



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ President Clinton sent a letter to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat expressing his commitment to the peace process and his pledge to help advance the negotiations. Meanwhile, Arafat praised the outcome of the Arab summit in Cairo as a new chapter in Arab unity.

■ The Jewish Agency for Israel began its annual deliberations in Jerusalem, focusing on managing its severe fiscal crisis, refining its mission, re-examining Israel-Diaspora relations and reinvigorating the flagging Diaspora campaign, which has fueled its budget crisis. The agency is in the process of implementing a five-year plan that would cut \$500 million from its budget by the year 2000.

■ Pope John Paul II told German Jewish leaders that too few Roman Catholics had resisted the Nazi regime. Among those who resisted were two German priests the pope beatified during his two-day visit. [Page 2]

■ Israel's ambassador to Washington, Itamar Rabinovitch, agreed to stay in his post until Sept. 1. Rabinovitch, who spearheaded peace negotiations with Syria for several years, had been widely expected to step down after the election of Benjamin Netanyahu.

■ Two bombs planted by Hezbollah exploded in separate incidents in the southern Lebanon security zone amid conflicting reports that Katyusha rockets were fired in the area. However, the Israel Defense Force spokesman's office denied that the Katyusha rocket attack took place.

■ The children of Paul Touvier, who is serving life for crimes against humanity for his activities in Nazi-occupied France, asked President Jacques Chirac to pardon him because he has terminal cancer. Touvier, now 81, was convicted in 1994 of ordering the execution of seven Jews while chief of the pro-Nazi militia in the eastern French city of Lyon.

■ The European Union called on the Jewish state and its Arab neighbors to resume peace negotiations on a variety of issues, including the future of Jerusalem.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Church-state concerns increase as Congress winds down session

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As the 104th Congress winds down, several pending measures are worrying church-state watchdogs.

A handful of social reform bills contain provisions that Jewish activists say threaten religious liberty and constitutional rights.

"Taken all together, it amounts to a substantial quiet revolution" against the constitutional separation of church and state, said Marc Stern, co-director of the legal department of the American Jewish Congress.

A provision in welfare reform legislation, for example, would encourage states to turn over federal block grant dollars and welfare services to "pervasively sectarian" religious institutions.

Similar language is contained in the Older Americans Act, which provides grants for local communities to run programs for elderly citizens.

Critics say the provisions, inserted into several public health and social service bills at the urging of Sen. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.), could lead to religious discrimination and excessive government entanglement with religion. In one scenario, critics say, a church could force non-believers to worship in order to receive benefit checks.

Another piece of legislation, known as the Parental Rights and Responsibilities Act, also contains a provision that could have religious liberty implications. Modeled closely after one of the planks in the Christian Coalition's "Contract With the American Family," the legislation would, among other things, give parents a kind of veto power over the curricula of public schools — a proposal troubling to many Jewish activists.

"It's incumbent upon us to stress that some of these initiatives, even though they're packaged benignly, are really very serious," said Richard Foltin, legislative director and counsel of the American Jewish Committee.

In what some say constitutes a new tactic in the church-state battle, some lawmakers have turned their immediate focus away from highly contentious issues such as school prayer, vouchers and a religious equality amendment. Instead, activists say, they are looking toward less prominent legislative channels to advance their agenda.

"It's very smart politics," said Reva Price, associate director of B'nai B'rith's Center for Public Policy. "Instead of going for big, broad change like the religious equality amendment," lawmakers instead are focusing on "little pieces that chip away" at the Establishment Clause, the constitutional provision that mandates the separation of church and state.

'Always unconstitutional'

Two proposed constitutional amendments on religious equality have so far been bogged down by disputes, but could re-emerge in coming months. They would, among other things, bring prayer into America's schools and require government to fund religious activities on the same terms that it funds secular activities.

Opponents say that any such amendment would effectively overturn the First Amendment and undo the careful balance that protects Americans against government coercion and endorsement of religion.

Voicing apprehension about the religious agenda some lawmakers have been trying to advance, several leading Jewish and Christian civil liberties groups sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) earlier this month, urging him to honor the constitutional separation of church and state.

"Religion that is promoted or sponsored by the government — however well-intentioned — is usually contrived, commonly watered down and always unconstitutional," they wrote.

The current challenges to the principle of separating church and state are not a new phenomenon.

As Stern of AJCongress said, "The Establishment Clause has never been wildly popular among legislators."

What is new, said Julie Segal, legislative counsel for Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, is the focus on congressional appropriations. Much of the pending legislation, she said, is "flagrantly

intended to turn over government funding to religious institutions."

The outlook for the pending bills remains unclear. Because it is an election year, some observers say the Republican leadership may well force votes on some of the more contentious church-state issues in order to allow lawmakers to go on record on these matters.

"Any one or all can be brought up in the waning days of Congress when people aren't paying as much attention, or there's so much going on that the attention is diverted," Segal said. □

Jewish Agency still working on accreditation in Russia

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian authorities have refused to renew the Jewish Agency for Israel's accreditation, claiming that some technical problems remain in the agency's registration documents.

The Jewish Agency submitted its registration application in May. The agency's license was suspended in April and its activities were curtailed in several Russian cities.

Russia had promised to renew the accreditation by June 15.

On Monday, the agency's Moscow office was informed by the Russian Justice Ministry that the agency would have to revise its accreditation form; otherwise, its activities could not be officially resumed.

"We were told that some technical problems must be resolved," said Aryeh Sadeh, head of the agency's delegation to the former Soviet Union.

The most significant change requires the agency to include private, local members to comply with new Russian laws, according to sources in Israel.

The agency has agreed to resubmit its application in the coming weeks.

It seems clear that the agency will wait until after the July presidential runoff in an effort to avoid any potential political problems.

The Justice Ministry in Russia has refused to comment on the situation. □

(JTA staff writer Cynthia Mann contributed to this report from Jerusalem.)

Pope honors 2 German priests who died opposing Nazi regime

By Daniel Dagan

BONN (JTA) — Pope John Paul II told German Jewish leaders this week that too few Roman Catholics had resisted the Nazi regime.

Making his first visit to Germany since reunification, the pope met in Berlin with members of the Central Council of Jews in Germany after he beatified two German priests who perished during World War II while opposing the Nazis.

"Not enough of the faithful followed the example of the courageous ones" who dared oppose the Nazi regime, the pope told the Jewish leaders Sunday at the end of his two-day visit.

"Although many priests and lay people opposed this (Nazi) regime of terror, as historians have now shown, and many forms of resistance arose in people's daily lives, they were still too few," he said, according to the official text.

Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the German Jewish council, praised the 76-year-old pope for speaking out against anti-Semitism and for trying to strengthen Catholic-Jewish relations. Bubis added that the Jews were aware that

during the Nazi era thousands of priests resisted and suffered severely as a result.

However, both the pope and the Jewish leaders skirted discussion of the controversial role of Pope Pius XII, who is widely accused of being silent while 6 million Jews perished.

Instead, Jewish participants in the meeting said they underlined the need to educate people about the horrors of the past and the example set by the few who resisted the Nazis.

During his visit, the pope himself appeared to want to avoid controversy with Jews and other critics of the church's role during the Holocaust by digressing on more than one occasion from his prepared remarks.

At Sunday's open air Mass in Berlin's Olympic Stadium, attended by some 120,000 people, the pope did not read several passages in the prepared text.

One of the omitted sections said, "Those who don't limit themselves to cheap polemics know very well what Pius XII thought about the Nazi regime and how much he did to help the countless victims persecuted by that regime."

On Saturday, while celebrating Mass in the town of Paderborn, the pope omitted a passage from his prepared statement that said "the whole church" had put up resistance against the Nazis.

Such remarks were in contrast to a statement made last year by German bishops that lamented the "profound failure" of Catholics to oppose anti-Semitism during the Nazi era.

Asked to comment on the omissions, Bishop Karl Lehmann, head of the German bishop's conference, played down the issue. "It really was a question of time," Lehmann said. "It was just a coincidence that these particular passages were left out."

But according to Vatican officials, the written version of the pope's remarks remains the official record.

Auschwitz mall

It was at the Olympic Stadium, the site of the 1936 Games at which Hitler had used to try to project the image of a racially superior Nazi Germany that also was open and tolerant, that the pope beatified two German priests who died during World War II while defying Hitler.

One of the priests was the Rev. Bernhard Lichtenberg, who condemned the Nazis' treatment of Jews from his pulpit and died in transit to Dachau.

The other was the Rev. Karl Leisner, who was sent to a concentration camp because he was overheard expressing regret that Hitler had not been assassinated.

"Today, the two martyrs celebrate their victory right here in the place where 60 years ago the National Socialist regime wanted to use the Olympic Games as a triumph of their inhumane ideology, where the idealism of youth was profaned, where people were incited to hate and enmity," the pope, speaking German, told the crowd during the beatification ceremony.

He then switched into Polish to pay tribute to all victims of the Nazi concentration camps.

"In my soul, we are kneeling down at the sites of death to pay tribute to all concentration camp prisoners and express our gratitude for the sacrifice of their lives and the magnitude of their suffering which became the foundation of a better future," he said.

At a ceremony Sunday evening in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Chancellor Helmut Kohl praised the pope for his words of solidarity with the Jews and said Germany had learned from its past.

In their meeting with the pope, the Jewish leaders sought to enlist the pope's support against a plan to build a shopping mall next to Auschwitz. □

Argentine magazine reports Nazi past of justice minister

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — An Argentine magazine has reported that Rodolfo Barra, the country's minister of justice, was a member of an anti-Semitic extremist group known for violence.

The revelation this week by Noticias was based on a black and white photograph showing a group of teenagers around a table with their right arms held out in a Nazi-style salute. The photo shows a young Barra standing in the middle of the group with his arm held high and stiff.

According to Noticias, the photo dates back to 1962, when Barra, a 14-year-old high school student, was a member of the right-wing Nationalist Union of Students, a group affiliated with the extremist organization Tacuara.

Tacuara was held responsible for hundreds of anti-Semitic incidents in the 1950s and 1960s, including the murder of Jewish lawyer Raul Alterman, several episodes of vandalism against synagogues and a racist riot in this city's Jewish neighborhood.

As justice minister, Barra has been directly responsible for the investigation of the unsolved bombings in Buenos Aires of the Israeli Embassy in 1992 and of the Jewish community headquarters in 1994.

Barra reportedly issued a statement Monday denying that he was ever a member of a Nazi organization and that he was not in the group in the published photo. "I was never a member of any organization which — as far as I could tell with a 14-year-old's experience and knowledge — was Nazi," Barra reportedly said.

Argentine Jewish officials expressed concern over the minister's reported past affiliation. But they were reluctant to go public with their concerns.

However, the Noticias article quoted Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, as saying, "If the Argentine minister of justice was involved with a Nazi organization, we shall have serious doubts about the real compromise of Argentine officials in solving the bloody bombings in Buenos Aires." □

Passport rekindles debate on fate of Martin Bormann

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Did Martin Bormann die in Argentina?

After years of speculation, the discovery of a passport may bring an end to the mystery surrounding Adolf Hitler's personal aide and treasurer of the Nazi Party.

Bormann, who was first thought to have died in Berlin at the end of World War II, was long believed to have actually fled Germany for South America.

Last week, a man who remains anonymous gave the newspaper La Manana del Sur (Southern Morning) in the northern Patagonia resort city of Bariloche a Uruguayan passport bearing the name of Richard Bauer, an Italian national. Bauer was one of the names allegedly used by Bormann during his exile in South America.

The man, who was identified only as "a middle-age, German man," told La Manana del Sur that in 1973 he bought property from "a man I suspected was a Nazi exile."

The property was located in a Chilean town near the border with Argentina.

After taking possession of the house, he found the passport and tried to return it.

"He told me he was moving to Argentina for

good, and he would not be needing it anymore," the man told the newspaper.

"He said he always spent long spells in Argentina, and that he was moving there because Gen. [Juan] Peron was returning to power," the man said.

Peron returned from exile in Spain on June 20, 1973, and died in office on July 1, 1974.

Bauer died in Buenos Aires in 1975 of liver cancer, the unidentified man told the newspaper.

He said he was telling the story now because he wanted "the truth about Bormann to be known."

Sergio Widder, from the Simon Wiesenthal Center here, said of the report about Bauer's passport that "all this is one more version about Bormann." Widder added, "We do not discount it, nor do we endorse it."

Bauer's passport bears the number 9892 and was issued at the Uruguayan Consulate in Genoa, Italy, on Jan. 3, 1946. The bearer's photo, of a balding man wearing a dark jacket, a white shirt and no tie, shows a remarkable likeness to the last available pictures of Bormann.

Bormann was one of the most powerful men in the Nazi regime. Toward the end of the war, he was secretary general and treasurer of the Nazi Party, held the second-ranking position in the government and was executor of Hitler's will. Some believe that Bormann died May 1, 1945, a day after Hitler's suicide.

Witnesses said he was killed by a Soviet barrage hours before the Soviet Army stormed Hitler's bunker.

Others have long questioned this account.

Bormann was judged "in absentia" during the Nuremberg trials, because Allied authorities believed that he was alive, even though he was not in their custody.

For decades, Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal searched for proof that Bormann was alive, saying that the war criminal was living in Argentina under the name of Richard or Ricardo Bauer.

But after an autopsy was performed in 1977 on a body found buried in Hitler's bunker grounds, Wiesenthal said Bormann had died in Berlin in 1945.

Over the years, other sources have maintained that Bormann was alive and had personally negotiated with Peron when he first led Argentina and let several Nazi officers into the country. Among them were Joseph Mengele, Adolf Eichmann, Franz Schwamberger and Erich Priebke, who also had been living in Bariloche and was recently deported to Italy where he is on trial for participating in the 1944 massacre at the Ardeatine Caves.

'A nugget of truth'

The Bauer-Bormann connection was reported in 1972 by the British newspaper Daily Express, which said Bormann had left Germany in 1946 under the assumed name of Richard Bauer.

And, in 1993, Paraguayan newspapers published a police memorandum dating from early 1959 claiming that Bormann had entered the country in 1956 and died in Asuncion in 1959. The memorandum, signed by police officer Pedro Procchuk, a Polish immigrant and survivor of the war, said Bormann was buried at a cemetery in the small town of Ita, 25 miles north of Asuncion.

"When it comes to Bormann, the stories always have a nugget of truth," said Jorge Camarasa, an Argentine journalist and author of two books on Nazis who moved to South America. "When it was said he died in Buenos Aires in 1975, we found medical records under the name of a Richard Bauer who suffered of cancer to the liver."

Camarasa found it noteworthy that the Bauer passport was issued in Italy, not in Uruguay.

Meanwhile, a copy of the passport has been sent to Israel for examination, according to an Israeli Embassy official in Buenos Aires. □

Interest rates rise as Israel vows to make cuts in its budget*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Jewish state's new government will make cuts in its budget but will not raise taxes in order to reduce the budget deficit, Jacob Frenkel, governor of the Bank of Israel, said this week.

Frenkel's announcement Monday coincided with the bank's announcement that it would raise July interest rates by 1.5 percent.

Frenkel, who was appointed for another five-year term as Bank of Israel governor, was also made head of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's economic council.

The bank said raising interest rates was the best way to combat inflation until the economic policy of the new government is established.

High increases in the monthly cost-of-living index have put the estimated 1996 annual inflation rate at more than 14 percent, which is beyond the range set by the previous government.

Israel had sought a second year of single-digit inflation. Inflation was 8.1 percent in 1995.

Israel's growing trade deficit reached \$2.97 billion in the first quarter of 1996.

At the current rate, the deficit will exceed last year's record \$10 billion.

In the wake of the announcement on interest rates, the shekel was revalued.

The new representative rate is 3.23 shekels to the dollar. □

Minister: More Jerusalem housing*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's deputy housing minister has promised to push for more building in Jerusalem, including the construction of a controversial housing project bordering the Palestinian autonomous areas.

Meir Porush, the deputy housing minister and United Torah Judaism party member, said he would try to clear the way for immediate work to begin on housing projects.

This includes Har Homa, a planned Jewish neighborhood for some 30,000 people that has been met with opposition from Palestinians as well as from left-wing Israelis.

Mossi Roz of Peace Now said the group would petition against the project if it is approved.

Porush's religious party, which traditionally does not accept ministerial appointments in the government, actually controls the Housing Ministry even though Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is officially the housing minister.

United Torah Judaism is made up of the political parties Degel HaTorah and Agudat Yisrael. □

Tichon elected Knesset speaker*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Likud member Dan Tichon has been elected Knesset speaker.

Sixty members of the Knesset voted Monday for Tichon.

Tichon said he would serve all the parties in the Knesset and promised to "calm things down" there.

Tichon previously served as chairman of the Knesset Finance Committee.

Knesset member Uzi Landau of Likud was expected to be appointed chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. □

Mosque to open in Knesset*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A mosque will be opened in Israel's Parliament after a Muslim legislator requested the prayer area.

Abdul Malik Dehamshe, a leader of the country's Islamic Movement and new Knesset member, said he believed that it was important that Muslim members have a place to pray.

The Knesset has long had a synagogue for its Jewish members.

Muslim legislators have never before requested their own prayer room.

Representatives of the Islamic Movement ran for the Knesset in last month's election for the first time as part of the United Arab List. The list included the Arab Democratic Party, which was in the previous Parliament.

The joint list won four seats. □

Knowledge stays neutral in Mideast*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The pursuit of knowledge can overcome political boundaries.

Bernard Spolsky, the chairman of the English department at Bar-Ilan University, recently received a letter from a graduate student who needed help finding materials for her dissertation in applied linguistics.

The student was Zhara'a Nasit Talib — from Basra University in Iraq.

"I am sorry for annoying you with a subject that might not be of your interest," she wrote. "Forgive me! Believe me that your comments and opinions will be of great value for me."

Iraq has no ties with Israel, and the letter was sent from Jordan.

Spolsky said, "I have published in this field, and she probably thought I could help." He added that he planned to write the student a letter to offer some feedback on her topic.

Spolsky's wife, Ellen, who is also a professor, said she had the needed materials and had prepared a package.

"We were glad to help," she said. □

Iraq celebrates attacks on Israel*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Iraq has declared Jan. 18 a "Science Day" to celebrate its Scud missile attacks on Israel in 1991.

News agencies, quoting official newspapers in Baghdad, said the Parliament had issued the law during a special session last week.

Iraq fired 39 Scud missiles on Israel during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. □

German diplomat to head to Israel*By Daniel Dagan*

BONN (JTA) — The vice director of the German Foreign Ministry, Theodor Wallau, has been named as the new German ambassador to Israel.

The 59-year-old career diplomat will replace Franz Bertele, who is retiring after a two-year term in Israel.

Wallau was responsible for the Middle East desk at the ministry. He has previously served as ambassador to Brazil and Indonesia.

Wallau is scheduled to go to Israel on July 1 and is expected to present his credentials to Israeli President Ezer Weizman a few days later. □