge of tourism and antiquities for the Palestinian Authority, was invited to the fair, but could not attend due to illness.

Amid loud applause and broad smiles, the three tourism ministers spoke of the political progress made in the region, which they said has opened the way for tour operators to offer excursions across newly opened borders.

The ministers said they view increased tourism as a key toward strengthening political and economic ties among the three countries and as an important economic factor for growth in the region.

Israeli Tourism Minister Uzi Baram, who expressed optimism that Israel will sign a peace accord with Lebanon and Syria, predicted that next year, the news conference would involve the tourism ministers from those two

countries as well. "Israelis will travel heavily" to Lebanon and Syria "as soon as they can," he said.

"Multidestination tourism stands to benefit from a just and lasting peace," added Jordanian Tourism Minister Abdel-Elah Khatib. He noted that a six-day tour package from the United States is already being offered in which travelers can book the journey via both El Al and Royal Jordanian Airlines.

Both Baram and the Egyptian Tourist Minister Mamdouh El Beltagui praised the Riviera project, which they said is still in the working stages. The project, they said, involves developing a promenade for pedestrians and cyclists that will be replete with restaurants, cafes and shops.

Beltagui said Egypt has much to gain from improved tourism because it has more coastline than the two other nations. But he said Egypt is first investing in improvements for a coastal airport so it can handle large aircraft.

While voicing their hopes for the future, the ministers also presented the news conference with 1994 tourism statistics for their respective countries.

Baram said Israel had 2.1 million visitors in 1994, an 11 percent increase over 1993 and a new record for the number of tourists visiting the country.

He said there were 492,000 American visitors last year, a 5 percent increase over 1993.

Among Europe's 1.1 million visitors to Israel in 1994, he said, the 197,000 travelers from the United Kingdom comprised the largest group, closely followed by 196,000 Germans.

Baram added that Israel is also a strong tourism exporter, with more than 1 million Israelis traveling abroad each year out of a total population of some 5 million.

Jordan's Khatib said that in his country, where border crossings with Israel were opened last fall, overall tourism was up 10 percent. He said there was a 27 percent increase in European tourists, with the number of Germans visiting Jordan up by 36 percent over 1993.

Khatib added that his country hopes to have a 100 percent increase this year in the number of tourists from Europe and America.

In the popular Jordanian tourist destination of Petra, Khatib noted, tourist capacity grew by 250 beds last year, and four additional hotels are on the way.

Egypt has reportedly suffered an overall drop in tourism because of the violent activities of some of the country's fundamentalist movements. But Beltagui said there were 213,214 Israeli tourists visiting Egypt last year, a 72 percent increase over 1993. □

King receives Belgians who aided Jews

By Joseph Kopel

BRUSSELS, March 15 (JTA) — King Albert II of Belgium last week received a delegation of 20 Belgians who helped save Jews from the Nazis during World War II.

The members of the delegation, who had previously been named Righteous Gentiles by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, were presented to the Belgian king on March 9 by Israel's ambassador to Belgium, Victor Harel. The ceremony came on the eve of a visit to the Auschwitz concentration camp by a delegation of Belgian officials.

Among the 350 people who traveled to Auschwitz March 13 to commemorate the memory of Belgian Holocaust victims were several members of the country's federal and regional governments, leaders of Belgium's political parties, religious and military officials, and representatives of the Belgian Jewish community. □