



NEWS AT A GLANCE

▣ **Palestinian police detained Islamic Jihad activists near Bethlehem who allegedly were going to carry out a terror attack in Israel.** The action came as Israel continued to seal off the West Bank and Gaza to prevent a feared attack in retaliation for last month's murder of the Hamas bombmaker Yehiya Ayash.

■ **Delegates to the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council returned home from the umbrella group's annual plenum in St. Louis without a vote on a controversial plan to reform the organization.** [Page 1]

■ **A Palestinian envoy reported that two days of talks in Cairo on repatriating displaced Palestinians resulted in a breakthrough.** He said Egypt, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinians agreed on the thorniest issue — the criteria for deciding the number and type of Palestinians displaced in the 1967 Six-Day War.

■ **Scientists concluded that a mass grave in Austria first thought to contain the remains of Jewish concentration camp victims actually dates back to the last century.** Bones unearthed during construction near Linz were so dry that experts concluded that they had been buried for at least 100 years.

■ **Key members of the House of Representatives threatened to hold up \$170 million for U.S. military hardware slated to be sent to Jordan.** The lawmakers are upset that Secretary of Defense William Perry promised King Hussein the package without consulting Congress.

■ **Judith Kaplan Eisenstein, 86, died of a heart attack.** Daughter of theologian Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of the Reconstructionist movement, she was the first girl ever to become a Bat Mitzvah. As an adult, she made important contributions to both the study and composition of Jewish music.

NJCRAC's future on the minds of community relations experts

By Cynthia Mann

ST. LOUIS (JTA) — This year's annual conference of the Jewish communal world's national public affairs body was marked mostly by what did not happen.

There was precious little of the contentious debate over substantive policy issues that has characterized and enlivened previous plenums of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

Also, scant attention was paid in the formal agenda to a newly released, controversial plan to reform NJCRAC to increase services to the 117 local community relations councils, which comprise the majority of its membership.

Proponents say not making the changes risks rendering NJCRAC irrelevant.

But a vote on the plan originally slated for the plenum was postponed in the wake of intense protest by the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee — three of NJCRAC's 13 national member agencies.

Instead, only two hours of discussion in small groups were devoted to the plan, with a vote tentatively scheduled to take place by June.

Nonetheless, the overarching theme of the plenum, which drew about 400 delegates here from Feb. 11 to 14, remained NJCRAC's efforts to recast itself and its direction in a changing communal landscape.

"Have we stood still?" Lawrence Rubin, NJCRAC executive vice chairman and an ardent advocate of internal reform, said in his address to the plenum. "Have we allowed ourselves to grasp the comforting cliches and bromides of past positions and policies, ignoring changes in our country and their consequences for our field?"

Despite "monumental changes in the world," Rubin said, NJCRAC's annual policy-making process has "appeared bland and sanitized" in recent years.

"The instrument needs refining" for NJCRAC to make a difference and help shape "a communal vision of a just society," Rubin said.

For Rabbi Douglas Kahn, executive director of the JCRC of San Francisco, the mandate for change in the community relations field is evident in the "diminished urgency in the issues typically associated with the CRCs: the Middle East, Soviet Jewry and anti-Semitism," he said.

"CRCs have been viewed as the insurance policy for the Jewish community, there to address crises and external threats," Kahn said. Now that some of the longtime crises have eased and the community is turning inward, the CRCs must reposition themselves, he added.

"In fact, CRCs have always, as part of their mandate, fulfilled a number of additional functions that have taken on increasing importance, including Jewish outreach, serving as a common table in an era of increased concern about intracommunal civility and respect, and providing expertise in the area of public advocacy," Kahn said.

'No burning issues, none that divided the community'

Nancy Kaufman, director of the JCRC of Greater Boston, said, "NJCRAC and CRCs across the country are in transition. The strategic plan is an attempt to begin to address where do we go from here and what do we want to be."

Plenum sessions were devoted to federal budget cuts, race relations, the environment, the peace process, the religious right, law and cyberspace, and grass-roots political organizing in an election year.

Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak gave a warmly received speech, though his scheduled counterpart, Likud Party head Benjamin Netanyahu, did not attend. He was replaced by Zalman Shoval, former Israeli ambassador to the United States, whose telephone address drew only a sparse crowd.

U.S. Health Secretary Donna Shalala, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt also appeared.

But "compared to several past plenaries, there were no burning issues, none that divided the community," said Leonard Cole, a NJCRAC vice chairman from Bergen County in New Jersey and a member of the

Because of the Presidents Day holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Feb. 19.

committee that issued the strategic plan. "Because of strategic planning, we were focused more on the internal structure and function of the agency and where it's going," he said.

"If the plan had been brought to a vote, it would have been a major issue, but we've postponed the day of reckoning."

Instead, five largely boilerplate resolutions were passed.

One resolution expressed support for the peace process and another condemned Jewish extremist rhetoric and violence and pledged to work for civility in public discourse.

To the consternation of some delegates who privately called the policy discussion "vacuous," the most heated debate was generated by a resolution calling for environmental protection.

The dispute was over whether the subject was a "Jewish issue."

But some participants said something fundamental was at stake in what seemed like a frivolous debate about "salamanders."

The question "reflects a much larger debate over the Jewish public affairs agenda," said one.

"The agenda is clearly expanding and there is growing debate over the contours of the agenda," the delegate said.

"Both the agenda and the entity itself are in a transitional phase," he said.

For some, the paucity of burning issues reflects the success of NJCRAC and its members.

"Look at the Jewish communal agenda," said Maynard Wishner, past chairman of NJCRAC and current president of the Council of Jewish Federations. "We've won it, both overseas and domestically."

Others were more cynical, saying that the common agenda has "collapsed."

But all agree these times call for NJCRAC and CRCs to carve out new roles and, in some cases, new agendas.

Indeed, at a time when local federations' budgets are squeezed, CRCs are clearly eager — and in some instances even pressed — to prove their value.

Most CRCs are attached to and receive their funding from their local federations, which in turn contribute some 80 percent of NJCRAC's funding.

'Teeming with policy junkies'

Several CRCs have begun to lend their political advocacy skills to federations at a time when the federal government is shifting responsibility for funding social programs to the states and federation-supported agencies are at risk for cuts.

"We've always maintained relations with key local and state officials, so this is an important service we can provide," said San Francisco's Kahn.

"Our JCRCs are teeming with public policy junkies and grass-roots activists, which makes us uniquely positioned to play a key role in this critical time of change," said Lynn Lyss, who completed her two-year term as NJCRAC chair at the plenum.

Fellow St. Louisan Michael Newmark is her successor.

There were calls by some speakers for heightened Jewish content in the pursuit of social action by both CRCs and the national agencies.

But warnings were sounded against retreating from a broad-based social-justice agenda and becoming too parochial.

Said Lyss: "There are those who maintain that our work on behalf of our values is a luxury we can no longer

afford, that only those issues that directly affect America's Jews — Israel, prayer in the schools, anti-Semitism, should occupy us."

But "it is imperative that we assert in every discussion and every public forum the fundamental correctness and importance of a Jewish community that stands for civil rights and civil liberties, for addressing the root causes of poverty and crime, for challenging discrimination wherever it occurs," Lyss said in a keynote address.

Such an agenda is precisely what will attract the young, unaffiliated or disaffected into the Jewish fold, thus ensuring Jewish continuity, said Lyss and others.

"If we are to convince substantial numbers of young people that being Jewish is a thing worth being, and if we are to make ourselves a community not only of comfort but of conviction, then we must stand for more than just our own interests," said Lyss.

Boston's Kaufman agreed.

"Social justice and what we do in public affairs is on the cutting edge of what will ignite a whole new generation," she said, adding that in the city of Boston, "The young people are coming out of the woodwork."

Meanwhile, the plenum heard provocative calls both to broaden the liberal organization's tent politically and to reach out more aggressively to conservative politicians and policy-makers.

NJCRAC is out of step with "the radical rightward shift in the political center of gravity" after the 1994 Republican ascendancy, said Ted Lapkin, CRC director in West Palm Beach, Fla.

NJCRAC policy statements "all reflect the ethos of an organization where a left-of-center orthodoxy reigns unchallenged," he said.

If this "partisan orientation" and "inhospitable environment" for conservatives is not changed, NJCRAC's mission will be jeopardized, Lapkin said.

The CRC director was not alone in expressing that sentiment.

At a forum on grass-roots political education, Simcha Lyons, a St. Louis Republican activist, warned delegates, "It is dangerous not to have Jewish involvement on the Republican side.

He dismissed as groundless Jewish "fears" of cultivating relationships with politicians of the Christian right.

Lyons said members of the Christian right are "sympathetic to Israel" and "share certain moral values."

"Not to be involved with them is a mistake," Lyons also said. "If we don't have involvement [with Republicans], we don't sit at the table and we won't have input."

Office in nation's capital

Said Emily Fink Bauman, executive director of the JCRC of St. Louis, "We should listen, have respect for and welcome diversity, and at the same time we have to be true to our principles.

"Judaism is a reference point. We've got to keep our eye on the ball."

As for the proposed plan to reform NJCRAC, discussions with the three big national agencies — the ADL, the AJCongress and the AJCommittee — are slated in the coming weeks in an effort to come to some agreement.

The three argue that the plan violates NJCRAC's mandate as a coordinating body.

The plan calls for NJCRAC to open an office in the nation's capital, oversee funds now distributed by federations to the national agencies and eliminate veto power now accorded to the "nationals" over public expressions of NJCRAC policy. □

Was 'Moshiach' promoter fired? Debate rages over Lubavitch post

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Rabbi Shmuel Butman, the outspoken Lubavitch Chasid leading the effort to convince people that the late Menachem Mendel Schneerson is the Messiah, has been fired from his job running the Lubavitch Youth Organization.

Or has he?

Contradictory messages are coming from leaders and spokesmen for various programs within the Lubavitch movement, who each claim the authoritative mantle to the late rebbe's vision and say that the rebbe charged them with carrying out his wishes.

The disagreement sheds light on the deep divisions within the Lubavitch movement over whether Schneerson should be promoted as the Messiah.

Schneerson died June 12, 1994, two years after he suffered a stroke that seemed to incapacitate him, though his followers continued to rely on him for advice on matters ranging from whether to have surgery to whether they should go ahead with a particular business deal.

Many still seek their rebbe's heavenly intercession and go to the cemetery in New York where he is buried to pray and to leave notes on his grave, requesting his help.

Butman himself said he has not been fired, and his version of the story is backed by one board member of the Lubavitch Youth Organization, an outreach group that falls under the purview of one of two umbrella Lubavitch organizations.

But another board member said Butman was fired, a view confirmed by Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, who, as a director of Machne Israel, one of the umbrella groups, is technically Butman's boss.

The board of Lubavitch Youth sent Butman a letter dated Feb. 5 saying that they were firing him because, despite repeated warnings, he has failed to submit reports of income and expenses for the last two years.

The letter, written in Hebrew, also cites as a reason for his dismissal the fact that he was using the fax and phone lines of the Lubavitch Youth Organization to promote his message that the rebbe is the Messiah — work that some within Lubavitch are deeply unhappy about.

Butman said the whole episode was a misunderstanding that was rectified in a Feb. 12 meeting with board members.

Says they drank 'l'chaim'

"I am not fired," he said, reached at his home in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

"We had a certain dispute, to straighten out some things of organizational matters. It's not a question of financial records. There's no dismissal whatsoever," said Butman.

"We drank 'l'chaim,' we worked it out 100 percent."

He said he promised to keep the work of Lubavitch Youth completely separate from his work as chairman of the International Campaign to Bring Moshiach.

"At the same time, I was not precluded from working on both," he said.

Butman described the work of the Lubavitch Youth Organization as "the outreach arm of the Lubavitch movement, which means that everything that has to do with outreach goes through the Lubavitch Youth Organization."

He added, "Working with college students, going to army bases, going out on the street to put on tefillin [on Jewish men], the menorah lightings, all this is the Lubavitch Youth Organization."

Rabbi Zalman Shmotkin, a spokesman for

Lubavitch World Headquarters and an aide to Krinsky, said Butman's description of the purview of Lubavitch Youth is "unbelievable, to put it mildly.

"Rabbi Butman is not known in Lubavitch to have participated or overseen any of those activities other than his publicity garnering menorah lighting in Manhattan."

Referring to Butman's Moshiach campaign, Shmotkin said, "How dare he take credit for the very work that no one in the world did more to destroy than he. Shame on him."

Those who believe that the late rebbe should be considered the Messiah are happy about the International Campaign to Bring Moshiach, which is now producing a two-minute commercial and a 30-minute infomercial to be broadcast on television later this year.

The campaign also sponsors billboards and newspaper advertisements promoting the rebbe as Moshiach, and recently organized an international satellite program, which hooked together Lubavitch-led congregations in Israel, Europe, Australia and the United States to proclaim the rebbe as "king Messiah."

Those who disagree say that the rebbe's legacy is being betrayed and that the good work of Lubavitch is being undermined because the promotional campaign scares Jews away from the movement's outreach work to bring Jews closer to traditional observance.

Spokesmen for each side accuse the other of being few in number and marginal in influence.

Meanwhile, Lubavitch Youth Organization board member Rabbi Hirsch Gansbourg confirmed Butman's version of recent events, saying, "He's not fired at the moment. I hope it will be laid to rest."

"The financial records are nobody's business," he said, when asked about the alleged irregularities. "It's wrong to dig into something like this."

But another board member, Rabbi Mendel Shemtov, contradicted that view, saying that the board's "decision was to fire Butman. He had two warnings in writing."

"I have no idea why they think he hasn't been fired," he said.

"There were no other meetings [of the board] after this to discuss it.

"If you fire someone he's going to try to get it back. If he will, I don't know."

Krinsky, who described Butman's behavior as "simply an abuse of the office," said the decision to fire Butman was reported to him and that he has not been notified of any reversal of that decision by the board. □

Syrians tour Museum of Tolerance

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance, which is accustomed to a wide range of international visitors, recorded a first last week when it hosted a group of six Syrian writers and artists.

The group included three writers, a journalist, a painter and a sculptor, most of them in their 30s.

They were taken on a tour of the museum by Rabbi Abraham Cooper, the center's associate dean.

Before leaving, two members of the group recorded their impressions in Arabic in the visitors book.

One wrote, "A very fortunate visit, with a lot of information on these ugly crimes against humanity."

The second entry read: "A revealing and moving experience. I hope this will not happen to other people."

The Syrians were selected by the U.S. Information Service office in Damascus. Their itinerary was arranged by the International Visitors Council of Los Angeles. □

Settlement expansion plan denounced by Cabinet heads*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Housing Minister has come under fire from several Cabinet colleagues for his plan to build thousands of apartments in West Bank Jewish communities near Jerusalem.

Meretz ministers Shulamit Aloni and Yossi Sarid, along with Labor Party Minister Yossi Beilin, attacked Housing Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, who this week assured the leaders of the communities that planned building would proceed as scheduled.

Israeli media reported that Ben Eliezer had proposed approving construction of new homes in five existing settlements and one new settlement.

He is to present the proposal to a ministerial committee on settlement construction later this month.

The proposal calls for construction of some 6,000 homes in Maaleh Adumim, Givat Zeev, Betar, Alfei Menashe, Har Adar and a new settlement, Kiryat Sefer.

The reports drew angry reactions from Palestinians, who claimed that the proposed new construction would violate the Israel-Palestinian peace accords.

In addition, Israel has promised the United States to curb construction in the territories.

In May, Israel and the Palestinians are slated to begin negotiations on a permanent settlement, which includes the status of Jerusalem and Jewish settlements in the territories. □

Yediot Achronot editor quits amid wiretapping accusations*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The editor in chief of Israel's largest newspaper, Yediot Achronot, resigned this week, after he was charged in a Tel Aviv court with wiretapping the paper's main rival, Ma'ariv.

The indictment against Moshe Vardi was the latest development in the yearlong wiretapping investigation into the nation's tabloids.

Ma'ariv Editor Ofer Nimrodi was charged in August with ordering wiretaps on senior executives and public figures at his newspaper and at Yediot.

The Justice Ministry confirmed that the charges had been filed Monday against Vardi and Ruti Ben Ari, a former assignment editor at Yediot.

Vardi announced his resignation Wednesday.

The indictment reportedly said the two Yediot editors are accused of bugging Nimrodi's cellular phone, ordering the wiretapping of a former Yediot editor who moved to Ma'ariv and conspiring to wiretap Ma'ariv's graphic artist.

The tabloid scandal comes as it was announced this week that the newspaper Davar Rishon was being closed down after the labor federation Histadrut decided to cut off funding in the face of unsuccessful efforts to find a private investor.

Besides Yediot and Ma'ariv, the Israeli market will have only one other major Hebrew daily — Ha'aretz. □

Druse rally for Golan's return to Syria*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Several hundred Arab Druse living on the Golan Heights demonstrated against Israeli rule and demanded the return of the area to Syria.

A parallel demonstration Wednesday by a similar number of Arabs was held across the border in Syrian territory.

After the protest, the Druse on the Israeli side held a rally in the nearby Druse town of Majdal Shams.

Leaders of the 18,000 Druse living under Israeli rule said this week at a news conference that they wished to return to Syrian rule and that the 32 Jewish settlements with their 15,000 residents on the Golan were "the root of all evil." □

E.U. wants role in Israel-Syria talks*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A delegation of the European Union told Prime Minister Shimon Peres that it was interested in helping with the peace negotiations between Syria and Israel.

"We think the moment has come for Europe with the United States to help with the peace process on the Syrian-Israeli track," Italian Foreign Minister Susanna Agnelli told reporters after meeting Peres.

Agnelli heads the three-member mission that arrived Wednesday in Israel from Damascus, where the delegation met with Syrian President Hafez Assad.

"We were very pleased to understand that Assad was very open to negotiations with Israel, and very pleasant towards the whole Israeli attitude," she said.

Talks between Israeli and Syrian teams, along with U.S. officials, are set to resume Feb. 28 at Wye Plantation in Maryland.

Peres praised the European Union's efforts and proposed that the European delegation meet with U.S. officials in order to coordinate positions on aid to the Middle East and on the peace process. □

Archaeologists strike perfume in Israel*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A team of archaeologists appears to have cracked the secret of perfume-makers from the ancient Jewish settlement of Ein Gedi, near the Dead Sea.

Archaeologists digging in the remains of the biblical village found a huge watchtower, which dates back to the fourth century, with a hidden facility for making the coveted balsam oil, used to anoint kings and later manufactured and sold by the village.

"It was considered one of the best perfumes in antiquity, in the early Roman period as well as in the Byzantine period," Yair Hirschfeld of the Hebrew University told Israel Radio.

"The installation we found was actually from the later period, so it was probably used [to manufacture] perfume, and not for anointing kings."

The wealth of the village depended on the superiority of the balm, which was made from a species of persimmon tree found only along the shores of the Dead Sea and in nearby Jericho.

The tree became extinct sometime in the sixth century.

Hirschfeld said the facility included two pools, one outside the tower and a smaller one inside.

The second pool was "protected by the tower itself," he said.

"Everything was under protection, it was a secret," he said, adding, "We may assume that perfume at that period was made in a special formula, something like the Coca-Cola formula."

"They wanted very much to keep it as a secret from the other producers of balsam oil in Jericho and other places around the Dead Sea."

The University of Hartford was also involved in the discovery. □