



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ A new survey of constituents of the religious right in America shows that only 38 percent consider themselves supporters of the religious right political movement. The survey was released on the eve of the Republican National Convention. [Page 1]

■ The Italian Cabinet unanimously backed the justice minister's decision to rearrest Erich Priebke, the former Nazi SS captain who admitted to shooting two people in the 1944 Ardeatine Caves massacre outside Rome. A military court had ordered him freed after a war crimes trial.

■ German judges trying American neo-Nazi Gary Lauck dropped charges involving the distribution of a banned propaganda video because the statute of limitations had expired, according to a news report. Prosecutors say Lauck, a resident of Lincoln, Neb., peddled the video "The Eternal Jew" in the early 1990s.

■ Israeli Justice Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman resigned after the attorney general ordered a police probe of allegations against him. The probe is to focus on charges that Ne'eman obstructed court proceedings in a case against Shas Knesset member Aryeh Deri. [Page 4]

■ Israeli fighter jets attacked Hezbollah targets in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley as the multinational group monitoring the cease-fire between the Jewish state and the Islamic fundamentalist group convened for the first time. The air attacks followed the killing of one Israeli soldier in Israel's security zone. [Page 4]

■ Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai was reported ready to present the government with a plan for an Israel Defense Force redeployment in Hebron under which Israeli troops would patrol Arab neighborhoods. Palestinians sharply condemned the report.

■ Palestinian legislative council member Hatem Abdel Kader submitted a pledge to the Israeli public security minister that an office he opened in his eastern Jerusalem home was private and had no ties to the Palestinian Authority.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Survey: Religious right masses often don't engage in politics

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A new survey of the religious right's mass constituency shows that only 38 percent consider themselves supporters of the religious right political movement.

Significant numbers were also unaware of the movement's leaders, proved to know little or nothing about conservative Christian groups active in politics and were no more likely to be politically active than other Americans.

The survey, conducted for the American Jewish Committee between May 10 and June 3 by the Gallup International Institute, compared the attitudes of 507 Americans aligned with the religious right with those of 503 other Americans.

The poll was released on the eve of next week's Republican National Convention, where political leaders of the religious right hope to exert their influence.

Those political leaders, especially those affiliated with Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, claim a large constituency among members of the religious right.

Religious conservatives have sought to bring Christian values into public policy and have emerged as the most powerful religious force in politics today.

But the poll seems to suggest that there is not an automatic connection between the desire to see enacted government policies based on Christian morality and actual political involvement.

"The religious right is much more diffuse and, viewed as a political movement, much less cohesive than might have been supposed," said Robert Rifkind, AJCommittee's national president.

The poll, which had a margin of error of plus or minus 5 percentage points, identified 14 percent of Americans as being aligned with the religious right.

Other estimates range from 7 percent to 23 percent, depending on how its constituency is defined.

The AJCommittee poll defined the religious right as those who believe that the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally; say they have been born again or have had a born-again experience in which they committed themselves to Jesus Christ; and report that they have attempted to encourage someone to believe in Jesus or accept Jesus as his or her savior.

A complex portrait

Most individuals on the religious right tend to be male conservative, white evangelical Protestants from rural areas and from the South, according to the survey.

They proved older, less educated and less financially well-off compared with other Americans.

The survey presents a complex portrait of a group strongly dedicated to conservative evangelical beliefs that wants government to reflect and promote Christian values.

Nearly half believe that a constitutional amendment should be adopted declaring the United States a "Christian nation," in contrast with 23 percent of other Americans who hold that view.

Three out of four said Christians need to get involved in politics to protect their values.

But there was no evidence in the survey to suggest that those on the religious right were more politically active than other Americans.

Only 14 percent of those on the religious right, compared with 18 percent of other Americans, said they had given money to a political group or party.

Eight percent of the religious right and 16 percent of other Americans had attended a political meeting or rally, and 9 percent had campaigned for a candidate, compared with 10 percent of other Americans.

At the same time, nearly half of those aligned with the religious right

said religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote.

Nearly two-thirds agreed that a person can be both politically liberal and a good Christian.

And they split in half on whether there is a correct Christian position on most political issues.

What emerges from the survey is a portrait of a constituency of religious conservatives whose attachment to the organized religious right movement is marginal, said Tom Smith of the National Opinion Research Center, who analyzed the survey for the AJCommittee.

"Fourteen percent of the population is nothing to sneeze at when it's moving shoulder to shoulder," Rifkind said, referring to those who make up the religious right.

"It's enough to have significant impact, but the group that we polled, while deeply religious, does not readily translate that religious commitment into a political commitment."

Fully 59 percent of the religious right said they had heard little or nothing about "conservative Christian groups that are active in politics, sometimes called the religious right or the Christian right."

They also showed little awareness of or admiration for the movement's leaders.

Eighty-two percent said they know too little about the Christian Coalition's executive director, Ralph Reed, to have an opinion about him. And while most knew who Pat Robertson was, only a little more than half said they admired him.

Jews, meanwhile, were viewed by the religious right with ambivalence.

As a whole, those involved in the religious right are more supportive of Israel than other Americans, with 72 percent of those polled agreeing that "Jews have a right to the Land of Israel, since it was promised to them by God."

By contrast, 43 percent of other Americans hold that view.

A total of 53 percent of the religious right also believe that "now as in the past, Jews remain God's chosen people."

Reflecting the views of most Americans, 79 percent of those on the religious right said they are willing to vote for a Jew as president, 88 percent do not believe that Jews have too much influence in American society and 96 percent are willing to live with Jews as neighbors.

However, the AJCommittee survey also found that they are more likely to raise objections to Jews on religious grounds.

'Hardly fanatical exclusionists'

Fifty-eight percent — compared with 22 percent of other Americans — disagree with the statement that "Jews do not need to be converted to Christianity."

And 22 percent — compared with 8 percent of other Americans — believe that Jews must still answer for killing Christ.

Those sentiments, said Smith, flow from "the basic tenet of Evangelicalism that the religious right and the Jewish community are fundamentally at odds with one another."

Still, Smith said, followers of the religious right are "hardly fanatical exclusionists."

Most differed little from other Americans in their attitudes toward Asians, blacks, Catholics, Hispanics and Jews, with clear majorities saying that those groups do not have too much influence in American society.

Moreover, 93 percent of those on the religious right deemed it "essential" or "very important" to "promote racial, religious and ethnic understanding and tolerance in the United States."

But when it came to acceptance of atheists, homosexuals, feminists and Muslims — the religious right views all these groups as outsiders, non-traditionalists and a serious threat to the country, Smith said — their tolerance appeared to have clear limits.

"From their faith comes conviction and a reluctance to accept as equal the beliefs and customs of others," Smith wrote in an analysis of the survey.

"It is not that they are intolerant, but that they deem tolerance as a lesser value than Christian morality," he said.

"Their first political principle is that Christ rules; all else follows from that." □

Minister of religious affairs proposes demise of own post

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's newly appointed Minister of Religious Affairs Eli Suissa dropped two bombshells this week, immediately after receiving the much-contested portfolio.

Suissa, who is also the interior minister, told reporters that the Religious Affairs Ministry should be dismantled.

"The subject needs to be investigated, though it will arouse opposition from some political parties and rabbis, and so it must be done with great sensitivity," he said.

He proposed placing local religious councils under the auspices of the Interior Ministry, with other religious matters being handled by the Ministries of Education and Justice.

Suissa, a member of the fervently Orthodox Sephardi Shas Party, also took a swipe at the Reform Movement, saying that the phenomenon of Reform Judaism should be stopped.

He also charged that the movement wields power disproportionate to its numbers in Israel.

"It is not feasible that less than 2,000 Reform Jews here will influence the country as if there were 200,000 or 200 million Reform Jews here," he said.

The minister added that in religious matters, "the criteria to be applied is that which is fitting to a Jewish state."

Uri Regev, director of the Reform Movement's Israel Religious Action Center, called Suissa's remarks "a very disturbing new page in the way the government is establishing its Jewish agenda."

On the one hand, Regev said he was "flattered" that his movement's "successful advocacy work gives the minister the impression that we're running the affairs of the state."

On the other hand, "his alarming statements run contrary to every aspect of Israel's character as a democratic state governed by the rule of law."

Regev said any strides made by non-Orthodox Jews in Israel in recent years were achieved through legislation, not arm-twisting.

"It's not the Reform who have created new avenues for religious-Jewish expression. It is the Supreme Court of the State of Israel," he said, referring to recent decisions that paved the way for possible favorable legislation.

Regev charged that the minister's remarks were "motivated by ideological objections to liberal movements."

He predicted that "forcing his theology [on others] will undermine the role of the judiciary and further push Israel into a collision course with the Jewish people, the majority of whom are [religiously] liberal." □

NEWS ANALYSIS**Palestinian strife poses threat to Arafat's control***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It was a rare phenomenon: A Palestinian civil rights activist appeared on Israel Television and strongly condemned the mistreatment of Palestinian citizens.

What made his televised appearance noteworthy was that Bassem Id, a Palestinian who has worked for the Israeli civil rights organization B'Tselem, was not attacking the Israeli security agencies.

His barbs were directed at the security service of the Palestinian Authority, in whose prison cells a man was tortured to death. The victim, Mahmoud Jemayel, of the previously pro-Arafat Fatah Hawks, was last seen alive — and relatively well — July 26 at a prison operated by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank town of Nablus.

Three days later, he was brought to a hospital in Jerusalem. Suffering from serious head wounds, Jemayel was in a coma. A day later he died. Days after his death, the threat of an intifada reared its head, but the warning of an imminent Palestinian uprising was not directed at Israel, but at Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority.

Along with the threat, Arafat has had to contend in recent days with massive demonstrations in two West Bank towns administered by the Palestinian Authority; Palestinian police opening fire on the protesters, causing at least two deaths; an embarrassing hunger strike launched by two prisoners in a Palestinian jail; and an even more embarrassing trial in which Palestinian security officers were convicted for the fatal brutalization of Jemayel.

Taken together, the events represent one of the most serious challenges to Arafat since the start of self-rule two years ago. They also raise serious questions about Arafat's ability to remain in power — and, by extension, about the future of the peace process itself.

Long before the threat of an intifada was issued, there have been complaints from Palestinians that Arafat's regime was undemocratic, repressive, brutal.

But Jemayel's death was not only an indication of the brutality of the Palestinian security forces.

It was also an example of how far former supporters of Arafat have drifted away from him because of their disenchantment with the peace process.

Winding alleys

The Fatah Hawks used to operate as pro-Arafat vigilantes in the winding alleys of the Nablus Casbah, enforcing the directives of the Palestine Liberation Organization and orchestrating the intifada against the Israelis.

But in the two years since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, members of the Fatah Hawks — as well as other Palestinians with high hopes for self-rule — have become increasingly disenchanted with Arafat.

"The situation is particularly frustrating because the expectations were so high," a respected Palestinian civil rights activist who preferred to remain anonymous said in an interview. "We thought we were getting a Palestinian democracy, and yet we received another Arab authoritarian and corrupt regime."

News of Jemayel's death prompted a protest Aug. 1 in Nablus that ended with Palestinian police fatally shooting a demonstrator.

As a result, for the first time in the relatively short history of the Palestinian Authority, anti-Arafat sentiment erupted throughout the Palestinian community. Leaders of Israel's Arab population strongly condemned the brutality of the Palestinian security forces; Id appeared on television, demanding a thorough investigation into the matter.

Arafat tried to show that he was responding to the pressure. A court martial was held in the West Bank town of Jericho and three Palestinian security officers were convicted in the fatal torturing of Jemayel.

Gen. Amin al-Hindi, the head of Palestinian intelligence, insisted this week that there were only rare instances of prisoners being tortured and that measures were being taken to ensure that they did not recur.

The situation among the Palestinian population continued to deteriorate. Last Friday, two Hamas prisoners in the West Bank town of Tulkarm were rushed to a hospital after they had been on a weeklong hunger strike.

Soon after Friday prayers, massive riots erupted in Tulkarm, where some 2,000 protesters came out to express their solidarity with the hospitalized prisoners.

The demonstrators threw stones at the police — Palestinian, not Israeli police — who responded with gunfire. The riots ended with the death of a Palestinian father of two and the wounding of seven others.

Days after the riot, the threat of an intifada was issued. It appeared in a leaflet issued in the name of Hamas. Not coincidentally, the Palestinian Authority had blamed armed Hamas members for the fatal shooting in the Nablus riot.

The leaflet contained a simple and direct call to arms: "To respond to the crime of the authority in Tulkarm, our people should rise up against this collaborating authority. Arafat's authority has tried — through repression of freedom, assassination, arrest campaigns and choking free opinion — to force us to accept weak agreements that are broken by the Zionists every day."

Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip and West Bank have distanced themselves from the leaflet, but it has left a nagging question hanging over Arafat: Is he still in control?

Arafat has been caught between Israeli pressure to destroy the infrastructure of Hamas and the growing animosity directed against him by the Palestinian citizenry. Putting more Hamas activists behind bars may mean better relations with Israel — but the situation at home worsens.

A senior Israeli intelligence source was quoted this week as saying that "more and more people support Hamas, and the status of Arafat has been eroded."

The source did not believe that Arafat's fall is around the corner. But, the source added, if the Palestinians are effectively controlled by forces who oppose the self-rule accords, then Israel will have no choice but to freeze the peace process.

Temporary strategy

Hamas has not yet repeated the devastating terror attacks of February and March, but experts such as Yigal Karmon, an anti-terror adviser for the previous Labor government, believe that may soon change.

Karmon said this week that Hamas' suspension of terrorist attacks was a temporary strategy. He said it was only a matter of time — in his estimate, three months — before Hamas would again resort to terror. The terrorist attacks were halted to speed up the redeployment in the West Bank town of Hebron, he said, adding that once that is achieved, the terror will resume and focus on Jerusalem.

Israeli security officials have praised the Palestinian Authority for its attempts in recent months to suppress Hamas, but there are critics who dispute this view.

As one of several pieces of evidence, they cite Arafat's continued failure to disarm Hamas and other militant groups. Arafat has managed so far to maneuver between Palestinian radicals and the Israelis, but he may soon have to make a choice. If his control is further challenged by Hamas, Arafat may have no recourse but to seek Israeli support to preserve his rule. □

Israeli justice minister resigns after obstruction probe ordered*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Nearly two months after the Netanyahu government was formed, a Cabinet minister has resigned.

Justice Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman offered his resignation Thursday after Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair instructed police to open an investigation against him for allegedly obstructing court proceedings relating to the case of Shas Knesset member Aryeh Deri.

Deri, a former interior minister in the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, resigned from his Cabinet post in 1993 after being indicted on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of public trust.

The Justice Ministry issued a statement Thursday charging that "the attorney general's decision lacks any basis and was done in continuation with his efforts to keep his position as attorney general."

Ne'eman "would place himself at the police's disposal," the statement continued, "in order that his innocence can be proven and it is made clear that there is no foundation for the accusations against him."

The Prime Minister's Office confirmed Ne'eman's resignation, issuing a statement expressing the hope he would soon be able to return to the position.

Ne'eman, a law professor with no party affiliation, is a member of the board of governors of the Bank of Israel and of the Central Committee of the World Bank.

Another Cabinet member, Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan, is also the object of a police investigation. Before he was named to the Cabinet, Eitan was alleged to have misused classified army documents from the personal file of an activist in his far-right Tsomet Party. □

Israel strikes Hezbollah targets*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli fighter jets rocketed Hezbollah targets in Lebanon on Thursday, hours before the first meeting of the five-nation group formed to monitor the U.S.-brokered cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah.

Israeli planes hit Hezbollah targets in eastern Lebanon's Bekaa Valley in two pre-dawn strikes.

There was no immediate report of casualties in the air attacks, which came after Hezbollah gunmen killed an Israeli soldier, Staff Sgt. Aslan Tehahu, in the security zone earlier this week.

The monitoring committee devoted its first meeting in the southern Lebanon town of Nakoura to planning how it would operate.

The group, which has representatives from the United States, France, Israel, Syria and Lebanon, will deal with violations of the April 27 cease-fire that ended 16 days of cross-border fighting between Israel and Hezbollah.

The cease-fire bars either side from launching attacks on or from civilian areas on either side of Israel's northern border, but it does not prevent fighting within the security zone. □

Two escaped militants sought*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Security forces were conducting a widespread search this week for two Palestinian militants who escaped from an Israeli jail by digging a tunnel underneath the prison walls.

During Sunday's morning roll call, the two inmates were discovered missing from the Ashmoret prison at Beit

Lid, near Tel Aviv. The two are members of the Islamic Jihad, a fundamentalist group that violently opposes the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords.

One of the escapees was serving a 17-year sentence for stabbing an Israeli, the other a 12-year sentence for killing an Arab suspected of collaborating with Israeli authorities.

When Israeli forces withdrew from areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, some Palestinians jailed for security offenses were transferred to prisons inside Israel.

Prison officials said the "very thin" men had escaped through a tunnel that was only some 16 inches high. Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani appointed a special team to investigate the escape.

The commissioner of Israel's Prison Authority said he would resign if the investigative team found him personally responsible. □

Airport security lapses exposed*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli journalist pretending to be disabled reportedly smuggled a fake gun and a bomb hidden in the seat of his wheelchair onto airplanes at Ben-Gurion Airport in Israel and Charles de Gaulle Airport in France.

The undercover reporter for the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot was doing an expose on holes in airport security.

The newspaper said the undercover reporter, David Suleiman, flew on Air France and El Al flights between Tel Aviv and Paris, but security officials at the two airports failed to pass the wheelchair through electronic scanners.

Suleiman conducted the experiment amid stepped-up fears about the efficiency of airport security in the wake of the July 17 mid-air explosion of TWA flight 800 shortly after it took off from New York's JFK Airport. All 230 passengers and crew aboard were killed in the crash, which is suspected to have been caused by terrorists. □

Missile agreement takes off*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Rafael Defense Industries and U.S. aerospace giant Lockheed Martin Corp. have signed a long-term agreement to jointly market Popeye air-to-ground missiles to the United States and other clients.

The missiles will be manufactured in Israel and at Lockheed facilities in Alabama and Florida. The agreement was signed Wednesday at a ceremony in Tel Aviv. □

Better census sought in Australia*By Jeremy Jones*

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Australian Jewish leaders are encouraging Jews across the country to answer the question on religion in the national census in order not to be undercounted.

Respondents have to answer most questions in the census, but a response is optional for a small number of questions, including that of religious affiliation.

Jewish leaders are seeking an accurate census because the figures for religious affiliation are widely used in the allocation of services. They are also used to determine the weight that arguments made on behalf of ethnic or religious groups carry with the political leadership.

In the 1991 census, 74,186 people responded that they were Jewish. But 23.4 percent of the Australian population did not answer the religion question and an estimated 3 percent of the resident Jewish population was overseas on census day. □