

NEWS AT A GLANCE

- Israeli and Syrian military experts will return to Washington next month to resume negotiations on security arrangements that would facilitate a return of the strategic Golan Heights, Secretary of State Warren Christopher announced. The secretary also said special envoy Dennis Ross would visit the Middle East next week and that he would follow soon after. [Page 2]
- The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum tapped Holocaust expert Walter Reich to become the institution's second director. Pending approval by the museum's full board, Reich is expected to take over next month. The museum's original choice, Cornell University Professor Steven Katz, stepped down in March amid controversy. [Page 4]
- The left-wing Meretz bloc threatened to leave the governing coalition of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin if Israel fails to meet a July 1 target date for reaching agreement on the next phase of Palestinian autonomy. The announcement came after Meretz leaders met with Rabin.
- Israelis were granted permission to enter the Gaza self-rule area for the first time since autonomy began a year ago. Non-Gaza residents must first coordinate their visits with Israeli officials. The new directive was intended to facilitate commercial contacts between Israeli and Palestinian businesspeople. [Page 2]
- Peruvian lawmakers passed legislation aimed at reducing discrimination on the basis of religion, race or ethnicity. The legislation, which still requires approval from the president, will impact Peru's 3,000 Jews. [Page 4]
- The Czech Republic decided to revoke its endorsement of an anti-Semitic textbook, according to the Czech ambassador to the United States. The move came after Jewish groups protested the book on church history. [Page 4]
- A school bus belonging to Gan Chama, a Jewish elementary school in Moscow, was targeted by arsonists. Police are looking for suspects, but it has not yet been determined whether the crime was anti-Semitic in nature.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**School prayer victor dismayed as lawmakers reopen the battle***By Jennifer Batog*

WASHINGTON, May 24 (JTA) — As Congress prepares to consider a constitutional amendment that would allow prayer in the schools, Debbie Weisman is afraid that the battle she fought all the way to the Supreme Court might have to be waged all over again.

"It really bothers me," Weisman said of the campaign to introduce a "Religious Equality Amendment" into Congress.

"It's ridiculous" that prayer in school is still an issue, said the 20-year-old Providence, R.I., resident whose opposition to prayer at graduation began when she was in junior high school.

Debbie and her family filed suit against her public middle school in 1989, prior to her graduation ceremony, at which a rabbi was slated to deliver the invocation. The family said such a move would violate the Establishment Clause, which provides for the separation of church and state.

The case, *Lee vs. Weisman*, made its way to the Supreme Court, which in June 1992 ruled in favor of the Weismans, agreeing that the invocation — which had taken place after all — breached the constitutional separation of church and state.

Whereas the Weismans took their case to the courts, once the traditional battleground over school prayer issues, organizations that support school prayer, such as the Christian Coalition, are now turning to Capitol Hill.

School prayer advocates lost their battle in the judiciary branch, so now "they're taking a different route — legislation," lamented Weisman's father, Daniel.

Although exact language for the legislation has not yet been drafted, it most likely would permit, among other things, exactly what the Weismans fought to prevent: prayer at public school graduations.

Both Debbie and Daniel Weisman said they opposed the idea, which was recently unveiled in the Christian Coalition's "Contract with the American Family."

The contract, which has been widely embraced by Republican lawmakers, urges legislation that would allow "voluntary, student and citizen-initiated free speech in non-compulsory settings such as courthouses, high school graduations and sports events."

Courts seen chipping away at church-state wall

"How can it be voluntary at a sanctioned event?" Daniel Weisman said.

He called the amendment a "scheme" and said the coalition was "merely looking for imaginative mechanisms to reintroduce publicly sponsored prayer."

Keeping religion out of public schools altogether is "the only right thing to do," Debbie Weisman added.

Although the court route worked for the Weismans and has traditionally been seen as a refuge for supporters of separation of church and state, not all court decisions have been clear victories for separation proponents.

In fact, some legal scholars say the courts are moving toward chipping away at the wall between church and state.

Just six months after the Weisman case, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans ruled in a Texas case, *Jones vs. Clear Creek Independent School District*, that students could deliver non-sectarian, nonproselytizing invocations at graduation ceremonies, according to a summary of church-state cases provided by the American Jewish Committee.

And in March of this year, a district court judge in Texas declared unconstitutional the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, legislation passed in 1993 that requires the government to justify interfering with religious practices.

Underscoring concern about the courts is a recent "Report Card on Religious Freedom," which concluded that the courts are not defending the wall between church and state as vigorously as they should be.

"With so much attention being directed toward Congress, our survey

indicates that in another key area of concern, the courts are quietly eroding our fundamental right to religious liberty," said David Kahn, the founder of the Religious Liberty Resource Center of the American Jewish Congress, which released the report. Kahn is also AJCongress' national president.

In the report card, 17 religious liberty experts gave the Supreme Court and federal judiciary low marks when it came to some aspects of defending religious liberties.

The report said the courts are not adequately protecting people's rights to freedom from indirect government restrictions or burdens on religious practices. Nor is there sufficient freedom from government financial entanglements with religious institutions, the report said.

The courts got a "C" grade in the restrictions category, and a "C+" in the financial category. A "C" grade indicates that those areas are still threatened, the report said.

On freedom from "government inculcation of religion in public schools," the courts rated a "B-" — a "well protected" grade.

None of the categories received "A," or "extremely well protected," ratings.

Both protection from government promotion of religion — including the display of religious symbols at government sites — and freedom from explicit government discrimination because of religious beliefs fell in the range that is well protected.

The Chicago-based center issues the ratings annually. The recent report examined the courts' 1993-94 sessions.

Although most in the Jewish community oppose the efforts by the Christian Coalition to introduce a constitutional amendment, not all legal experts agree with the resource center's conclusions.

Marc Stern, AJCongress' co-legal director, said he disagreed with the scholars' assessment of how the courts have ruled on issues related to prayer in public schools.

"There's no evidence yet that the courts in the public school context are doing a less-than-adequate job," Stern said. He noted that he would give the courts a higher grade in that respect.

In general terms, Stern said, it is "implausible" for people to believe that the courts have abandoned separation of church and state.

"It's just not true," he said. "There's no cause now for panicking about the courts."

The American Jewish Committee's legal counsel, Sam Rabinove, agreed that the courts have "upheld the separationist principle." But, he said, some Supreme Court justices, such as Antonin Scalia, would "like to abandon it."

Activists should be more concerned with thwarting passage of a Religious Liberty Amendment, which could further weaken the wall between church and state, Stern said.

Such an amendment would "substantially alter" the current concept of the dividing line between church and state, AJCongress' Stern said.

Rabinove was even blunter.

"If an amendment of this nature passes," he said, "our whole concept of church-state separation is gone with the wind." □

Syria and Israel to resume long-stalled military talks

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, May 24 (JTA) — The on-again off-again Israel-Syria peace negotiations are on once again. Senior military experts from Israel and Syria will

return to Washington before the end of June to try to work out security arrangements to facilitate a return of the strategic Golan Heights, according to the State Department.

Israel and Syria agreed to broad terms of reference that will serve as an agenda for the upcoming talks, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Wednesday.

Negotiations have stalled in recent months. Syria has been demanding a return of all of the Golan Heights while Israel has conditioned any pullback on the nature of a future peace and the nature of security arrangements.

The Israeli and Syrian military chiefs of staff met last December, but talks broke off when Syria demanded symmetry in any security arrangements.

"This is an important development, but there still are significant gaps between the parties, and there is much hard work to be done on the security arrangements and on all the non-security issues," Secretary of State Warren Christopher said in a statement read to reporters at the State Department.

In Tel Aviv, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin welcomed the announcement, but agreed that there was still a long way to go.

"I believe it is a continuation of the negotiations," Rabin told reporters. "It is a breakthrough in the procedure, but not in the substance."

The State Department released no details about the agreement.

But officials said it was reached after months of negotiations at the highest levels of the Israeli and Syrian governments.

Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's ambassador to the United States, called the agreement "a positive and important development." Rabinovich has met periodically over the last six months with his Syrian counterpart, Ambassador Walid Muallem.

Rabinovich, who serves as Israel's chief negotiator with the Syrians, cautioned that "the discussion and the negotiations about the actual security arrangements are still ahead of us."

Rabinovich praised Christopher and the State Department's Middle East peace team for "their effort and devotion in helping Israel and Syria."

Christopher said Dennis Ross, the U.S. special Middle East coordinator, would visit the region next week, at which time he will focus on Israeli-Syrian relations.

The secretary of state also said he would tour the region soon afterward, before the talks are scheduled to resume in Washington. Christopher had earlier said that he would not travel to the region unless some progress had been made. □

Israelis permitted into Gaza

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 24 (JTA) — For the first time since the start of Palestinian self-rule last May, Israelis have been granted permission to enter the Gaza self-rule area.

The head of the southern command, Maj. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, said Israelis would be able to enter the autonomous area on the condition that they coordinate ahead of time with the Coordination and Liaison Administration at the Erez checkpoint separating Israel from Gaza.

With the transfer of autonomy to the Palestinians last year, the then-head of the southern command, Matan Vilnai, issued an order barring Israelis entrance to Gaza — with the exception of Jewish residents of the area, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The new directive is intended to make it easier for Israeli contractors and businessmen to maintain ties with their Palestinian counterparts in Gaza. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

28 years after reunification, Jerusalem still a divided city

By Uriel Masad

JERUSALEM, May 24 (JTA) — As Israel prepares to mark the 28th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem, many here believe that division, not unity, characterizes relations between Jews and Arabs in the nation's capital.

"Jerusalem is not united," said Ornan Yekutieli, city council member. "The wall dividing the city is higher than ever."

Although many Israelis from different parts of the country come each year to celebrate Jerusalem Day, which this year falls on Sunday, less than a third of the city's residents join the festivities.

The fervently Orthodox residents, who constitute a third of Jerusalem's population, avoid the secular celebration. For the other third, the city's Palestinians, Jerusalem Day is more a time for mourning their loss of the eastern sector of the city, which Israel captured from Jordan during the 1967 Six-Day War.

Israeli-Palestinian tensions in the city came to the fore in recent weeks, when Israel announced plans to expropriate nearly 140 acres of mostly Arab-owned land.

After resisting international criticism of the move, Israel froze its plans this week when two Arab parties in the Knesset vowed to bring down the governing coalition in a no-confidence vote.

Intensified rhetoric at home and abroad

Even before the land confiscation plans made headlines, however, the rhetoric over Jerusalem had intensified at home and abroad in recent months.

This happened despite an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians to delay discussions on Jerusalem until final-status talks, which are scheduled to begin next year.

While Israel has declared that Jerusalem will remain the undivided capital of the State of Israel, the Palestinians claim the eastern sector as the capital of their own would-be state.

Whatever arrangements the politicians ultimately work out, Jerusalem's current residents are living their own reality of separation.

"Most Israelis don't cross to the other side; they hardly venture into the Old City, let alone into the rest of Arab East Jerusalem," said Yekutieli, a native of Jerusalem who served as deputy mayor under the city's longtime leader, Teddy Kollek.

"Why they fear for their safety, and they don't feel at home there," said Yekutieli, who heads the city council's Meretz faction, which currently represents the Arabs' interests.

There are pockets of coexistence throughout the city, including some hospitals and health centers that serve both Arabs and Jews. And several organizations run programs aimed at improving ties between the city's Jewish and Arab residents.

But despite the efforts of groups such as the Abraham Fund, Peace Now, the feminist Jerusalem Link and the New Israel Fund, Jerusalem hardly serves as a model for Jewish-Arab coexistence.

For their part, Palestinians venture out from eastern Jerusalem only to satisfy needs that cannot be met in their part of the city, such as employment, business and medical needs.

When Palestinians come to City Hall to register a child for school, seek a business permit, pay or argue over taxes, or lodge a complaint, they find that some municipal personnel speak Arabic, but that very little of the city's

published information or correspondence is written in their language.

Yekutieli blames some of the distance on the Palestinians themselves.

"When Israel brought East Jerusalem under its jurisdiction, it awarded the Palestinians residency and the right to vote and be elected to the council," he said.

"But they refused the offer, and did not take part in any municipal election," he said.

He said the problems have become further exacerbated under the current administration of Mayor Ehud Olmert.

Until Olmert, a Likudnik, replaced Kollek as mayor in November 1993, there was a special Arab affairs adviser to the mayor.

But Olmert cancelled the position, and now Meretz represents the concerns of the Arabs, Yekutieli said. As far as the distribution of services, Yekutieli said Jerusalem is "definitely not" run as a united city.

According to official figures, some 570,000 people live in the extended municipality of Jerusalem. The 160,000 Arab residents comprise 28 percent of the population, but receive only 6 percent of the municipal budget.

"Just walk through the Jewish Quarter and the rest of the Old City, and see the difference. There is a day and night difference in most municipal services, and particularly in development planning and housing permits," Yekutieli said.

But the most immediate problem facing the city's Palestinians, according to most experts, is the severe housing shortage for Arabs.

According to Yekutieli, this disparity has resulted from the policies of successive city administrations over the years.

The mayor's office declined an interview on these issues.

But a spokeswoman for the city council acknowledged the disparity in services, saying the mayor is trying to rectify the situation. "There is a gap in standard of services which developed over a long period of neglect due to numerous historical and political reasons," the spokeswoman said in a statement.

"Since Mayor Olmert took office over a year ago, he is committed to ensure that all residents of Jerusalem receive equal municipal services. We are now working toward this goal," the statement added.

'Housing is predominant problem'

Meanwhile, B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights organization, has just released a report on the lack of parity between Israelis and Arabs living in Jerusalem.

"The predominant problem of Jerusalem is housing," according to the report's author, Eitan Felner.

"The housing shortage is intentional, and its goal is to maintain the same demographic balance between Jews and Arabs that existed in June 1967," when Israel captured the eastern sector of the city, Felner said in an interview.

"This explains the history of land expropriation for building new housing for Israelis. Simultaneously, development plans and housing permits for Arabs are consistently being turned down or stuck in committees," he said.

The B'Tselem report found that of the 76,151 housing units that have been built in Jerusalem since 1967, 88 percent have been for Jews and 12 percent for Arabs.

In 1993 alone, the report said, only 3.8 percent of housing units were built in Arab areas.

There is a current shortage of 20,000 homes for Arabs, the report estimates, adding that while a third of the city's Arab population lives in overcrowded conditions of three or more persons per room, only 2.7 percent of Jerusalem's Jews live in similar conditions. □

Holocaust museum taps Reich, ending search for new director

By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, May 24 (JTA) — The search is over.

After nearly two months of careful consideration, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has tapped Holocaust expert Walter Reich to take the reins as the institution's second director.

Pending approval by the museum's full board, Reich is expected to take over sometime next month.

Members of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, which acts as the museum's board, said they were pleased with Reich's nomination.

"Walter Reich is a person of tremendous integrity, intellectual scope and tremendous vision," council member Menachem Rosensaft said in a telephone interview.

Reich, 51, is an author and essayist who has written on various topics, including the Holocaust, Israel and the psychology of terrorism. He is also a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, a Washington-based think tank.

As a psychiatrist at the National Institute of Mental Health, Reich organized an effort by psychiatrists and psychologists to advise the museum's council on how to present the Holocaust most effectively.

He was born in hiding in Poland and spent his early years in a displaced person's camp in Berlin before coming to the United States when he was 3 years old. Reich's background as the child of Holocaust survivors gives him special insight into the museum, Rosensaft said.

"He is ideally suited to take the museum from its creative stages into the 21st century," he said, adding that he "had every reason to believe" Reich will be approved.

Reich himself was more cautious. "It would be a tremendous honor to contribute to that institution in any way I can, should the board allow me to do so," Reich said in a telephone interview.

Reich said he sees the central mission of the museum to memorialize the Holocaust and its victims.

Stemming from that memorial, he said, "is the opportunity to learn from the Holocaust in a way that protects and ennobles our human civilization."

Reich is the board's second nominee for the position, which has been vacant since Jeshajahu Weinberg retired last month.

The museum's original pick, Cornell University Professor Steven Katz, stepped down in March after a Washington Post article revealed that Cornell had imposed disciplinary measures on him for misrepresenting his accomplishments and improperly taking a job while on paid leave from the university.

Rosensaft said a "thorough" background check was done on Reich. The museum's director is "an important position and the leadership wanted to have absolute confirmation of what we knew regarding Reich's integrity and qualifications for the position," he said. □

Czech Republic to revoke approval of anti-Semitic text

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK, May 24 (JTA) — The Czech Republic has decided to revoke its endorsement of an anti-Semitic textbook, according to the Czech ambassador to the United States.

Ambassador Michael Zantovsky also said action would be taken to prevent the recurrence of such an endorsement, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

These official moves come about a month after

ADL and other Jewish groups first publicly denounced the book. The World Jewish Congress had made its opinion of the text known in the Vatican.

In an earlier response, the Czech government had said it would likely withdraw its approval of the text, "Handbook on Church History."

The text claims that Jews in the Middle Ages collected extensive assets in all countries, took over money-lending businesses and were extraordinary usurers, charging more than 100 percent interest.

The book's author, Pavel Mracek, also purports in the text that Jews in the Middle Ages committed ritual murders, the crucifixion of Christian boys and the persecution and murder of Jews who converted to Christianity.

Zantovsky said he was "dismayed at the reappearance of dangerous and stupid myths."

He added that the book was approved without consulting sources knowledgeable about the Jewish community and that in the future, the minister of education would call upon the opinion of experts "for any texts dealing with Jewish history or Judaism."

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, welcomed the development.

"They indeed fulfilled the promise they made to us and it reflects a maturity on the part of the new Czech democracy."

Abraham Foxman, ADL national director, said, "This reasoned and responsible reaction to our protests is gratifying."

Pupils at public schools had been getting the book at no cost because it had been approved by the Czech Education Ministry. □

Peru wants discrimination to become a punishable crime

By Steven M. Zeitchik

NEW YORK, May 24 (JTA) — Peru's lawmakers have overwhelmingly passed a bill aimed at reducing discrimination on the basis of religion, race or ethnicity.

The legislation, which mandates stern punishment for those who commit "crimes against humanity," will have a profound impact on the Jewish community, according to Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

"Until now, if someone discriminated against you because you were a Jew, there was nothing that could be done," Steinberg said. "This provides for legal recourse."

According to Steinberg, the Jewish community played a key role in the legislation.

"This was done specifically at the insistence of the Jewish community," he said. There are an estimated 3,000 Jews in Peru.

The last remaining step for the legislation to become law is its approval by Peru's president, Alberto Fujimori, who has already pledged to sign it.

Steinberg said even though he believes that religious discrimination would continue, the new legislation would go a long way in assuring the equal treatment of all people, especially in areas such as the workplace.

Provisions in the law, which was one vote short of unanimous passage among legislators, include a minimum sentence of six years if found guilty of inflicting wounds "on the physical or mental health of the discriminated groups."

If found guilty of belonging to groups that intend to commit such crimes, the minimum sentence is eight years, according to a Peruvian press release.

Peru joins only a handful of Latin American countries, including Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, which have laws to punish discrimination-related crimes. □