



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The Likud Party launched its election campaign under the slogan "Peres is partitioning Jerusalem," prompting a call by the Labor Party to keep the capital out of the campaign. Prime Minister Shimon Peres denied charges by Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu that he is directing secret talks with the Palestinians on the future of Jerusalem.

■ Security for Prime Minister Shimon Peres and several Cabinet ministers was increased in the wake of reports that Jewish militants were planning attacks. Peres' daughter said she received anonymous telephone calls warning that her father would be assassinated. [Page 2]

■ Congressional debate on a proposed voucher plan for Washington, D.C., schools is bringing to the surface deep divisions in the Jewish community over the use of federal dollars for private and religious schools. Orthodox Jewish groups favor the measure as a means of making Jewish education more accessible, while others call vouchers a violation of church-state separation. [Page 1]

■ A deal that could bring an anti-Western Islamic party to the helm of the Turkish government stalled over power-sharing arrangements. Meanwhile, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan said during a visit to Turkey that the Turkish nation must decide whether it wants a secular or Islamic government.

■ Forty-six American and Canadian volunteers were injured when their bus overturned in Israel. The visitors are participants in a B'nai B'rith program that places older volunteers for three months in Israeli municipalities, social welfare institutions and hospitals. [Page 4]

■ A traffic accident in northern Israel claimed the lives of three children and left more than 40 others wounded. A truck hit a bus carrying elementary school-children to the city of Tiberias.

■ Israel's Olympic committee announced that it would send 25 athletes to the summer games in Atlanta. The cost of sending each athlete was estimated to be \$140,000.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Jewish community divided over D.C. voucher proposal

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A charged debate over federally funded school vouchers awaits Congress when an appropriations bill for the District of Columbia comes up for a vote at the end of the month.

The bill contains a provision that would, for the first time, authorize federal tax dollars for vouchers to be used at private and religious schools.

The voucher initiative is part of a 14-point reform plan attached to the district's appropriations bill. It would authorize a five-year, \$42 million "tuition scholarship" program.

Under the plan, \$3,000 scholarships would be given to selected low-income students for tuition and transportation to private or religious schools. Additional \$1,500 remedial education scholarships would be available for after-school programs.

The voucher debate will mark the first time a challenge to the principle of church-state separation has come to the floor of the current Congress.

Lawmakers have considered school prayer measures and a religious equality amendment, but none of the proposals has moved outside committee rooms.

School vouchers, meanwhile, have proved to be one of the most explosive and divisive issues in the American Jewish community.

Orthodox Jewish organizations see vouchers as the best bet for improving access to a quality education.

But other Jewish groups charge that vouchers would undermine the First Amendment principle of church-state separation.

"If our community is concerned about our children's lack of a quality education, this is one way to address the issue — to improve the accessibility for Jewish children to a solid Jewish education," said Betty Ehrenberg, director of the Institute for Public Affairs at the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America.

"The Jewish community is now facing a crisis of continuity," Ehrenberg added. "Jews are asking that their children be educated as Jews, but many Jews are afraid that the cost of private Jewish day schools can be prohibitive. Our community leaders recognize that depends on private Jewish education."

For opponents of the district voucher plan, it is "both bad public policy and it's unconstitutional," said Jess Hordes, director of the Anti-Defamation League's Washington office.

The ADL, the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the National Council of Jewish Women have joined a coalition of more than 40 education, civil liberties and religious organizations in opposing the voucher plan.

Filibuster planned

"Once you get into a situation where the government begins to get its fingers into religion," Hordes said, "you embark on a course that is going to be difficult and tragic for the notion of separation of church and state and for the religious liberties and freedoms that flow from that."

Voucher opponents in the Senate intend to filibuster when the legislation comes up for a floor vote Feb. 27, according to Hordes, who believes that they "stand a strong chance" of killing the proposal.

Among the measure's supporters is Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), an Orthodox Jew and a longtime proponent of vouchers, who introduced legislation last year along with Sen. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) that would give low-income parents vouchers to send their children to private and parochial schools.

The legislation, which is still pending, would create up to 20 demonstration projects for three years to test the theory that vouchers would benefit children in the poorest American school districts.

An aide to Lieberman said the voucher proposal in the district could serve as a similar trial balloon.

"If it goes into effect and works and if you see some improvement

for the kids in question, then it certainly gives the whole concept a boost," the aide said.

The Clinton administration has said it objects to the voucher initiative, along with other provisions that would cut the district's budget and limit abortions at public facilities.

Marc Stern, co-director of the legal department for AJCongress, said he sees federally funded vouchers as tantamount to a "church-state revolution."

"It doesn't necessarily mean with vouchers you'd have compulsory prayer, but it would be a wholesale revision of the Constitution," Stern said.

Voucher proponents, however, do not see the plan as government interference in organized religion.

Because the vouchers would be given directly to parents, they argue, the government could successfully avoid entanglement in religious matters.

"I think as a community it's in our interests to re-evaluate some of the long-standing 'orthodoxies' about our absolute opposition to any form of governmental assistance to parents who want to choose religious education for their children," said David Zweibel, director of government affairs and general counsel for Agudath Israel of America, an Orthodox group.

Both sides anticipate that the issue will wind up in the Supreme Court, where it remains uncertain which argument would prevail.

Constitutional issues aside, Stern believes that voucher programs would undermine the Jewish community's historic commitment to public education.

Moreover, he sees vouchers as "a confession of failure that we can have schools that serve everybody. There's no pretending that our current public schools do that well for everyone, but at least they strive for that."

He added, "There's all too much evidence that our society is fragmenting, and vouchers would hurry that process.

"Those parents who are the most put together are most likely to take advantage of the limited number of vouchers. It's going to leave behind the kids who come from the most fragile families, making it more difficult to teach anything in the public schools."

Zweibel, however, said he would consider it a worthwhile trade-off if families and education receive a boost at the expense of the public school system.

"What's of primary importance is the education of children and the empowerment of families," he said.

Concerns about extremists

Other concerns opponents raise include the possibility that extremist groups could qualify for vouchers to set up their own educational institutions.

Those schools could "serve as breeding grounds for a new generation of haters," Stern said.

Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan "could undoubtedly set up schools, as well as the militias and Christian Identity churches," Stern said.

"It's not so easy to devise a scheme that leaves choice with the parents and that decides that some choices are not good ones."

Voucher proponents maintain that carefully written plans would allay such fears.

And while voucher advocates say all they are asking for is a trial run, their opponents say they are largely concerned about precedent.

A voucher program initiated by the federal government could have far-reaching implications for both church-state separation and the way America views its public school system, say voucher opponents.

Zweibel sees it differently.

"Anyone who pretends that education in this

country is healthy ought to look at the statistics from other countries and ought to look at the reality of what's going on in urban centers in public schools," he said.

"To say we can't try anything to shake up the system because who knows what will happen — that rings very hollow to me." □

Security services on alert for attacks against ministers

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Israel's election campaign gets under way, security officials have stepped up the protection of Cabinet ministers in the wake of reports that Jewish militants are planning attacks against them.

At the weekly Cabinet meeting, Internal Security Minister Moshe Shahal said security officials had received information that right-wing Jewish militants had targeted a number of ministers, including Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Environment Minister Yossi Sarid and Shahal himself.

Further underscoring fears for the lives of leading Israeli officials, Peres' daughter, Zvia Valden, told Israel Radio this week that she had received an anonymous telephone call warning that her father would be assassinated.

A number of ministers blamed Israel's right wing for the atmosphere of threats.

"We have returned to the incitement of the days of Zion Square," Trade Minister Michael Harish was quoted as saying, in a reference to a Likud rally last year in which posters were displayed of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in a Gestapo uniform.

Harsh right-wing rhetoric against Rabin's peace policies with the Palestinians was cited last year for creating the charged political atmosphere in which the Nov. 4 assassination of Rabin took place.

A senior security source told the Israeli daily Ha'aretz that in light of the latest warnings of possible attacks against Cabinet ministers, security around them had been stepped up and specific instructions for their protection had been given.

A security official was quoted as saying that protection units of the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security service, had been given explicit instructions to keep "hot-headed youths" away from ministers during rallies and tours across the country in the election campaign.

Security and intelligence sources have in recent days collected extensive material — including pamphlets and graffiti — denouncing Peres, Shahal and Sarid.

Some of the graffiti had been found scrawled on walls in Bnei Brak, Ashkelon and Safed.

In addition to the planned attacks on ministers, security and intelligence officials have also been alerted to plans by extreme right-wing groups to attack Arabs in an attempt to sabotage the elections.

In another development, one of the Israelis charged with conspiracy to assassinate Rabin wrote in a letter that Peres had been marked for death because he was endangering Jewish lives with his peace policies.

The letter by Dror Adani was published Monday by the Israeli daily Ma'ariv.

The letter was seized by a prison guard during a search of Adani's cell, according to the newspaper.

"Any person who endangers the lives of Jews must know that he is putting his own life in danger," Adani wrote.

Similar reasoning was expressed by Yigal Amir, the 25-year-old law student who confessed to the Rabin assassination. □

Australian firm cancels deal with Iran to avoid U.S. penalty*By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Threatened with U.S. economic sanctions, Australia's largest corporation has pledged not to participate in a project to build a gas pipeline from Iran to Pakistan.

The Australian venture would have flown in the face of legislation working its way through Congress that seeks to impose sanctions against foreign firms with substantial investments in Iran's energy sector.

Iran has been desperately seeking \$7 billion in foreign investment to bolster its declining oil industry, to bail out its economy and to finance a nuclear buildup.

In a letter to the Melbourne-based Broken Hill Proprietary Co., Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), who heads the Senate Banking Committee, wrote: "Reports suggest that action on a potential deal between BHP and Iran on a gas pipeline to Pakistan is being rushed to be signed before the bill passes Congress in an effort to avoid sanctions. Please understand that there is growing support in Congress to add various provisions, including one that would make the bill retroactive in order to cover these types of threats."

Reports of the project initially surfaced in the magazine *Australia-Israel Review*.

Responding to D'Amato's letter, BHP Chairman B.T. Loton denied that his company was on the verge of striking a deal with Iran. "We have no intention of taking any action to pre-empt your proposed legislation," Loton wrote. "BHP is well aware of the substance of the legislation and will, of course, abide by U.S. law as applicable."

Whether BHP backed off the deal as a result of the congressional pressure remains unclear.

But one congressional aide said, "If the deal wasn't dead before, it is now." He added that with "substantial resources in the U.S.," the Australian company is "not going to put them at risk."

BHP also joined some of America's closest allies, including Great Britain, France and Germany, in expressing opposition to the legislation. They view it as unwarranted interference in the activities of foreign companies.

In December, the Senate approved the Iran Sanctions Act, which would deny sanctioned firms access to financing sponsored by the Export-Import Bank of the United States and to licenses for exports to the United States. U.S. law already prohibits American firms from investing in Iran's fuel industries.

The measure, which is supported by the White House, is expected to pass in coming months. Through the new policy, the government hopes to discourage companies such as BHP from indirectly subsidizing Iran's nuclear development by framing the issue in simple terms: Choose between trade with the United States or trade with Iran.

"A straight line links Iran's oil income and its ability to sponsor terrorism, build weapons of mass destruction and acquire sophisticated armaments," Peter Tarnoff, undersecretary of state, recently said before the Senate Banking Committee. "Any government or private company that helps Iran to expand its oil [sector] must accept that it is indirectly contributing to this menace." □

Third Way becomes a party to run in Knesset elections*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Nearly two years after its inception, the Third Way movement has declared itself a political party to run in the upcoming Knesset elections.

Founded in June 1994 by two renegade Labor

Knesset members who opposed the government's negotiating strategy with Syria, the Third Way supports relinquishing land to the Palestinians in return for peace, but opposes an Israeli withdrawal from all the territories.

The decision to transform the Third Way into a political party was approved last week by the movement's central committee at Ramat Efal in central Israel.

National elections are planned for May.

The party, headed by Knesset member and war hero Avigdor Kahalani, opposes a full territorial withdrawal on the Golan.

Kahalani and parliamentary colleague Emanuel Zismann resigned from the Labor Party ahead of the movement's declaration.

In a letter to Nissim Zvilli, party secretary general, Kahalani and Zismann wrote that they could no longer belong to Labor, which they believed had failed in its commitment to the electorate.

They said the Third Way would take up the principles that they claimed the Labor Party had abandoned — opposition to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and to a full Golan withdrawal.

"The Labor government is ready to give up all of the Golan," Zismann said. The Third Way is interested in territorial compromise "in which Israel maintains control over most of the Golan."

The Third Way said it would hold coalition talks with the winner of the race for prime minister of the Jewish state.

"We see ourselves as an insurance policy," Yehuda Harel, Golan activist and one of the founders of the Third Way, told Israel Television. "We would prevent the Labor Party from withdrawing from all of the Golan, and make sure the Likud continues peace negotiations with Syria." □

Michael Jackson reinstates anti-Semitic lyrics in video

NEW YORK (JTA) — According to the Anti-Defamation League, the title of Michael Jackson's song "They Don't Care About Us" should be "I Don't Care About You."

Jackson apologized last summer for including anti-Semitic lyrics in the song that is part of his "HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I" album.

The ADL, the Simon Wiesenthal Center and others last June protested the words "Jew me, sue me," and "kick me, kike me."

Jackson said at the time that he would rerecord the song and change the lyrics to "do me" and "strike me."

In his letter of apology, Jackson wrote, "My intention was for this song to say 'no' to racism, anti-Semitism and stereotyping. Unfortunately, my choice of words have unintentionally hurt the very people I want to stand in solidarity with. I just want you all to know how strongly I am committed to tolerance, peace and love, and I apologize to anyone who might have been hurt."

Jewish leaders were satisfied with Jackson's response. But, after the video version of the song was recently released — with the original anti-Semitic lyrics — on a nationally syndicated television program, the ADL expressed outrage.

"We accepted your apology, and we assumed that the video would conform with our understanding," ADL National Director Abraham Foxman wrote in a Feb. 6 letter to Jackson. "Apparently we were wrong."

Foxman added, "With the release of such a video, instead of remaining a spokesman against hate and prejudice, you have made a decision which reinforces intolerance." □

Russian version of Talmud released by Rabbi Steinsaltz*By Lev Krichevsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — The first volume of the Babylonian Talmud to be translated into Russian has been released here.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, an Israeli known for translations of the Talmud into modern Hebrew, English and French, presented the Russian-language edition at a ceremony last week at the office of the mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov.

The Babylonian Talmud — which contains 63 sections, or tractates, and which was written in Aramaic and ancient Hebrew when it was compiled some 1,700 years ago — has never before been available to Russian Jews in their native language.

During the atheist Soviet era, when Communist authorities suppressed all expressions of religious activity, Russian Jews had little access to the Talmud, copies of which were sometimes in the country's few functioning synagogues or were smuggled in by foreigners.

The 59-year-old Steinsaltz, who is the founder and the head of the Jerusalem-based Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, has already published 27 volumes of the Talmud in modern Hebrew, as well as in English and French.

The Russian Talmud is being published under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Steinsaltz first became widely known to Russian Jews in 1990, when his book, "The Thirteen Petalled Rose," a personal exposition of Jewish mysticism, was translated into Russian.

The book, the first on Judaism published in the then-Soviet Union in the new era of openness under leader Mikhail Gorbachev, led many Russian Jews to re-establish links to the Jewish religion.

In 1995, Steinsaltz was invited by the chief rabbi of Russia, Adolph Shayeovich, to take on the title of Duchovny Ravin — the spiritual leader of Russian Jewry.

Since that time, Steinsaltz has spent a week every month in the former Soviet Union giving lectures and visiting Jewish communities.

'A big effort and a big gamble'

"I see my attempt to be in Russia today as a big chance, a big effort and a big gamble," Steinsaltz said in an interview. "Many have asked me why go to Russia, where any chances to revive Jewish spiritual continuity are so weak."

Russia's Jews number an estimated 600,000, but Steinsaltz fears that a high rate of assimilation is threatening the community with extinction.

But the risks of assimilation, he added, are not only to be found among Russian Jewry.

"Where Russian Jewry is now, European Jewry will be in 15 years, American Jewry in 30 years, and even possibly, Israeli Jewry in 50 years," he said.

"Any attempt to do something in the former Soviet Union is an attempt to see if there is any way of changing the situation elsewhere. If there is any possibility, it means that Jews as a people have hope," he said.

Steinsaltz added that the project of translating the Talmud into Russian would continue with the publication of other volumes only if the first volume had a discernable impact on Russian Jews.

"This translation may be a great scientific achievement, but that is not what I'm interested in," he said. "The project would be a success if you see groups of people that want to study, want to practice, want to go on." □

46 U.S., Canadian volunteers hurt in weekend bus accident*By Michele Chabin*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Forty-six American and Canadian volunteers, most of whom are senior citizens, were injured over the weekend when their tour bus missed a curve and overturned.

The volunteers, in Israel on a three-month program sponsored by B'nai B'rith, were on their way to Beit Guvrin, near Kiryat Gat.

Most of the passengers were released from nearby Barzilai and Kaplan hospitals.

But 13 were admitted to Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon for the treatment of broken bones and other injuries.

Group leader Saidie Symon, 59, who was bruised in Sunday's accident, said, "Before we knew what was happening we were in a terrible accident."

Symon added, "Thank God, all 46 people, including the driver, got out alive, and none of the injuries is life threatening."

Symon, who said the accident occurred on her birthday, added, "Despite the injuries, though, the spirit of the people has been tremendous."

"Their courage has given me the strength to carry on, and we will try to restart the program tomorrow," she said.

The volunteers come to Israel for three months to work with municipalities, social welfare institutions and hospitals.

"Many of our volunteers come year after year and play a key role in Israel's voluntary sphere," said Alan Schneider, director of the B'nai B'rith World Center in Jerusalem. □

Weekend raid results in arrest of 22 thought to be neo-Nazis*By Daniel Dagan*

BONN (JTA) — A raid by German police has led to the arrest of more than 20 people thought to be neo-Nazis who belong to an outlawed organization.

The raid last Friday took place in the German states of Brandenburg, located in the east, and North Rhine-Westphalia, located in the west.

The crackdown was hailed as a blow to right-wing extremists in Germany by Interior Minister Josef Kniola of North Rhine-Westphalia.

The 22 suspects, whose ages range from 15 to 56, were accused of belonging to the Recklinghausen Comrades, a renamed segment of the Free German Workers' Party, which was outlawed by the German government in February 1995.

More than 150 police officers took part in the crackdown.

During the raid, police searched 20 apartments as well as a publisher's office.

The police discovered weapons, Nazi flags and propagandistic publications.

The raid came after police officials received warnings of an attack on a home for those seeking asylum in Germany.

The Free German Workers' Party, also known as the FAP, had glorified the Third Reich.

Party leaders had called for the overthrow of the government and the execution of anyone who opposed them.

Members of the Free German Workers' Party also had viewed Rudolf Hess, one of Adolf Hitler's henchmen, as their role model. □