

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Arab states circulated a draft resolution at the U.N. Security Council, sharply criticizing Israel's planned confiscation of Arab-owned land in eastern Jerusalem. The resolution called on Israel to rescind the confiscation order immediately. Canada and Australia joined the chorus of nations critical of Israel's move.

■ Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa left talks with President Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Washington, apparently armed with new proposals on security arrangements for an eventual Israeli-Syrian accord. The meetings came as Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin vowed to take a tough stand in negotiations with Syria. [Page 3]

■ As many as 20 girls younger than 12 have been married off by their fervently Orthodox fathers. They are the latest victims of the "get wars," in which husbands seek retribution against their wives in messy divorce battles. [Page 1]

■ Swedish Deputy Prime Minister Mona Sahlin cut short a visit to Israel, after the Foreign Ministry denied her permission to meet with Palestinian officials at Orient House. Sahlin canceled planned meetings with Israeli leaders, who denied that Sahlin's departure represented a "diplomatic incident." [Page 2]

■ Representatives from about 30 countries, including Israel, Jordan, Egypt and the United States, met in Eilat for multilateral talks on tourism. The meeting was held in an effort to increase tourism in the Middle East.

■ For the first time, an Israeli man has been made an instructor for a women's officer training course. The chief women's officer said she had no problem with his request, because women have trained cadets in men's officer courses. [Page 2]

■ The cost of living index rose by less than 1 percent in April, the lowest increase for that month in more than 20 years. The annual inflation rate was 3.6 percent, with increases in clothing and building costs.

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Orthodox 'get wars' turn ugly as young girls are married off**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, May 15 (JTA) — The "get wars" in the fervently Orthodox community are turning uglier, and the latest victims are girls younger than 12.

As many as 20 girls who have not yet reached the traditional Jewish age of majority have been unknowingly married off by their fathers, according to Orthodox sources familiar with the cases.

The fathers are apparently using their daughters as tools of retribution against their wives in messy divorce battles. They are holding their daughters' lives hostage until they obtain what they want from their wives.

The practice forces the girls into a situation that can only be resolved with a get, or religious divorce, that only their husbands can grant.

In most of these cases, the girls do not even know to whom they have been effectively married.

This recent practice, known as kedusha ketana, appears to be a new twist on an old problem for agunot, or women who are unable to obtain religious divorces from their husbands.

"This shows what happens when the agunah problem is ignored," said Rivka Haut, co-president of Agunah Inc., a New York-based organization that advocates on behalf of agunot.

"This is the next stage. They are not content to just torture their wives, but are now torturing their daughters, too," Haut said.

Betrothing young girls represents new tactic

There are estimated to be thousands of observant women in North America whose husbands refuse to grant them a divorce.

In many cases, a husband will demand large sums of money or custody of the children before he agrees to give the divorce.

But the tactic of betrothing young girls is apparently new, say critics, many of whom expressed alarm at this latest development in the battle for a get.

Betrothing a daughter younger than 12 has not been practiced in contemporary times, said halachic experts.

And until the past year, it has never been used as a weapon of retribution, according to several rabbis.

In earlier times, when arranged marriage at an early age was the norm and a girl required a dowry, families would sometimes betroth a minor daughter if they had the money for it and were not sure that they would in the future.

Today, however, the men involved are usually seeking custody of their children or possession of property, such as houses or cars.

The men are seeking a new form of leverage over their wives, most of whom have obtained civil divorces, but cannot date or remarry within the Orthodox world.

Once word gets out in the tightly-knit communities that these girls have been betrothed, they are made pariahs, said sources within the community.

The fathers are not required to divulge the names of the men to whom they have betrothed the girls, and rabbinic authorities have not determined a way of forcing them to do so.

In one case, a father who lives in Boro Park, a religious neighborhood in Brooklyn, betrothed his oldest daughter, who was then 11. He has threatened to do the same to a second daughter, who is now approaching her 12th birthday, unless he gets custody of his children.

A civil court had denied him custody of his children and visitation rights. The girls live with their mother in Montreal.

The father has not revealed the name of the man to whom he betrothed his daughter.

The judges on the beit din, or religious court, in Boro Park accepted his statement of betrothal as valid, according to one Montreal rabbi involved in the situation.

He has also refused to give his wife a religious divorce and claimed

that she owed him \$120,000. Canadian and American rabbis raised the money to pay him off in order that he would give her the divorce, said a source familiar with the case.

When they went to a Boro Park beit din and handed over the money in cash, the man then refused to sign the divorce, saying that he had never made any such agreement.

Fervently Orthodox rabbis appear uniformly dismayed by the girls' betrothals, but they have not found a solution to the dilemma.

"The rabbis are very upset and we haven't decided how to react to it," said Rabbi Solomon Herbst, a former head of the religious court connected with the Rabbinical Council of America, the mainstream Orthodox rabbinic body.

"It is so painful that I cannot even talk about it," added Herbst, head of his own Orthodox religious court, named the Beit Din Tzedek-Ein Sof.

'A tragedy of the highest order'

Rabbi David Zweibel of Agudath Israel of America agreed.

"This is a tragedy of the highest order," Zweibel said.

"I've heard rabbonim describe people who do this as evil. I prefer the term 'maniac,'" he said.

"Certainly no one condones using this as a weapon," said Rabbi Chaim Malinowitz, a judge at the religious court in Monsey, N.Y., an area heavily populated by fervently Orthodox Jews.

"Rabbonim and batei din (religious courts) have met and have been discussing ideas" of what to do about the issue, Malinowitz said.

Haut thinks that the solution is for Orthodox rabbis to declare the betrothals meaningless.

"These husbands and fathers have tremendous power over women. Now they're showing it also over their young daughters," Haut said.

Calling on rabbis to "break this power," Haut said:

"If every rabbinic organization issued a declaration that men cannot betroth their young daughters and the girls should in no way be stigmatized by the Orthodox community, and that they will perform these girls' marriages when the time comes, and that rabbis will not take the betrothals seriously, that would put an end to it."

"We believe that the rabbis must find a halachic solution, and we believe that it is within their capacity" to do so, Haut said.

Zweibel believes that this is not necessarily the case.

"Unfortunately or fortunately, halacha is something that cannot be easily manipulated," he said.

"We don't subscribe to the idea that where there's a rabbinic will, there's a halachic way," Zweibel said.

As they discuss the issue, rabbis are now in the process of deciding whether these girls are required to cover their hair, as married women do.

Each of the dozen Orthodox rabbis interviewed had heard of two or three cases of this betrothal, all of which have happened during the past year.

But according to a representative of the Shalom Bayis (Peaceful Home) Organization, at least 20 girls have been betrothed by their fathers in the past several months alone.

Shalom Bayis is a newly established group whose goal is the eradication of divorce in the Orthodox Jewish community, according to the representative, who identified himself only as Yossi.

The organization has blanketed religious neighbor-

hoods in Brooklyn and Queens with leaflets urging all men to wait five years before giving their wives a religious divorce.

The leaflets state that custody of all boys older than 6 "must be given to the husband as required by halacha."

Yossi said even though his group does not condone the child betrothals, husbands have been "pushed to the wall" by their wives and the civil courts before committing their daughters.

"It's against Torah for a man to have his home and possessions taken away from him," he said.

"Some women have put their kids in public school to spite their husbands," he said. "This blackmail works both ways."

He said the fathers had been threatened with physical harm "by family members and goons hired" by the estranged wife.

These fathers, he said, view the betrothals "as life insurance."

"Nothing's going to happen to them as long as the wife needs to know who the girl is betrothed to," Yossi said. □

Swedish leader leaves Israel early after canceled visit to Orient House

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 15 (JTA) — Swedish Deputy Prime Minister Mona Sahlin cut short a visit to Israel, after the Foreign Ministry denied her permission to meet with Palestinian officials at Orient House, located in eastern Jerusalem.

Sahlin said prior to her departure Monday that she would return to Israel at a time when she would be able to choose "whom I can meet, and when."

Sahlin canceled planned meetings with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Peres denied that Shalin's departure represented a "diplomatic incident."

He said the Foreign Ministry had explained to Sahlin that because her trip was ceremonial, not political, it would not be appropriate to meet at Orient House, which serves as the Palestine Liberation Organization's de facto headquarters in Jerusalem.

During her abbreviated stay, Sahlin took part in ceremonies honoring Count Folke Bernadotte, who helped save thousands of Jews during the Holocaust.

Bernadotte, who was later appointed by the United Nations to mediate in the 1948 War of Independence, was assassinated in September of that year by members of the Stern gang.

The group, whose members included Yitzhak Shamir, opposed Bernadotte's policies, which called for the internationalization of Jerusalem.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said reports that Sahlin's departure marked a crisis in Israeli-Swedish relations were "wild exaggerations." □

Male soldier to teach female officers

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 15 (JTA) — For the first time, a male soldier has been made an instructor for a women's officer training course.

The officer, Lt. Lior Siton, 22, had asked to lead a women's officer training course.

The chief women's officer, Lt. Col. Yisraela Oron, said she had no problem with his request, because women train cadets in men's officer courses. □

Rabin talks tough on Syria as Sharaa meets U.S. leaders

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 15 (JTA) — Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin opened the summer session of the Knesset this week, vowing to take a tough stand in its negotiations with Syria.

Israel would not sign a peace agreement with Syria "under any conditions or at any price," Rabin said Monday.

His remarks came as Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa concluded talks in Washington aimed at moving the Israeli-Syrian negotiations forward.

Sharaa will apparently return to Damascus with proposals to bridge the gaps between Israeli and Syrian visions for security arrangements in the event of an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

In meetings with the Syrian foreign minister, President Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher pressed him to make peace with Israel.

However, the meetings failed to resolve the major issues dividing Israel and Syria, including the extent of a presumed withdrawal from the Golan Heights, the time frame and the security arrangements. "There are serious gaps," Christopher told reporters.

After meeting with Clinton, Sharaa said, "The next step is to reach an understanding on the terms and principles of security arrangements. If we are able to, the negotiations will move ahead quickly."

Sharaa argued that security arrangements must be "reciprocal, equal and balanced."

Citing the size of the Jewish state and the advantage of holding the strategic plateau, Israel has opposed the notion that all security arrangements have to be equal.

The recent decision by Israel to confiscate Arab land in Jerusalem and congressional initiatives to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem obscured Sharaa's visit.

"The general picture in the Arab world is not a good one especially regarding the confiscation of land by Israel" in eastern Jerusalem, Sharaa said he told Christopher during their meetings.

Jerusalem was also high on Rabin's agenda during the Knesset session.

Rabin, Netanyahu trade barbs

At the heart of the day's debates were the barbs traded between Rabin and Likud opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu.

While Rabin said Jerusalem is the eternal and undivided capital of Israel, Netanyahu retorted that despite government claims that Jerusalem is not up for negotiation, it is busy negotiating the city's fate with the rest of the world.

The sparring came in the wake of Sunday's Cabinet decision to approve the expropriation of the land in eastern Jerusalem.

At the United Nations on Monday, Arab states circulated a draft resolution sharply criticizing Israel's planned confiscations. The resolution calls on Israel to rescind the confiscation order immediately.

Israel sought to ease the outcry on the matter, presenting members of the U.N. Security Council with copies of Sunday's Cabinet decision, which stressed that no further lands would be expropriated for building housing in the city.

Prior to Rabin's address, the Knesset debated a no-confidence motion that had been submitted by the National Religious Party over an Israeli law implementing the Palestinian self-rule accord.

Rabin's governing coalition defeated the motion by a vote of 57-48.

Both Rabin and Netanyahu gave their spin on negotiations with Syria at respective caucus meetings earlier in the day.

Rabin said there are problems in the negotiations with Damascus, which is asking more from Israel than any other Arab country had in previous peace talks.

Netanyahu warned at a Likud caucus meeting that the government is getting ready to sell out on Jerusalem, as well as on the Golan Heights.

The statements came as the Labor Party faced its own internal division on the Golan issue. After a stormy Knesset Committee meeting, Labor Party member Avigdor Kahalani said he would present his Golan bill before the Knesset plenum, no matter what other party members said.

Kahalani has been calling for a law requiring a special majority of 70 Knesset members to approve any territorial concessions on the Golan as part of an eventual peace deal with Syria. □

(JTA correspondent Matthew Dorf in Washington contributed to this report.)

Islamic Jihad waffles on attacks against Israelis

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 15 (JTA) — The Islamic Jihad fundamentalist movement has announced that it opposes any agreement with the Palestinian Authority aimed at curtailing the group's attacks on Israelis and at getting the militants to turn over their weapons to the Palestinian police.

Sunday's announcement by the group stood in sharp contradiction to a statement made Saturday by the spiritual leader of Islamic Jihad, Abdullah Al-Shami, who was released by Palestinian police over the weekend.

Shami said his group was ready to stop its attacks against Israelis temporarily.

Shami was arrested by Palestinian authorities in January after two members of his group carried out a double suicide attack near Beit Lid in Israel, killing at least 21 Israelis and wounding 60 others. Shami, noting that his statement Saturday represented a shift in his position, said there was a need for the Palestinian Authority and its fundamentalist opposition to enter into dialogue.

The self-rule government of Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat began holding discussions a month ago with the Islamic Jihad and with the larger Hamas fundamentalist movement in an effort to ease tensions in the Gaza Strip.

But the Islamic Jihad's Damascus-based leader, Fathi al-Shuqaqi, said Sunday that no understanding had been reached with the Palestinian Authority, and that the group would never agree to stop terror attacks against Israelis.

Islamic Jihad has demanded that the Palestinian Authority release all fundamentalist activists still held in detention, suspend the military court it established recently to prosecute activists and stop mass arrests.

Meanwhile, Palestinian officials in Gaza said they would begin confiscating unlicensed weapons. The announcement came after a deadline issued by the Palestinian Authority for registering the weapons expired Sunday. The deadline was announced last month, amid pressure on the Palestinian Authority to crack down on extremists.

Freih Abu Medein, the Palestinian Authority official in charge of judicial affairs, said police would not carry out arbitrary searches of people's homes, adding that only those Palestinians carrying unregistered arms in public would be prosecuted. □

U.S. ousts accused Nazi to face charges in Canada*By Alissa Kaplan*

NEW YORK, May 15 (JTA) — A Canadian citizen accused of belonging to a notorious Nazi murder squad has been kicked out of the United States and sent back to Canada, according to the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations.

Helmut Oberlander, 71, will face citizenship revocation proceedings in Canada based on charges that he took part in executions of civilians during World War II.

Eli Rosenbaum, OSI director, said that Oberlander's removal from the United States last week should send a "powerful and unambiguous message far beyond our borders: Under no circumstances will the United States allow itself to become a haven for those who are credibly accused by other governments of complicity in the barbaric crimes of the Nazi regime."

The Justice Department said Nazi documents show that Oberlander, an ethnic German from Ukraine, was a decorated member of a unit of the Einsatzgruppen. These were mobile killing units that Germans used to annihilate Jews in Soviet territories overrun by Nazis during World War II.

The Canadian government started proceedings April 28 to revoke Oberlander's Canadian citizenship, which he obtained in 1960 after immigrating to Canada from Germany in 1954.

On the day the proceedings began, Oberlander, a home builder, disappeared from his Ontario residence. The OSI traced him to Florida.

Oberlander agreed to go back to Canada rather than face deportation hearings in the United States. □

German police: Neo-Nazis desecrated Jewish graves*By Gil Sedan*

BONN, May 15 (JTA) — Police suspect that neo-Nazis were responsible for the desecration of graves at the Jewish cemetery in the northern German city of Gottingen.

A gardener at the Jewish cemetery, which is part of the city cemetery, discovered last Friday 11 overturned tombstones and damage to numerous other gravesites.

Earlier last week, officials at two Gottingen churches received anonymous phone calls that graves had been desecrated at the Jewish cemetery. However, no signs of vandalism were found until last Friday.

The desecration of the Jewish cemetery came only days after an arson attempt at the synagogue in the northern port city of Lubeck.

Michael Friedman, deputy chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, demanded over the weekend that all synagogues in Germany be guarded by police. "We need security without conditions," he said.

Friedman also demanded that schools introduce into the curriculum classes on basic human values, which should be "as obvious as mathematics lessons."

The arson attempt at the Lubeck synagogue took place May 7, just hours before state ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of the Allied defeat of the Nazis.

No one was hurt, and the fire was extinguished before it spread.

Michael Wolf, head of the security service in the state of Schleswig-Holstein, where Lubeck is located, told the German newsmagazine Focus that his organization had prior intelligence that rightist radicals and skinheads were planning a "spectacular action" to coincide with the 50th anniversary commemorations.

But he said his agents had not known that the target of the attack would be a synagogue.

The Lubeck synagogue was the target of a previous arson attack in March 1994. That incident resulted in significant damage to the building, but no one was hurt.

Four men between the ages of 19 and 24, all of whom belonged to extreme right-wing groups, were convicted for premeditated arson in the earlier incident. They were recently given sentences ranging from 30 months to 4½ years in jail. □

After 30 years of relations, German views toward Israel vary*By Gil Sedan*

BONN, May 15 (JTA) — Although relations between the governments of Germany and Israel have never been better, the German public harbors increasing amounts of resentment toward the Jewish state, according to an Israeli historian working in Germany.

Professor Michael Wolffsohn sounded the discordant note during a festive symposium held here last week to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany.

Wolffsohn stressed that German attitudes toward Israel had nothing to do with anti-Semitism, which he said was declining in Germany.

To back up his theory, the professor cited a number of opinion polls that have been carried out within the past five years. In one, 29 percent of the population in the western part of the country and 15 percent of those from the former East Germany believed that Israel was living off German reparations.

Few Germans, said Wolffsohn, were aware that since the reunification of the two Germanies in 1990, the Federal Republic of Germany has spent annually in the former East Germany well above the \$100 billion Germany has paid Israel in war reparations during the past 40 years.

Wolffsohn also said many Germans consider Israel one of the least popular countries in the world. This attitude has not changed since the launching of the Middle East peace process, Wolffsohn added.

Israel and Germany established diplomatic relations May 12, 1965. The move came after much soul searching on both sides, with the Israeli government fearing the reactions of Holocaust survivors, and the German government concerned about the reactions of Arab states.

Indeed, many Arab nations cut off relations with Germany shortly after Bonn established full ties with the Jewish state.

Thirty years later, relations between the countries are strong, with Germany serving as the driving force behind European financial support of the peace process. It is also seen as the strongest lobbyist for Israeli interests within the European Union.

In addition, the special status of Israel has become a cornerstone in German foreign policy, and many observers consider Germany the closest ally of Israel after the United States.

Wolffsohn's comments infuriated his audience at the symposium.

Rita Sussmuth, president of the lower house of the German Parliament, asked rhetorically whether Germany should give up its efforts to maintain its special relationship with Israel.

German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel was prompted by Wolffsohn's comments to issue a vow: "I tell our Jewish friends: We shall not forget what happened; we have learned our lesson. And once again: We feel our very special responsibility and commitment toward the Jewish people and Israel." □