



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak began an official visit to Washington, seeking a renewed commitment to his country's annual \$2.1 billion in U.S. aid. Mubarak met with Secretary of State Warren Christopher and congressional leaders, and is scheduled to meet with President Clinton on Wednesday. Representatives of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations were set to travel to Washington to meet with the Egyptian president on Tuesday.

■ Israel denied allegations made by the Hamas fundamentalist movement that the Jewish state was responsible for Sunday's explosion at a bomb factory located in an apartment building in the heart of Gaza City. At a symbolic funeral for the victims, some 10,000 Palestinians vowed revenge against Israel, which Hamas blamed for the explosion. [Page 2]

■ The United Jewish Community federation of Bergen County, N.J., voted to tighten its internal procedures and practices that govern the organization. The move came after an investigation into charges of mismanagement against the organization's former executive vice president. [Page 3]

■ An anti-Semitic Bible that the Catholic Church said should cease being published has again been made available to the French public. The book was originally published under the auspices of the Bishop of Versailles, but the Vatican said the offensive Bible should not be published. [Page 4]

■ Polish Foreign Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski criticized German Chancellor Helmut Kohl for not inviting Polish leaders to ceremonies marking the defeat of the Nazis in World War II. The Polish official said Poland would hold its own ceremonies commemorating the end of the war against Germany. [Page 3]

■ Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands visited Israel, stressing the special bond between her country and the Jewish state. Addressing a special session of the Knesset, the queen likened the current situation in the Middle East to Europe in the wake of World War II. [Page 4]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Is the clock running out for an Israeli-Syrian accord?

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 3 (JTA) — In the halls of power in both Jerusalem and Washington, a consensus has emerged that time is running out for Israel and Syria to reach a peace agreement.

The question is: Does Syrian President Hafez Assad see it the same way?

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signaled his own sense of urgency and determination to persevere in negotiations with Syria, both in remarks he made at the weekly Cabinet meeting and in a widely reported newspaper interview.

And in Washington, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher declared that "this is the critical period" in Syrian-Israeli negotiations.

Christopher's urgency was reflected in his decision to dispatch his special Middle East coordinator, Dennis Ross, to the region this week to keep up the momentum in the negotiations.

Ross' immediate task will be to arrange for new talks between top Israeli and Syrian military officers, who had met briefly in December before their talks were abruptly broken off by Assad.

After Christopher's visit to the region last month, Assad agreed to resume talks with Israel on an ambassadorial level. Since March 20, Israeli Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich and his Syrian counterpart, Walid Muallem, have been meeting on and off, with various degrees of progress reported.

In an interview with the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, Rabin disclosed — though the newspaper did not attribute the comment to the prime minister directly — that the Syrians were prepared to establish a low-level diplomatic mission to be established in Damascus after an initial withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Golan Heights.

Although some observers say Syria has made this offer before, it was nonetheless noteworthy that Rabin, even indirectly, referred to the offer.

Christopher issues somber warning

Christopher, whose visit to the region last month injected new vitality into the Israel-Syrian process, declined Sunday to confirm the development.

But in upbeat references to the state of the negotiations, Christopher said on the CBS Television news show "Face the Nation" that he was "somewhat encouraged" by progress made "over the last few days and weeks" in the Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

The two sides had successfully "identified issues," Christopher said. Gaps remained, he said, adding that he believed that they were "bridgeable."

At the same time, the secretary of state used his television interview to sound a somber warning.

"Now is the time," he declared. If Syria and Israel did not clinch a deal within "the next few months," the election period in Israel would begin, making it harder or even impossible to make further progress.

Rabin's own concern about the 1996 election has been evident in recent weeks as he has attempted to sharpen the differences between his Labor-led government's peace policies and what he views as the Likud's non-alternative approach to peace.

This deliberate attempt to distinguish himself from his rival, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, manifested itself on Sunday during controversial remarks at his Cabinet meeting.

"We have to do everything to bolster the settlements along the Lebanese border," Rabin said. "That's where we should put our effort — not in the Golan Heights."

Rabin's remarks came in the wake of a difficult weekend for Israelis living near the northern border.

Northern residents spent part of the weekend in shelters after Hezbollah terrorists in southern Lebanon fired Katyusha rockets on Nahariya and Kiryat Shemona last Friday evening. Benny Yunassi, a 17-year-old youth, was killed while running on the beach in Nahariya.

An escalation of tensions with the fundamentalist Islamic Hezbollah further emphasized the need for negotiations with Syria, which, as the main

powerbroker in Lebanon, is widely believed to have the leverage to contain Hezbollah.

The reaction of the Golan settlers to Rabin's remark was instant and predictable: A chorus of protests immediately went up that Rabin was "setting off one part of the populace against another."

Rabin was crudely trying to build up public opinion in favor of withdrawal from the Golan by "delegitimizing" the Golan settlers, they maintained, just as he had previously spoken out against West Bank settlers.

Golan settlement leaders asserted that if and when the issue came to a referendum, as Rabin has promised it would before any action is taken, the majority of Israelis would vote against withdrawal from the strategic Golan and dismantlement of the settlements there.

On the face of it, they were right, because the polls consistently show strong public support for Israel keeping at least part of the Golan under any circumstance.

But in the view of many pundits here, if Israeli and Syrian negotiators really do hammer out a land-for-peace agreement backed by ironclad security arrangements, and if Rabin is able to present it as a practical proposition, the majority of Israelis would favor such a deal.

Although Rabin's grouching toward the Golan settlers at the Cabinet meeting was in line with his political concerns, it was also the product of the black weekend on the Lebanon border.

Hezbollah launched the attack after the Israel Defense Force killed a senior Hezbollah commander, Rida Mahsoun Yassin, in southern Lebanon earlier the same day. The killing of Yassin was conducted with surgical accuracy by Apache attack helicopters firing rockets at the Hezbollah commander's car.

The Israeli air attack was in retaliation for the killing of Staff Sgt. Liron Lang during an earlier ground clash with Hezbollah forces.

For Rabin, the flare-up in Lebanon was especially galling. Instead of taking the credit for the killing of Yassin, a prime terror target, Rabin was tarnished by criticism — even around the Cabinet table — of the army's decision not to take early and prompt civil defense measures for the population in northern Israel.

In addition, Rabin had stressed in his interview with Yediot Achronot that only an agreement with Syria would settle the perennial terrorist problem in southern Lebanon.

Ultimately, say observers here, the likelihood of an agreement with Syria will depend on Assad's reading of the Israeli political scene.

Will he, like Christopher, see Rabin's term, now quickly running out, as his only chance to make a deal?

Will he believe the promises of Netanyahu, who continues to insist that for him control of the Golan is non-negotiable? Or does he believe, as he reportedly told a visiting German statesman recently, that he will get "the same price from Likud as from Labor" when all is said and done?

The months ahead, as Christopher said Sunday, will prove critical. □

Israel denies any role in terrorists' explosion

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 3 (JTA) — Israel has denied any involvement in this week's explosion at a bomb factory located in the heart of Gaza City.

Palestinian police said that Sunday's explosion occurred when bombs being made by members of the militant fundamentalist Hamas movement blew up prematurely.

The explosion ripped through a Gaza City apartment building, killing at least six people, including a senior Hamas activist who was sought by Israeli and Palestinian security forces.

Among the dead was Kamal Kheil, a member of Izz a-Din al-Kassam, the military wing of Hamas. A 3-year-old girl was also among the dead, according to witnesses. Some reports said eight people had died.

The explosion, which gutted the second floor of an apartment building in Gaza, also left at least 20 people wounded.

Large numbers of Palestinian police and ambulances came to the site, which was reportedly strewn with body parts as far as 300 yards from the apartment building. Bomb crews found several other explosive devices that did not go off at the site, as well as hand grenades and assault rifles.

In a statement issued Sunday, Hamas claimed that Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat had conspired with Israel to kill Kheil in the explosion.

On Monday, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres flatly denied the accusations leveled by Hamas.

'Those gentlemen killed themselves'

"Israel has nothing to do with the explosion in Gaza yesterday," Peres said, adding that the Hamas attempt "to finger Israel is total nonsense."

"Instead of killing other people, those gentlemen killed themselves, and thank heaven they did not kill other people," Peres added.

Appearing before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Monday, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said he expected Hamas to attempt to carry out a terror attack in Israel in an effort to regain its sense of prestige after the debacle of the weekend blast.

Meanwhile, Israel Radio reported that a Gaza truck which was apparently intended to be used for a terrorist bombing near Beersheba last month was filled with explosives made in the Gaza City bomb factory.

Israeli police discovered the truck before the attack could be carried out.

Rabin said there was still no detailed information about the other Hamas members killed in Sunday's explosion.

Palestinian police reportedly said Monday that one of the unidentified bodies might be that of Yehia Ayash, a top Hamas bomb maker known as "the engineer," who was wanted in Israel for planning and engineering several terror attacks.

Rabin's remarks before the committee came as the government withstood two no-confidence motions submitted by members of the opposition over what they called Israel's eroding security situation.

Peres, who responded for the government, said the government will continue to attempt to advance the peace process. The Knesset defeated the vote 58-46.

Elsewhere in Gaza City, some 10,000 Hamas supporters crowded the streets Monday for a symbolic funeral after Palestinian officials refused to allow the explosion's victims to be buried in a public funeral.

The event, replete with empty stretchers normally used to carry bodies to the cemetery, soon turned into a demonstration against Israel. The marchers reportedly shouted "Revenge, revenge" and "We want to hear the Jews crying."

Meanwhile, Palestinian Authority officials criticized Hamas for setting up the bomb factory in a residential neighborhood of Gaza City.

Hisham Abdel-Razek, a PLO activist, accused Hamas of hurting Palestinian aspirations by plotting terror attacks against Israel. □

Mismanagement probe spurs N.J. federation to change procedures

By Gary Rosenblatt
New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK, April 3 (JTA) — The United Jewish Community federation of Bergen County, N.J., has, in effect, accused itself of fiscal mismanagement over a period of years.

Responding to an investigative report by its national parent body, the local federation last week voted to tighten its internal procedures and practices centering on the actions of its former executive vice president.

James Young, who retired last year after 17 years as the top official of the federation, is said to have "failed to provide adequate leadership" and may have "benefited" from his actions, according to a carefully worded report of a special audit committee formed by the Council of Jewish Federations, the umbrella organization of the 165 American Jewish federations.

The report also charged that the volunteer leadership of the Bergen County federation did not execute proper oversight in its operations.

The report listed more than 15 instances of improprieties involving the administration and allocation of funds.

These include procedures for increasing the executive vice president's salary, providing funds for his retirement package, allowing vacation to accrue toward his retirement benefits and using donor-designated funds for other charitable purposes.

As a result of the CJF report, the Bergen County federation adopted its own report last week, which set out specific follow-up actions.

Martin Kraar, executive vice president of CJF, said his organization was "distressed at the questionable business practices confirmed" by the Bergen County federation committee, "but we are comforted by the knowledge that these practices are extremely rare to the federation system as a whole."

He said federations should "review their own recordkeeping and business practices to be certain they exceed those required by law and serve our donors with the highest standard of practice and integrity."

Kraar said the federation system "deplores bad practice and therefore puts service to its clients and commitments to donors as its highest priority."

At the center of the crisis is the administrative actions and style of Young, whom some see as a throwback to the old school of federation executives who generally operated on an informal basis with lay leaders.

For several years, the community has heard rumors of charges of flaws in the system.

Several critics from within the federation have sought corrective measures.

Critics turn to new president

After contending that they were being stonewalled, the critics turned to the new president, Danny Rubin. He in turn approached CJF several months ago, which formed an independent committee and made the recommendations adopted last week.

Young did not comment, but Dr. Andrew Sklover, a former president of the federation and advocate of Young's, insisted that the CJF investigation was "a witch hunt" conducted improperly and without balance.

"No one is charging fraud here," said Sklover, noting that he and four other presidents of the federation have issued a point-by-point response to the CJF investigative report.

Sklover defended Young, pointing out that the

former executive was one of the most successful fundraisers in the field and always operated with the support of his lay leaders. Sklover is heading a regional Anti-Defamation League dinner in May that will honor Young.

In the end, though, Sklover said he and the other members of the federation board voted in favor of the recommendations in the interest of healing the community and putting the issue to rest.

"We sold out on the truth to put this behind us," he said.

Ron Meier, who succeeded Young last fall, characterized the report as reflecting the problems involved in a small federation growing quickly into a larger one. The Bergen federation raises about \$7.5 million in its annual campaign.

"Our main flaw, if there was one, was in not recognizing some time ago that the system of internal control and management here did not keep pace with the sophisticated growth of campaign fund raising," he said.

"Decisions were made by a president or officer, or too few people. There were not enough checks and balances."

Meier expressed confidence that even though "this has been a rocky path," the federation will be strengthened by instituting the procedures it voted in last week. □

Poland among states unhappy with Berlin ceremony guest list

By Gil Sedan

BONN, April 3 (JTA) — Relations between Germany and some of its neighbors have soured after Chancellor Helmut Kohl decided not to invite those countries' leaders to ceremonies marking the defeat of the Nazis in World War II.

Poland, in particular, felt snubbed by Kohl's refusal to invite President Lech Walesa to the May 8 ceremonies in Berlin.

Kohl said he wanted only the leaders of the victorious wartime Allies — the United States, Great Britain, France and Russia — to attend.

He said that if he invited the Polish leader, he would also have to invite leaders of other countries overrun by the Nazis in the war.

Kohl instead decided to ask those governments to send diplomats to the ceremonies.

The Polish foreign minister, Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, criticized Kohl's decision not to invite Walesa, saying Poland "should not be absent or in the second row of importance" at the commemoration. Bartoszewski is a survivor of the Auschwitz death camp and a former underground fighter.

He referred to the 6 million Poles who died during the war and that the Poles fought on every front with the Allies against the Nazi regime.

Despite his criticisms, Bartoszewski has agreed to address the German Parliament at a special ceremony April 28.

After meeting with Rita Sussmuth, president of the German Parliament, Bartoszewski said he was honored by her invitation.

The foreign minister also said Poland would hold its own ceremonies commemorating the end of the war against Germany.

Among those invited to the May 8 German ceremonies are U.S. Vice President Al Gore, British Prime Minister John Major, French President Francois Mitterand and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

President Clinton has agreed to accept Russian President Boris Yeltsin's invitation to a May 9 ceremony in Moscow marking the defeat of Nazi Germany. □

Germany commemorates attacks against Jews, past and present

By Gil Sedan

BONN, April 3 (JTA) — Two painful events — one from the past, one from the present — were commemorated recently in Germany.

Gypsies and Social Democrats, two groups persecuted by the Nazis, were commemorated in ceremonies at the former Ravensbruck and Sachsenhausen death camps. Some 500,000 Gypsies were murdered during the war.

At Ravensbruck, Roman Rose, chairman of the Central Council of Sinti and Roma (Gypsies) in Germany, urged that all forms of discrimination be handled with a strong commitment.

And at Sachsenhausen, Rudolf Scharping, leader of the opposition Social Democratic Party, urged all Germans to stand up against "the daily fascism" in that country.

Scharping spoke at a ceremony commemorating the Social-Democrats who had been victims of the Nazi regime.

A few days before the ceremony, vandals daubed swastikas on a door in Sachsenhausen, officials said, adding that the swastikas and neo-Nazi slogans had been drawn in pencil. No one had been apprehended.

In 1989 and 1990, neo-Nazis torched two barracks at the camp. Those barracks, which have recently served as a Jewish museum, will be reconstructed in May for the 50th anniversary of the end of the war.

In an event commemorating a more recent atrocity, about 300 people gathered Sunday to remember last year's burning of the synagogue in the German town of Lubeck.

The firebombing, on March 25, 1994, was the first such attack on a synagogue since the Nazi era. Various speakers noted that the attack amounted to an assault against all of civilized society.

Four men in their 20s have been charged with arson and attempted murder and are awaiting trial. The defendants reportedly belong to an extreme right-wing group. According to the charge sheet, they were motivated by "hatred toward foreigners and Jews." At the time of the fire, five people resided at the synagogue. They escaped unharmed. □

Anti-Semitic Bible denounced by Vatican available yet again

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, April 3 (JTA) — An anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist Bible that the Catholic Church said should cease being published has again been made available to the public.

In response to this recent development, French Chief Rabbi Joseph Sitruk said he "deplored this evident theological drawback." The rabbi added, "It's a bad blow to the relations between Jews and Christians."

The book was originally published under the auspices of the Bishop of Versailles, Jean-Charles Thomas. But when the Vatican was made aware of the French translation, the papal office sent a letter to the bishop, saying the book was "in contradiction" with the teachings on the Jews of the Vatican II Council.

The bishop has since said that he was not aware of the offensive content, which apparently appears in the footnotes. He has apologized for what he termed "a mistake and an offense towards the Jewish people."

The Bible contains some of the worst anti-Semitic stereotypes of pre-Vatican II Catholic literature.

In the footnotes, Jews are called "God killers" involved in "fanatical," "folkloric" and "businesslike" practices.

Despite the efforts of the Catholic Church to stop publication of the Bible, people can still purchase it.

The International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism said it was planning to sue those connected to the book's publication, including French publisher Mediaspaul.

In response, Sitruk said: "One shouldn't engage in a theological or legal war. It would mean a failure for all. Now that the evil has been done, it is better to request statements and corrections. One also has to stress that the mentalities don't evolve very fast and that Jews and Catholics have to go on with their efforts against anti-Semitism." □

Queen of the Netherlands tells Knesset of challenges of peace

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 3 (JTA) — Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands visited Israel last week, stressing the special bond between her country and the Jewish state.

Addressing a special session of the Knesset, the queen likened the situation in Europe in the wake of World War II to the challenges state leaders in the Middle East face today. "Once peace is concluded, reconciliation must follow," she said.

The queen said that immediately after WWII in Europe, reconciliation among the countries that fought two World Wars seemed an impossible task.

"Yet inspiring statesmen then showed the way and found a forum for the necessary reconciliation," she said. "In three years, your country will celebrate its 50th anniversary. It would be the crown of your work, if on your country's birth, peace could also be celebrated."

Earlier in the visit, the queen visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and attended a state dinner with President Ezer Weizman. The president said, "Unfortunately, we cannot forget that over 80,000 Dutch Jews perished" during the Holocaust. But, he added, "We also remember the 4,000 Righteous Gentiles from your country." □

During the state visit, the Dutch foreign minister met with Palestinian official Faisal Husseini in eastern Jerusalem. Israel Radio reported that the two discussed the peace process and the issue of Israeli settlements. □

Portugal honors ex-consul who saved Jews during war

By Ruben Vis

LISBON, April 3 (JTA) — The man who served as Portugal's consul in France during World War II has been posthumously honored for illegally issuing 30,000 visas, mostly to Jews facing Nazi persecution.

Dr. Aristide de Sousa Mendes do Amaral e Abranches, also known as the "Portuguese Raoul Wallenberg," received Portugal's most distinguished non-military honor — membership in the Order of Christ, first degree — and had a memorial in his honor erected in Lisbon's city center.

Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat, saved the lives of 100,000 Hungarian Jews during World War II.

The first lady of Portugal, Lady Soares, presided over both ceremonies, which many dignitaries attended.

In 1940, De Sousa Mendes served as the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux, France. In three days, he issued about 30,000 visas to mostly Jewish refugees in the area, an illegal act under the Portuguese government.

A career diplomat, De Sousa Mendes was ordered back to Portugal to be fired from the consul post and to have his diplomatic status taken away as a result of the visas. □