

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a statement seemingly directed at the Palestinians, said governments must honor their international commitments. Netanyahu also reached out to Arab leaders, on the eve of their summit in Cairo, to join him in building peace. [Page 2]**

■ **Israel's outgoing air force commander, Herzl Bodinger, said chances for war breaking out in the near future are small, but the risks for Israel are high if war did break out. Bodinger said long-range missiles held by neighboring Arab nations could easily hit any target in Israel.**

■ **An assassination attempt was made on Abraham Azencot, the deputy president of the Casablanca Jewish community. It was not clear whether the Morocco attack, in which Azencot was seriously wounded, was of an anti-Semitic nature.**

■ **Pope John Paul II is set during his weekend visit to Germany to beatify two German priests who opposed Adolf Hitler. One of the priests is the Rev. Bernhard Lichtenberg, who condemned the Nazis' treatment of Jews from his pulpit and died in transit to Dachau. The other is the Rev. Karl Leisner, who was sent to a concentration camp because he was overheard expressing regret that Hitler had not been assassinated.**

■ **The Jewish National Fund is trying to distance itself from Messianic Jewish groups by rejecting their donations. [Page 3]**

■ **Several senior Labor Party members charged that the results of the May 29 elections should be voided because of fraud. A sample check of ballot boxes, they said, revealed that among those who registered to vote were people who were abroad or deceased. [Page 4]**

■ **A mosque will be opened in the Knesset. The move comes after a new Muslim legislator who is also a leader of Israel's Islamic Movement requested a prayer room for Arab members, similar to the long-standing synagogue housed in the Knesset.**

NEWS ANALYSIS**As Congress winds up session, critical measures could still pass**

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As Congress enters the final 30 working days of its session, pre-election partisanship and political wrangling are certain to take center stage.

With Democrats and Republicans jockeying for electoral advantages and seeking to give their respective presidential candidates the upper hand, Jewish activists are preparing for an onslaught of legislative initiatives that they believe undercut their core principles.

Among the key issues on the agenda:

- Welfare reform
- Immigration policy
- Federal budget
- Prayer in the public schools

Whether such legislation becomes law will depend largely on the race against the clock. Many activists are quietly rooting for time to run out on the 104th Congress before it can act on some of the most significant reforms.

Often at odds with the Republican-controlled Congress over domestic issues, Jewish groups fear that fast action may lead to what they see as bad policy.

"It would not be an overstatement to say that this is a very dangerous time," said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League.

Even as Congress winds down, leadership changes have brought new energy to Republican aspirations.

Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) has taken over as majority leader for Bob Dole, who has retired from the Senate to devote all his time to run for president. Lott, a Southern conservative, has vowed to continue Dole's legacy while simultaneously putting his own stamp on the Senate.

Lott is known equally in the Jewish community for his staunch pro-Israel views and his support for school prayer and sharp budget cuts.

The new majority leader's politics symbolizes much of the what the organized Jewish community faced during the 104th Congress: how to deal with staunchly pro-Israel lawmakers who are often at odds with Jewish views on school prayer and allocation of financial resources.

Although Lott is taking over a deeply divided and sharply partisan Senate, Israel is expected to continue to garner bipartisan support.

The foreign aid bill, which provides more than \$3 billion to the Jewish state and \$75 million for the Palestinians, is on the fast track to approval.

Jewish activists counting the days

A measure that would impose sanctions on overseas firms trading with Iran and that has already won House approval is expected to pass the Senate under Lott's stewardship.

But it is the domestic front that has many Jewish activists counting the days until Congress goes home to run for re-election.

Hidden in many of the legislative initiatives are provisions that assault the separation of church and state and radically alter the relationship between the federal government and America's poor.

- Welfare reform:

Republicans are hoping to pass another welfare reform bill. The last measure drew a veto from President Clinton for a number of reasons, including its provision ending the federal guarantee of cash assistance programs.

Although Jewish groups publicly support welfare reform in principle, they oppose ending the federal guarantee of welfare. Their opposition to the measure now being considered stems from three specific concerns: its impact on immigrants, its ties to Medicare and its potential violation of church-state separation.

The measure now making its way through Congress in effect bans all legal immigrants from receiving federal benefits.

The Council of Jewish Federations is working to convince Congress

to change the provisions dealing with legal immigrants. Unlike legal immigrants, refugees, including Jews from the former Soviet Union, would continue to be able to have access to benefits for their first five years in the country. They would again become eligible after receiving their citizenship.

GOP lawmakers also hope to fold Medicare and Medicaid reforms into the welfare bill, a move that is sure to draw a veto from the White House. Jewish groups continue to oppose an end of the federal guarantee of health care for the elderly and poor.

Other activists are focused on the bill's provisions that would allow religious institutions to administer benefits.

Jewish activists fear that the measure would allow, for example, a church to force non-believers to worship in order to receive benefit checks. A similar provision recently was added to the Older Americans Act, which provides grants for local communities to run programs for elderly citizens.

• Immigration Reform:

House and Senate negotiators are hammering out differences between bills that aim to stop illegal immigration. Both measures, however, also include new limits on benefits for legal immigrants. While not as restrictive as the measures in the proposed welfare reform legislation, the bill does include sharp restrictions on aid to legal immigrants.

If it became law, it would cut off about 95 percent of newcomers from benefits, said Diana Aviv, director of the Council of Jewish Federations' Washington Action Office.

Jewish groups have traditionally backed liberal immigration policies.

The bill would also have an impact on legal immigrants, who would be denied access to government-sponsored English classes, college loans and Medicaid.

Measures restricting legal immigration were struck down on the House and Senate floor.

• Federal budget:

This year's budget debate will continue last year's efforts to cut many federal programs.

'Showy floor vote'

Although Congress is set once again to provide full funding for programs that assist the resettlement of refugees from the former Soviet Union, many other social service programs administered by federations across the country are on the chopping block.

As early as next week, for example, Congress will begin considering a measure that cuts more than 25 percent from current elderly and low-income housing programs.

B'nai B'rith and Jewish federations nationwide receive tens of millions of dollars through the programs and rely on these federal subsidies to run elderly, low-income and disabled housing facilities.

But many of the funds slated to be cut are expected to be restored.

• Religious Equality Amendment:

Introduced with much fanfare at the beginning of this Congress, supporters of a constitutional amendment that would, among other things, bring prayer into America's schools have been unable to agree on a measure.

"With each passing day it appears less likely that we will see a serious push" for such legislation, said Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Nonetheless, there could be a "showy floor vote" to allow members to go on the record on the issue, Pelavin said.

In addition, supporters could push for legislation

that calls for a moment of silence that opponents say could gain a majority of members of Congress and perhaps Clinton's support.

Any bill that is not agreed to by both the House and Senate and signed by the president effectively dies and starts from scratch in the next Congress.

Congressional Republicans will not want to go down in history as "the do-nothing Congress," as White House officials have charged. This tension will affect nearly everything now coming out of Washington. □

Netanyahu appeals to Arabs to join him in building peace

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — On the eve of an Arab summit called to discuss Israel's new government, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made another appeal to Arab nations to work with him to achieve regional peace.

"We are committed to continue the quest for peace and security," Netanyahu said in a statement Thursday distributed to reporters shortly before the prime minister made a speech in Jerusalem. "Our position is that governments should keep commitments. We expect a similar commitment from others."

The statement also said, "Our Likud government was the first to reach a breakthrough for peace with the Arab world, with the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli treaty of peace. We have kept our obligations since Camp David and Madrid," referring to the 1991 peace conference in the Spanish capital.

Arab leaders are convening this weekend in Cairo for their first summit in six years. They are expected to develop a unified stance about the peace process and the new Israeli government.

Netanyahu convened top security and political advisers Thursday for consultations to discuss the Arab summit, next week's visit to Israel by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Netanyahu's own trip next month to Washington.

Netanyahu's statement Thursday made no direct mention of the promise made by Israel — under the government of Shimon Peres — to redeploy Israeli troops from most parts of the West Bank town Hebron.

But later in the day, an official in Netanyahu's office reportedly said the prime minister would meet Friday with Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Foreign Minister David Levy to discuss Hebron.

Israel was scheduled to redeploy its forces in Hebron in March, but Peres delayed the move after a series of Hamas suicide bombings that killed 59 people. A subsequent agreement with the Palestinian Authority called for a redeployment in mid-June, after Israel's elections, leaving Israeli forces in the enclaves where some 450 Jewish settlers reside in the Arab town of 100,000.

Palestinians have said Netanyahu's handling of Hebron would be the first test of his commitment to the ongoing peace process.

In another development, the military wing of the fundamentalist Hamas group offered the new Israeli government a conditional cease-fire. Izz a-Din al-Kassam said in a statement Thursday that it would stop attacks if Israel also halted action against its activists, released Hamas prisoners and lifted the closure imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip after the suicide bombings.

But Israeli security sources dismissed the offer, according to Israel Radio.

The sources said real policy is determined by Hamas military leaders abroad. Regardless of statements issued from the territories, the leadership abroad would continue to plan and direct attacks, the sources said. □

JNF rejects large donation from Messianic Jewish group*By Debra Nussbaum Cohen*

NEW YORK (JTA) — A prominent Messianic Jewish evangelist says he has raised more than \$100,000 for the Jewish National Fund.

But the JNF doesn't want it.

The JNF is trying to distance itself from Zola Levitt and his fellow evangelists, who focus their efforts on converting the Jewish people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

The move came soon after the JNF dropped plans to plant a forest of about 10,000 trees, worth about \$50,000, on behalf of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America.

The JNF is in the process of developing a policy that will address the question of donations from Messianic Jewish groups, said JNF spokesman Mark Cohen.

Messianic groups are waging an ongoing quest to blend into the mainstream of the Jewish community by participating in organizations such as the JNF.

The implied imprimatur of mainstream Jewish groups lends the missionaries the credibility with Jews that they desperately seek.

Levitt is a Jew-turned-evangelical Christian who has built a career capitalizing on the Jewishness he was born with to try to proselytize the Jewish people.

He hosts a weekly television show on which he has had as guests several high-level Israeli Likud officials.

Guests have included Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Yitzhak Shamir and Ariel Sharon; former Labor member of Knesset and current Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani; and David Bar-Ilan, the editor of the Jerusalem Post.

He interviewed Netanyahu at the Knesset for a show that was first broadcast in early 1995.

Levitt's show is carried by independent and cable network television stations across the country and is seen by about 1 million people a week, according to his producer.

Since the late 1970s, he has also led several annual tours to Israel, and estimates that he has brought between 4,000 and 5,000 tourists to the Holy Land.

'Reforestation of the Holy Land'

Some of the people traveling with him are gentiles, others are what he calls "believing Jews" and others are "unbelieving Jews."

He also has an impressive Web site on the Internet. It was on "Zola's Bulletin Board" that someone in the JNF's Pittsburgh office saw that he had urged his followers to plant trees in Israel through the JNF.

In a message on his site, titled "Trees for the Kingdom," Levitt wrote: "Thanks to the blood of Christ, the sacrificial lamb of God, our firstborn are safe.

"He died so that we could live. And what a covenant He gave us, that didn't necessitate blood on our doorposts this Passover! How can we ever repay him?"

"Answer: We can't. If only there were some tangible way we could give life to something He loves, as a small token.

"There is: Contribute to the reforestation of the Holy Land."

It then goes on to list the cost of trees, the address of the JNF's Houston office and its tree-order phone number.

Shortly after being made aware of Levitt's marketing of the Jewish group, the JNF executive vice president, Samuel Cohen, sent him a letter that told him to stop.

The May 29 letter asked Levitt "to desist from

referring to the Jewish National Fund or JNF in connection with any proselytizing" he does.

The bearded missionary is not happy about the missive and described it as "a threat from the Jewish National Fund."

"We've given tens of thousands of dollars, over \$100,000" to the JNF, he said in a telephone interview from his Dallas home.

"It's so offensive, it's so discriminatory" that they do not want our money, he said.

Cohen said, "Using our name in a context like this crosses a line that is really reprehensible to us."

"His ends are inimical to us and to everything we believe," Cohen said.

"We will not permit it."

He said there was no way for the JNF to determine whether Levitt's followers had contributed as much as the missionary claims, because people often order trees in their own name.

The JNF's sensitivity to being used by Messianic missionaries targeting Jews is a recent development.

In August 1995, the organization accepted a \$5,000 donation from Baltimore's Messianic congregation, Rosh Pina.

In the case of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, the JNF originally negotiated with the group to plant a forest with a plaque with only the initials of the group.

However, when news reports publicized the JNF's plans, its lay leaders forced the Jewish group to return the money.

JNF policy, Cohen said, will be to reject contributions when the organization is aware that it from missionizing organizations.

But the JNF may not always be able to know the true identity of the donor, especially in the case of a Messianic Jewish congregation that has a legitimate-sounding name. □

Israel expected to accept global ban on nuclear tests*By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Israel is expected to agree to a request by the world's nuclear powers to abide by a global ban on testing nuclear weapons.

The United States joined France, Great Britain, Russia and China in asking Israel, one of three undeclared nuclear powers, to accept the ban.

The move, which also targets India and Pakistan, comes less than two weeks before talks are scheduled to open on an international nuclear test ban treaty.

A summit on the issue is scheduled for June 28 in Geneva.

On Monday, the Jewish state applied for and was accepted to sit on the United Nations Conference on Disarmament.

The conference, which is also rallying support for a moratorium on nuclear tests, has begun drafting a resolution to that effect.

While Israel has never acknowledged having nuclear weapons, Western intelligence officials believe that the Jewish state maintains an arsenal of at least two dozen warheads.

The negotiations over the test ban have not changed Israel's official line that it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East, an Israeli official here said.

Israel apparently is seeking to avoid a similar flap, which occurred in 1994, when it refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. □

Peres reached out to Assad before moving election day*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres disclosed this week that he had communicated with Syrian President Hafez Assad before deciding earlier this year to advance the date for Israel's national elections.

Speaking Thursday at Labor Party headquarters in Tel Aviv, Peres said he had sent a message to Assad, asking whether Israel and Syria could reach a peace agreement by October of this year. Assad responded that he would be willing to meet with the Israeli prime minister, but gave no date, Peres said.

The meeting of Labor Party members came a day after senior party officials declared that the May 29 election should be invalidated because of fraud.

National elections were originally scheduled to be held in October. But Peres, who assumed leadership after the November assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, moved them forward.

Some observers have said two factors played into the decision to move the elections — expectations that Peres could win from a sympathy vote resulting from Rabin's assassination and the assessment that Syrian peace negotiations were dragging, and could hurt Peres' chances if elections were held as scheduled.

But after choosing May 29 as election day, four terrorist suicide bombings in February and March for the most part erased Peres' lead in opinion polls over Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu.

Labor Party members also have accused each other of causing the defeat of Peres by failing to come up with an effective response to the Likud campaign and a clear message for immigrant and religious voters.

At the Labor Party meeting, Peres refrained from revealing his future political plans. But he said the party should still hold its internal leadership elections as scheduled next year.

Meanwhile, three senior Labor members said they would request that 6,700 ballot boxes be checked on the suspicion that they had been subjected to tampering. One of the protesters, Knesset member Raanan Cohen, submitted a petition to the Jerusalem District Court this week, asking that the election results for prime minister be disqualified. He said a sample check of 100 boxes found signs of tampering, including one box in which 304 ballots were cast in a voting district with only 274 voters.

Some of the boxes examined revealed that people who did not exist, were abroad or dead had been registered as having voted.

Cohen's would be the second try to disqualify the election results.

The High Court of Justice already threw out three petitions challenging the election results. The petitioners had argued that blank ballots should have been counted as valid abstentions — which in turn would have altered the results in the vote for prime minister with neither candidate winning the necessary majority of more than 50 percent.

Netanyahu defeated Peres by just less than 1 percent, or 30,000 votes. □

Auschwitz saga continues amid reports of new plans*By Alissa Kaplan*

NEW YORK (JTA) — The saga of the ill-fated shopping complex across from Auschwitz continues.

In the latest development, the Polish developer of the area near the former Nazi death camp has said work

would resume at the site unless the government made a decision to the contrary by the end of this week.

Earlier this month, Poland had ordered the police to stop the renewed construction of the controversial mini-mall, which was to house a supermarket, a home and garden center and a fast-food restaurant, among other businesses.

The developer, Janusz Marszalek, this week indicated that he might build something other than a shopping complex.

Both Polish and Jewish officials — as well as other communities around the world — have denounced the mini-mall project.

Many see the building of a shopping complex on the site as an offense to the memory of the victims of Auschwitz.

During World War II, nearly 2 million people were killed at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death complex.

Ninety percent of those murdered at the camp were Jewish.

The latest developments prompted renewed concern.

If Marszalek builds, "I am sure the police will stop him," Kalman Sultanik, World Jewish Congress vice president, said in a telephone interview from Israel.

Sultanik is scheduled to attend the July 7-8 meeting of the Auschwitz Museum Council, the body charged with protecting the integrity of the Auschwitz grounds.

Sultanik said Marszalek's original permit to build on the site was "revoked."

The council, headed by former Polish Foreign Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, who is an Auschwitz survivor himself, reportedly recommended recently that the guest facilities now on the museum grounds be moved to the site being developed.

Marszalek reportedly said the project had been modified to take this suggestion into account.

However, the details of his amended plans were unclear. □

Lileikis returns to Lithuania*By Heather Camlot*

NEW YORK (JTA) — The former chief of the Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian security police has left the United States to return to Lithuania.

Aleksandras Lileikis, 88, who was denaturalized last month by a federal court in Boston, arrived Tuesday in Vilnius, where he had served during World War II.

"The American part of this drama is over" after 15 years, said Eli Rosenbaum, director of the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations.

Lileikis immigrated to the United States in 1955 and became a citizen in 1976.

On May 24, Lileikis was stripped of his U.S. citizenship after the court found that his activities as the head of the Lithuanian security police, known as the Saugumas, "clearly constitute" personal participation in persecution.

He held the position between August 1941 and July 1944.

Saugumas officers arrested Jews who attempted to escape from the ghetto in Vilnius.

The Jews were taken to an isolated killing site, stripped of their clothing and then gunned down in sand pits by a group of volunteers known as the "special detachment."

Some 55,000 of Vilnius' 60,000 Jews perished during the war.

Before his departure from the United States, Lileikis lived in Norwood, Mass. □