

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin froze a controversial plan to confiscate Arab-owned land in eastern Jerusalem.** The surprise decision came during an emergency Cabinet session after two Arab parties threatened a no-confidence motion in the Knesset that seemed certain to bring down the Rabin government. [Page 2]

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■ **Canadian Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel blamed Jews for a series of attacks against him.** A homemade pipe bomb filled with nails arrived at Zundel's home one week after his home was the target of arsonists.

■ **Israel named five Italians — including a former Fascist and two Roman Catholic nuns — Righteous Among Nations.** Four of the Italians honored at a ceremony in Rome were given awards for rescuing a 64-year-old Roman Jew, whose father once served as the chief rabbi of Genoa. [Page 3]

■ **Palestinian police were scheduled to come to Israel to study riot control methods in the Gaza Strip,** according to Israeli news reports. But the plans were delayed because of the reports. [Page 3]

FOCUS ON ISSUES**New leader of Reform Jewry seeks 'education, worship' focus**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, May 22 (JTA) — When Rabbi Eric Yoffie takes over the leadership of the Reform movement's flagship organization next summer, his primary challenge will be to refocus the mandate and philosophical direction of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

The union's Board of Trustees unanimously elected the 47-year-old Yoffie to be its next president during a Saturday night meeting in Philadelphia. Yoffie will assume the post in June 1996, when Rabbi Alexander Schindler retires.

Yoffie's goals contrast with those of Schindler, who over the past two decades has concentrated on opening the doors of the Reform movement to intermarried couples and their children.

About 25 percent of new members of Reform temples are non-Jews, according to a recent Reform movement study. Although the movement under Schindler has sometimes been described as having a theology of social action, Yoffie is looking in a more traditional direction.

He said he intends to focus the resources of the union on developing the "Judaism" in Reform Judaism.

Reform movement members want different things than they did a decade ago, Yoffie said in an interview in his New York office a few days before his election.

"The baby boomer leadership of our synagogues is looking for a religious experience of Judaism," he said.

"They don't feel the pull of ethnicity the way their parents did, but have personal religious concerns," said Yoffie.

"They want a religious expression that speaks to their heart and soul and kishkes. We have to reignite the flame of Sinai in their hearts," said Yoffie, sounding more like the leader of a Chasidic sect than the director of the movement's Commission on Social Action, a role he currently fills.

Yoffie to confront group's financial problems

The ascension of someone who has long been identified as a social issues activist within the movement had been challenged by a high-level lay leader in the movement.

Attorney David Belin of Des Moines had spearheaded an effort to derail Yoffie's nomination by widely distributing a letter several weeks ago protesting what he defined as the choice between social action and God.

The effort apparently did not have much impact, given the unanimous endorsement of Yoffie by the 175 of the union's 220 trustees who attended the meeting. Belin, an honorary vice chairman of the union, apparently did not attend.

A graduate of Brandeis University who was ordained in 1974, Yoffie served as executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists of America for nine years. He has also served as executive editor of Reform Judaism magazine.

When Yoffie takes over next summer, he will be heading an organization with serious financial and constituent-relations problems.

The union has been facing a recent cash crunch and has been cutting departmental budgets and staff. Budgets have been cut between 15 percent and 20 percent across the board for the next two years, said a source within the organization.

Some of the union's 858 congregations have been withholding dues and a few, including a prominent and large California congregation, Stephen S. Wise of Bel Air, have dropped their membership in the union.

"We have to do better than we've done in basic synagogue services," Yoffie said. "We haven't done near enough and our congregations are looking to us for help getting on-line, raising money, collecting dues and creating endowments."

Already in the works is a move to overhaul the union's dues structure.

Congregations' dues have been reduced by 8 percent each year for the next two years while a new structure is researched, according to Yoffie, who

said a new system would be proposed at the 1997 biennial convention.

Also on the horizon are "significant personnel changes," he said, refusing to provide details about the shifts.

Yoffie's election appears to signal significant changes between the role that the union has played in the past and what it hopes to accomplish in the future.

Differences between Schindler and Yoffie go far deeper than the fact that Schindler is the product of an Orthodox European upbringing and Yoffie is a true product of the American Reform movement.

While Schindler waxes eloquently philosophical and dresses with as much flair as he speaks, Yoffie is straightforward in outlining his plans and fond of short-sleeved button-down shirts and polyester striped ties.

While Schindler has been, at times, radically ideological, Yoffie seems more pragmatic.

Schindler has defined his presidency by leading his constituents with ideas and policies that were, in some cases, not always greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm.

For example, Schindler's calls, first in the early 1980s and then again at the last union biennial convention in November 1993, to actively proselytize unchurched non-Jews and to give greater ritual roles in the synagogue to non-Jewish members, were greeted with more silence than accolades.

Despite their different approaches, Schindler enthusiastically endorsed his successor, calling him one of the "finest young rabbis our religious community has produced."

In the interview, Yoffie said he plans to define his presidency by responding to his constituents.

"Our lay leadership is asking that I be clear in my religious direction and in my response to the needs of our congregations," said Yoffie.

"It is surely true that we need a union with a clear emphasis, one which functions with great efficiency and responds quickly to the congregations' needs."

Yoffie said he supports "the principle of reaching out to the unchurched, but at this moment given our other needs, it's not something we have the resources to address in a systematic way."

He said he would be refocusing the union's resources on "education and worship."

"Our learning after Bar Mitzvah is wholly inadequate," the rabbi said. "We need to create a congregation of learners, not just children who learn. We need congregations with Torah at the center."

Commenting on the worship experience in Reform temples, he said, "We want it to be more than 'stand up, sit down, read responsively.'"

Yoffie said he was not yet ready to divulge details of his plan to emphasize these areas. □

Seeking to save government, Rabin Cabinet freezes land plan

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 22 (JTA) — Two small, Arab-dominated parties in the Knesset have managed to accomplish what weeks of growing international pressure and criticism failed to achieve.

In a surprise move aimed at saving his government, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his Cabinet decided Monday to freeze a controversial plan to confiscate some 140 acres of mostly Arab-owned land in eastern Jerusalem.

The decision came during an emergency Cabinet session Monday after the two parties, the Hadash Party and the Arab Democratic Party, introduced no-confidence motions in the Knesset.

The motions seemed certain to bring down Rabin's government when the opposition Likud bloc, which in principle supports the confiscations, said it would back the motions.

The Palestine Liberation Organization welcomed the decision to suspend the land confiscation plans.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said the Clinton administration thought the action "would be helpful," given that the original plan "posed difficulties."

It also led to the suspension of a planned Arab League summit scheduled to convene in Morocco this weekend to discuss how to respond to the confiscations.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres announced the surprise Cabinet decision at the Knesset podium shortly after debate on the no-confidence motions began.

He also announced that a ministerial committee headed by Rabin would be established to review land expropriations.

Peres lashes out at Likud

Peres lashed out at Likud for supporting the motions. "Toppling the government is more important [to the opposition] than keeping the unity of the country around Jerusalem," he said.

After Peres made the announcement, the Arab Democratic Party and the Hadash Party withdrew their motions. But then, members of the opposition lashed out at the government for reversing course on land expropriations, saying they planned to submit their own no-confidence motion next week.

The opposition has submitted dozens of no-confidence motions since Rabin's government came to power in July 1992. But few came as close to toppling the government as those scheduled for a vote Monday.

Prior to Peres' announcement in the Knesset, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu indicated that he would support the motions, even if he supported the land confiscations in principle. "If we can topple this government for the sake of the nation's future, we should," he told Israel Radio.

With minutes to go before the debate, it was still unclear whether the government had enough votes to defeat the motions. It was at that point that Rabin convened the special Cabinet meeting.

The confiscation plans had drawn an increasing barrage of criticism over the past few weeks from Israel's Arab neighbors and a number of Western countries.

Last week, the United States vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution aimed at getting Israel to suspend its confiscation policy.

Shortly after Peres announced the Cabinet decision, the PLO welcomed the new development. "It seems that the Palestinian, Arab and international efforts have paid off," said an Arafat spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeineh.

Hours before the Knesset debate on the no-confidence motions, Peres and Arafat held an emergency meeting in the Gaza Strip to discuss the land confiscation policy and the pace of ongoing Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

After their meeting, Peres told reporters that the two sides had agreed to speed up negotiations on an Israeli army redeployment in the West Bank in order to meet a July 1 deadline for implementing the next phase of Palestinian self-rule.

The two sides also announced a number of confidence-building measures, including an offer from Israel to increase by 4,000 the number of Palestinians allowed to work in Israel, bringing the total to 35,000.

In addition, Israel will give the Palestinians control over three additional areas of civilian affairs in the West Bank: agriculture, statistics and local government. □

Aachen synagogue opening closes a historic circle

By Gil Sedan

BONN, May 22 (JTA) — For Dorothea and Simon Schlachet, the inauguration last week of a new synagogue in the German city of Aachen marked the closing of a historic circle.

Fifty-six years ago, both had witnessed the burning of the city's synagogue during Kristallnacht. Both had been freed from a concentration camp 50 years ago. And Dorothea had been one of the hundreds of Jews rescued from Auschwitz by Oskar Schindler.

Now, joy replaced the Schlachets' painful memories.

The new house of prayer opened during festivities that were attended by 18 Holocaust survivors who are former inhabitants of Aachen. Also on hand were Ignatz Bubis, head of the German Jewish community, and Johannes Rau, premier of the regional state of Nordrhein-Westphalia.

"The Nazis did not have the last word in this site and this community," said Simon Schlachet, chairman of the Aachen Jewish community.

Rau said, "The renewed building of a synagogue in the land of the Nazi criminals is a wonderful and joyful event."

He thanked the Jews for building their home in Germany "despite Lubeck and precisely because Lubeck." The synagogue of Lubeck in northern Germany was the site of a firebombing earlier this month, the second arson at the building in 14 months.

Bubis demanded that more synagogues be built on German soil as a sign of a Jewish presence.

The new synagogue was built as a joint venture by the regional state and the city of Aachen at a cost of \$8.3 million. The Christian community of Aachen presented the synagogue with a special gift: new Torah scrolls.

Some 800 Jews now live in Aachen, half of them emigrants from Eastern Europe. □

Nuns, former Fascist given Righteous Among Nations honor

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, May 22 (JTA) — In an emotionally charged ceremony at Rome's city hall last week, Israel named five Italians — including a former Fascist and two Roman Catholic nuns — Righteous Among Nations.

"It is good to remember that even in dark times there were moments of light," Israeli Ambassador Avi Pazner said as he awarded the medals and certificates May 17.

"In Israel, we do not have a nobility — princes, counts and the like. It is the Righteous Among Nations who are the real nobility," he said.

Four of the Italians honored were given awards for rescuing Emanuele Pacifici, now a 64-year-old Jew living in Rome, whose father was the chief rabbi of Genoa.

The late Enrico Sergiani, the concierge of the Pacificis' apartment house in Genoa, along with his wife, hid Rabbi Riccardo Pacifici and Emanuele and shared rationed food with them. The concierge and his wife also saved the rabbi's library, which after the war was given to the Rabbinical College in Rome.

The rabbi and his wife were seized by the Nazis and died at Auschwitz. But Emanuele and his younger brother were hidden for 11 months by nuns in a convent at Settignano in Tuscany.

"This is a great day, a dream come true for me," Emanuele Pacifici said, choking back tears. "It has been

my desire for many years to give this great honor to these people who are so dear to me."

The other Italian honored, Ferdinando Natoni, was a member of the Fascist Party and a supporter of dictator Benito Mussolini. But he opposed the racist anti-Semitic laws, and when the Nazis began rounding up Roman Jews for deportation, he stepped in to rescue two young twin sisters, pretending they were his own daughters. □

Widow of Israeli spy asks Damascus for his remains

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 22 (JTA) — The widow of an Israeli spy who was hanged in Damascus three decades ago has appealed to Syrian President Hafez Assad to return her husband's remains.

Nadia Cohen made the appeal at a news conference in Tel Aviv on Thursday, exactly 30 years after her husband, Eli, was hanged in Damascus.

"To stop the pain, I am ready to even go to Damascus" if that will result in the release of her husband's remains, Cohen told Israel Radio.

In 1960, the Egyptian-born Cohen was recruited by the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence agency. He was dispatched to Argentina, where he posed as an expatriate Syrian businessman, and later moved to Damascus.

There, he developed contacts with Syrian political and military officials, passing information to Israel over the course of three years.

Some military historians believe that some of the data Cohen passed on to Mossad were crucial to Israel's capture of the Golan Heights in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Cohen was caught by Syrian authorities and publicly hanged May 18, 1965.

Since then, the Syrians have rejected efforts to have the body returned.

"Once, Syrian leader Assad was asked for the body, and his answer was, 'What body?' " Nadia Cohen told Israel Radio.

Meanwhile, Likud Knesset member David Mena is heading a public committee to try to get Syria to return the body. He told Israel Radio that Syria should provide a sign of its commitment to peace by returning the remains. □

Media: Palestinian police to go to Israel to study riot control

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 22 (JTA) — Palestinian police will come to Israel to study riot control methods in order to quell future demonstrations in the Gaza Strip, according to Israeli news reports.

About two dozen Palestinian police officers will be taught how to fire rubber bullets, train water hoses on crowds and chase demonstrators, both the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot and Army Radio reported last week.

The Palestine Liberation Organization was quick to deny the reports.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesman for PLO leader Yasser Arafat, called the reports "absolutely false."

Maj. Gen. Ghazi Al-Jabali, the Gaza police commander, also issued a denial.

"We have many professional and well-qualified police, and we don't need training like this," he said.

The riot-control training was to start last week, in what was to be the first of a series of daylong seminars for Palestinian officers at an Israeli police school in the town of Shfaram in northern Israel, Israeli media said.

Israeli police officers confirmed the report, but would not comment further. □

Right-wing elements fail in attempt to alter prayer

By Uriel Masad

TEL AVIV, May 22 (JTA) — An attempt by anonymous right-wing extremists to popularize an anti-government prayer has failed for the second year in a row.

The prayer — an amended version of the Prayer for the Welfare of the State and its Leaders — was distributed to synagogues across the country on the eve of Israel's Independence Day, which fell on May 4 this year.

As was the case last year, the amended version, which speaks of protecting the Jewish state from what the prayer's authors believe is the government's misconceived view of what the country should be, failed to attract followers.

The Prayer for the Welfare of the State and its Leaders was written by S.Y. Agnon, winner of the Nobel Prize in literature. It was instituted into the liturgy by the chief rabbinate in 1951.

The prayer — adopted by most Israeli synagogues, but rejected by the fervently Orthodox — is recited during Shabbat and holiday morning prayers. Many Diaspora congregations recite it as a prayer for Israel.

The prayer follows an ancient tradition, dating back to the Babylonian exile, in which Jews recite a prayer for the welfare of the state they reside in and for its leaders.

In prewar Germany, when the Nazis were already in power, Jews recited this type of prayer, which mentioned Adolf Hitler, as late as 1938.

Version challenged since negotiations

The Israeli prayer reads, "Our Father in heaven, Protector and Redeemer of Israel, bless the State of Israel, which marks the dawn of our deliverance. Shield it beneath the wings of your grace, spread over it your canopy of peace, send your light and your truth to its leaders, officers and counselors, and direct them with your good council."

Since the peace process with the Palestinians began, right-wing elements commonly identified with extremists in the settlers movement began challenging this version.

Some on the religious far right have abolished the prayer altogether, thereby joining those fervently Orthodox Jews who view the State of Israel as an aberration from the theocracy envisioned in the Torah.

Less extreme members of the right suggested changes this year and last to the part of the prayer that refers to the country's leaders.

While the original prayer seeks God's protection for the country and its leaders, the amended version seeks protection for the country from its leaders.

The amended prayer reads in part: "Send your light and truth to the state, and protect it from its leaders, officers and counselors."

Proponents claim that the amendment is based on a suggestion made by Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neriah, who established the B'nai Akiva yeshiva high school system.

Neriah was unavailable for comment due to ill health.

However, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau made it known through his office that he is opposed to any changes in the prayer.

Rabbi Yehuda Amital, who heads the Har Etzion Yeshiva and the dovish Orthodox movement Meimad, came out strongly against the amended prayer.

"These anonymous extremists can compose their own protest prayers if they wish," the rabbi said. "But to amend the Prayer for the Welfare of Israel and its Leaders as they have is, in my eyes, malicious. I cannot accept the

notion that portrays the government as the enemy of the State of Israel."

According to Amital, Neriah never proposed the amendment in earnest. "Over a year ago," Amital said, "Rabbi Neriah uttered some words at a moment of anger, but he never meant it to be adopted as a prayer."

Amital said that after checking around, "I can now state with confidence that the majority continued to say the prayer in its traditional form, and only a minority recited the amended version."

"What these extremists don't seem to understand is that the Prayer for the Welfare of Israel is one of the unifying forces of religious Zionists the world over," he said. □

Rabin, ministers discuss funding for Kiryat Shmona

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 22 (JTA) — Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and several ministers are discussing the possibility of giving the city of Kiryat Shmona preference when it comes to budgetary matters.

The prime minister met last week with the ministers of finance; construction and housing; labor and social affairs; tourism; commerce and industry; education; and immigration absorption.

In the past, Rabin has said the northern Israeli community of Kiryat Shmona should have financial preference over other communities because its residents are subject to shelling and Katyusha rocket attacks.

Despite past statements, Kiryat Shmona residents have long complained that the government has overlooked their needs. Recently, the city held a daylong strike to protest the government's failure to live up to its promises of additional support.

Rabin met last week with Kiryat Shmona mayor Prosper Azran, which resulted in an agreement that each ministry would do its utmost to promote city projects. □

Policemen injured in Gaza blast

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 22 (JTA) — Two Israeli policemen were injured in a bomb explosion Sunday near the Netzarim settlement in Gaza.

One of them, a police bomb sapper, suffered moderate injuries. The other, an officer, sustained light injuries. The incident occurred when the two men were searching an area where a blast had injured a Netzarim resident Saturday as he walked near the settlement's hothouses.

Security forces combing the scene found a hole in the settlement's perimeter fence, which the terrorists had apparently penetrated. □

Animal lovers cannot bear IDF boots

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 22 (JTA) — Two Israeli animal lovers have asked the Israel Defense Force to exempt them from wearing standard combat boots, which are made of leather.

Ido Eyal and Shai Baklad, both soon to be conscripted, said they neither eat nor wear products made from animals, the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported.

An army spokeswoman said she did not know the military's position on the issue.

In a petition sent to the army, Israel's civil rights association said both youths would be prepared to buy U.S.-manufactured boots made of artificial leather. □