



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **President Clinton vigorously denied that his administration had softened its position regarding the Israeli government in order to avoid a voter backlash in November.** The only way to achieve lasting peace "is to work with the elected government," Clinton said before meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. [Page 3]

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the United States is putting forth a new proposal to restart Israeli-Syrian peace talks.** U.S. officials have tried in vain to secure a formula to resume the talks that Israel suspended in March after Syria failed to condemn a series of suicide attacks in Israel. [Page 3]

■ **Shimon Peres, Labor Party head and former prime minister, welcomed as "a necessary step" last week's meeting between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat.** Peres, in his remarks in New York before the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, also cautioned against slowing down the peace process and urged the fulfillment of the peace agreements.

■ **Knesset member Ehud Barak announced his candidacy for Labor Party leader.** Some party members were upset that Barak made the decision while Shimon Peres, the current party chief, was in the United States. [Page 2]

■ **Adolf Hitler maintained secret Swiss bank accounts into which he deposited the royalties from the sales of "Mein Kampf," according to declassified U.S. intelligence reports.** The reports say the accounts were held in the Bern-based Union Bank of Switzerland, one of the country's biggest banks. [Page 3]

■ **An Israeli Cabinet committee has drawn criticism for its decision to exclude President Ezer Weizman and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from the list of speakers at the official ceremony commemorating the anniversary of the death of Yitzhak Rabin.** The decision by the Cabinet's Ceremonies and Insignia Committee came in deference to the wishes of the Rabin family.

FOCUS ON ISSUES [Part 2 of 2]

Small in number, non-Orthodox in Israel battle for recognition

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's minister of religious affairs recently attacked what he said was the undue influence of the Reform movement in Israel, given the small numbers of its adherents.

"It's not feasible that there are less than 2,000 here and that they will influence the country as if there were 200,000 or 200 million Reform Jews here," Eli Suissa, of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, was quoted as saying.

It is true that the headlines grabbed by the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel in their fight for legal recognition belie the strength of their formal membership.

It is also true that Israeli politicians of all stripes routinely lecture non-Orthodox religious leaders in North America who complain of their second-class status in Israel. They tell them that if they want their movements to have parity with Orthodoxy, the official state religion, their followers should make aliyah and register to vote for their representatives in Israeli elections.

But Reform and Conservative champions inside and outside Israel say numbers have nothing to do with rights and that if they had legal status that gave them access to the free marketplace of ideas, they could boast much higher numbers of loyalists.

"Given the opportunity to operate on an equal footing and reach out to the public without demonization," says Rabbi Uri Regev, non-Orthodox streams would flourish.

Until then, "to the extent we're talking about Israel as a democracy," he continues, "it is inconceivable" that the importance of religious freedoms would be measured by numbers of affiliates.

"Jews, of all people, should know better than to say liberties should be limited for small groups," says Regev, the director of the Israel Religious Action Center of the [Reform] Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism. He is also the most visible Israeli champion in the Supreme Court for the legal recognition of non-Orthodox movements.

The Orthodox monopoly on religious affairs dates back to the founding of the state and is endorsed by most Orthodox Jews in Israel and abroad. But it is a system that has hampered the growth in Israel of the non-Orthodox streams.

The Conservative movement, called the Masorti movement in Israel, claims 20,000 members or affiliates, 50,000 program participants and 45 congregations and havurot nationwide. Of the 45, 20 have rabbis.

The Reform movement claims 5,000 official members and tens of thousands who are involved in their programs. There are 22 Reform congregations and 30 rabbis, about half of them born in Israel.

Reform and Conservative rabbis preside over certain religious life-cycle events, including circumcisions, Bar Mitzvahs and weddings. But their officiation at weddings, for instance, is not legally recognized in Israel. Israeli couples who choose this route must leave the country for additional marriage ceremonies, which then are recognized under international treaties.

Absence of public funding

If their synagogues get any public funding, it is a minute fraction of the amount that has sustained the Orthodox establishment and permitted it to flourish since the state's founding. Formal, dues-paying, synagogue affiliation is not part of Israeli custom, so Orthodox synagogues typically rely on such public funding for their survival. Non-Orthodox synagogues are severely disadvantaged by its absence.

But the Reform and Conservative streams have secured some advances in recent years:

• The Reform movement's Hebrew Union College has received for the past three years an annual grant of \$100,000 from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, while the movement itself has received \$60,000 a year for the past two years from the same source.

The ministry awarded the Masorti movement \$60,000 in 1994 and

\$100,000 last year. For several years, the Beit Midrash, the quasi-independent affiliate in Jerusalem of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, has also received government funding.

- The Masorti movement last year received for the first time some funding by a national interministerial commission for the construction of a synagogue in Beer-sheba.

- A Supreme Court ruling secured the right for Conservative and Reform representatives to sit on local religious councils, which have a large impact on local religious institutions. Among other functions, they pay for neighborhood rabbis' salaries and furnish maintenance and supplies for local, mostly Orthodox synagogues and mikvahs, or Jewish ritual baths. Only two local municipalities fund Reform synagogues.

This court ruling, however, has been resisted in many cities and is being challenged by members of the new coalition government. Several deputy ministers or ministers made news recently when they vowed that no Reform members would be seated on the councils. The Jerusalem municipality has been fined \$10,000 for failing to seat Reform and Conservative members.

- The court also issued a ruling in November opening the way for the legal recognition of non-Orthodox conversions in Israel, but the governing coalition has pledged to bar this through legislation.

- The two movements also won some recognition when the Shenhar Commission, appointed by the government in 1991 to address the crisis in Jewish learning and identity, recommended that the curriculum in secular public schools include non-Orthodox Judaism. Funding for such programs already has been cut for budgetary reasons.

Although the number of Israelis who identify with non-Orthodox Judaism is small, this uneven legal status accorded the religious streams appears to go against the public grain.

Polls show that more than half of the Israeli public favors equal status for non-Orthodox streams of Judaism and favors recognition of non-Orthodox marriages.

In fact, the legal monopoly over marriage enjoyed historically by the Orthodox is already showing signs of strain.

One survey by Hemdat, the Council for Freedom of Science, Religion and Culture, found that one in five Israeli couples married outside the Orthodox rabbinate in 1994. That includes those who rejected Orthodoxy, those who could not marry under Orthodox Jewish law and immigrants whose Jewish status was uncertain. Ten percent of these were married by Reform or Conservative rabbis.

The number of Reform weddings has grown from 200 two years ago to more than 500 this year.

Cut out of the equation

Until recently, Reform and Conservative leaders had reason to be confident of further gains. For one, they were banking on the political capital of tens of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union whose Jewish status is questionable under Orthodox Jewish law. These immigrants clearly need alternatives to Orthodoxy in matters ranging from marriage to burial.

But these hopes were dashed this summer when Natan Sharansky, the leader of the new Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party, began to seek a special deal with the Chief Rabbinate for civil solutions for these immigrants, effectively cutting the non-Orthodox movements out of the equation.

At the same time, in an even more critical development, May's elections saw a consolidation in the strength of the fervently religious parties and a commitment by the new government to curb any erosion of Orthodox power.

The mood grew bitter and divided over religious

differences. Campaign rhetoric from the fervently Orthodox Shas Party included warnings that Reform Jews convert people by telephone.

Last month, the conflict intensified when Sephardi Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi Doron gave a d'var Torah that was interpreted by some as incitement to violence against Reform Jews.

And more recently, there have been calls for the end of the "phenomenon" of Reform Judaism in Israel, while government funding to the non-Orthodox streams looks to be in jeopardy.

Nonetheless, Regev sees "light" on the horizon.

As evidence, he points to the recent outpouring of protest by non-Orthodox Israelis over efforts to close Jerusalem's Bar-Ilan Street to traffic on Shabbat and holidays.

He says the new effort by politicians to crack down on Reform will awaken people "who didn't give much thought before" to the need to fight to preserve religious liberties and support "an alternative Jewish voice." □

Barak launches campaign for top Labor Party post

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Knesset member Ehud Barak has formally announced his candidacy for the leadership of the Labor Party.

At a news conference Monday in Tel Aviv, the former Israel Defense Force chief of staff and foreign minister in the Peres government declared that he would run in the Labor Party's internal elections next June.

He said he would run against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the premiership in the year 2000 — "or earlier, if possible," he added, referring to the prospect of early elections.

"I believe that the Labor Party will return to power in the next election, and I believe in my power to bring about security, peace and prosperity for Israel," Barak said.

The Labor Party's current leader, former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, was on a visit to the United States when Barak made his announcement.

Peres offered little reaction, saying that he would make his own announcement "in due time."

Peres said Barak had telephoned him in the United States to inform him of his decision prior to the news conference.

Others in the party criticized Barak for making the announcement while Peres was abroad.

Political commentators noted a similarity between Barak's tactics and those of Netanyahu, who announced his bid for the leadership of Likud in 1992, soon after that party's defeat in the election that year.

Barak, at his news conference, made it clear that he would run against Peres for the party leadership if Peres failed to step down by June.

Peres, who lost to Netanyahu in the May 29 general elections, has not said whether he intends to remain party leader.

Other hopefuls for the party leadership, among them former Interior Minister Haim Ramon, offered no immediate comment on Barak's announcement.

"I don't think there will be a rivalry with Peres," Barak said at the news conference. As for Ramon, Barak described him as "one of the important people in our party," apparently signaling that a deal was possible.

Other Labor figures considering running for the leadership include former Health Minister Ephraim Sneh and Shlomo Ben-Ami, a first term Knesset member who is a leading historian and former ambassador to Spain. □

Netanyahu defends policies in his meeting with Clinton

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Faced with mounting pressure from the United States to redeploy Israeli troops from most of Hebron, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu went on the offensive to defend his government's policies in a whirlwind visit here.

At the same time, Netanyahu sought to focus attention on finding a formula to resume talks with Syria during his second visit to Washington since taking office in June.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher teamed up with President Clinton to deliver the Israeli premier a direct message that the United States wants to see a quick resolution to the long-delayed turnover of most of the West Bank city to the Palestinians. The United States also hopes to prod Netanyahu to issue more work permits to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

Netanyahu's meetings with Clinton and Christopher on Monday coincided with the resumption of talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on implementing the self-rule accords, including the Hebron redeployment.

The redeployment, originally scheduled for late March, was postponed indefinitely by the previous Labor government after a series of Hamas suicide bombings in Israel. Palestinians have looked to implementation of the redeployment as a test of goodwill by the Netanyahu government regarding the peace process.

Netanyahu's visit here also came on the heels of an Israeli announcement that additional work permits would be issued, bringing the total number of Palestinians working in Israel to 50,000, as part of a further easing of the closure imposed on the territories after the first suicide bombing earlier this year.

Netanyahu spent about 12 hours in Washington during which he met with Secretary of Defense William Perry, Christopher and Clinton. "Security in Hebron is not only an Israeli interest but it is a Palestinian interest," Netanyahu told Christopher. Netanyahu told reporters that he discussed with the Americans the "ongoing negotiations with the Palestinians and what we hope will be a resumption with the Syrians."

Concerns about backlash

In an effort to deflect reports that the United States was pressing his government to act in Hebron, Netanyahu told Israeli reporters, "I don't feel any pressure. I don't think there will be pressure."

The U.S. administration has been accused by Arab states recently of taking a softer line with the Netanyahu government for fear of concerns about a backlash at the polls in November.

Clinton vigorously denied that there had been any shift in his administration's posture. "That's wrong," Clinton said, responding to reporters' questions in the Oval Office before he met with the Israeli leader. "Different governments may have different ways of pursuing the peace process," but the only way to achieve lasting peace "is to work with the elected government."

After meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy in London over the weekend, Christopher called on Israel to take new "concrete steps" to advance Middle East peace.

As Netanyahu made the rounds in Washington, the State Department sought to keep up the pressure over Hebron. "It's very important to meet your commitments. It's important to take actions," said State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns.

U.S. officials speaking on the condition that their

names not be used said Netanyahu touted his government's recent moves, including his own meeting last week with Arafat, and highlighted that Israeli and Palestinian teams of negotiators resumed face-to-face meetings this week for the first time since his May election.

In his meetings here, the Israeli premier focused much of his attention on the stalled talks with Damascus. U.S. officials have tried in vain to secure a formula to resume talks between Israel and Syria that Israel suspended in early March after Damascus failed to condemn the suicide bombings.

After meeting for more than an hour with Clinton, Netanyahu told reporters that the United States is putting forth a new proposal to restart Israeli-Syrian peace talks.

"If President [Hafez] Assad is interested in negotiating peace, then I'm sure a forum can be found," said Netanyahu. It is "crucial" for neither Israel nor Syria to try to "nail the other side to fixed positions to enter the negotiations."

Netanyahu shored up the invitation to the Oval Office when he met with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat under heavy pressure from U.S. officials.

In his second visit here since taking office in June, Netanyahu maintained a low profile and had little contact with the media.

When asked whether he maintained his insistence that the peace process remain a two-way street, he said, "Sure, everybody knows that already."

Netanyahu came to the United States to deliver in New York one of the keynote addresses to the 40th anniversary celebration of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Vice President Al Gore and Republican vice presidential nominee Jack Kemp were also scheduled to address the fund-raising gala.

During his brief visit to New York, Netanyahu was also scheduled to visit the Queens grave of the Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson. □

Report says Swiss bank held proceeds from 'Mein Kampf'

By Jenni Frazer

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON (JTA) — Adolf Hitler deposited the royalties from his book "Mein Kampf" into secret Swiss bank accounts, newly declassified U.S. intelligence documents showed.

The documents, revealed last week, show that a German official handled Hitler's accounts at Bern's Union Bank of Switzerland, one of the country's largest.

The discovery of the "Hitler accounts" by the World Jewish Congress was seen as underlining the importance of Switzerland as a banking haven for the Nazis. World Jewish Congress researchers recently have been examining World War II documents in the U.S. National Archives as part of an ongoing effort to locate the assets of Holocaust victims.

A six-member commission set up by the World Jewish Restitution Organization, the World Jewish Congress and the Swiss Bankers Association is now seeking to determine the whereabouts of money deposited in Switzerland by Jews during the World War II era.

Max Ammann, described in the documents as "a close collaborator of Hitler," oversaw the accounts. In 1925, Ammann published "Mein Kampf," Hitler's notorious manifesto that spells out Germany's need to rearm, suppress communism and exterminate the Jews.

The authors of the October 1944 intelligence reports believed that the Swiss bank held "foreign exchange revenues of the Nazi Party abroad" in addition to foreign exchange revenues from Hitler's book. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD Largest synagogue in Europe reopens in Hungarian capital

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST (JTA) — A former Israeli prime minister, the president of Hungary and a host of foreign dignitaries joined thousands of Jews here last week for the reopening of Europe's largest synagogue.

"This is the symbol of the rebirth of Hungarian Jewry," said Peter Feldmayer, the president of Hungary's 80,000-member Jewish community.

The Sept. 5 reopening of the Dohany Street Synagogue came days before another reinauguration — of Bulgaria's Sofia Synagogue, the largest in that country and one of Europe's most ornate.

The 137-year-old Dohany Street Synagogue is also renowned for its architectural beauty. The impressive Moorish-style building with its two high towers is one of Budapest's landmarks.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, who conveyed the greetings of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, spoke of "this magnificent building, which could tell stories of so much tears, fear and sorrow."

Of Hungary's prewar Jewish community of 800,000, some 600,000 perished in the Holocaust. The Jewish ghetto was built around the Dohany Street Synagogue during World War II. The synagogue, which served as a wartime shelter for thousands of Jews, was hit by 27 bombs. After the war, a mass grave with more than 2,000 Jewish victims was found in the synagogue's courtyard.

"We have to remember to cherish the memory of Raoul Wallenberg, who saved tens of thousands of Jews," Shamir said, referring to the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews from the death camps. After the war, Wallenberg was arrested by the Soviets and disappeared into their prison system.

'At home within borders'

"We also have to pay homage to all those Hungarians who saved Jewish lives, risking their own lives," the former Israeli leader added. He also mentioned the many Hungarian Jews who contributed to building the State of Israel, including Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism. The synagogue was built on the site of his birthplace.

The synagogue, which seats about 3,000, required some \$10 million in restorations because of its age.

The Hungarian government contributed about \$8 million to repairing the synagogue, whose construction was begun in 1854 and completed in 1859.

The Jewish community in Hungary and abroad is contributing some \$2 million toward the renovations, which are expected to be completed next year.

In his speech, Hungarian President Arpad Goncz proclaimed his country's tolerance, saying, "Today, the Jewish community can feel at home within the borders of this country."

Among the 7,000 people attending the reinauguration was Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), a Budapest native. The only Holocaust survivor elected to Congress, he became a Bar Mitzvah in the synagogue in 1941. He was one of the thousands of Hungarian Jews rescued by Wallenberg's efforts. The synagogue's reopening reflected "the commitment of the Hungarian government and Hungarian people to religious freedom and the respect for all religions," Lantos said after the ceremony.

"We cannot undo the past, we cannot revive the martyrs who lost their lives because of their religion," he added. "But we can rededicate ourselves to the concept of religious freedom."

Also attending the ceremony were Hungarian

Cabinet ministers, members of the diplomatic corps and a representative of the Vatican.

In Bulgaria on Sunday, more than 1,000 Jews gathered for the reopening of the Sofia Synagogue. The speaker of the Knesset, Dan Tichon, spoke at the ceremony along with Bulgarian President Zhelyu Zhelev.

"The dark days of Nazism did not pass through this land," Tichon said. "We, the Jews, will not forget that we were saved by the Bulgarian people, who prevented the sending of thousands of Jews to the gas chambers."

Although it had a military alliance with Germany, the wartime government of Bulgaria refused to hand over its 50,000 Jews to the Nazis in 1943. Most of Bulgaria's Jews left for Israel after the war.

First inaugurated in 1909, the copper-domed, Moorish-style Sofia Synagogue was hit by a bomb during World War II. Restoration was forbidden by the country's Communist government until its fall in 1989. The restoration, which has not yet been completed, has so far cost nearly \$400,000, most of it contributed by the international Jewish community. For years, services were held in a small room adjoining the synagogue's main hall.

The reinauguration ceremony included the blowing of the shofar and the replacement of Torah scrolls in the synagogue's 15-foot-tall, gilded marble ark. □

Labor Party Knesset members meet Hussein at Orient House

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A small group of Labor Party members of the Knesset Interior Committee met this week at Orient House with Faisal Hussein and other Palestinian officials.

The group, acting in defiance of government policy, made the visit to the Palestinian Authority's de facto headquarters in eastern Jerusalem to hear about the problems of Palestinians living in the Holy City.

Committee Chairman Saleh Tareef organized the visit and was accompanied by fellow Labor Party Knesset members Rafi Elul and Micha Goldman.

Committee members from the Likud Party and its coalition partners boycotted the visit.

Orient House has been at the center of a simmering dispute, particularly when Palestinian officials host foreign dignitaries there. Israeli leaders want to prevent the Palestinians from gaining an official foothold in Jerusalem, which Israel regards as its eternal, indivisible capital.

Israel has repeatedly called on the Palestinian Authority not to conduct any activities at Orient House that are related to its self-rule government, which is confined to operating in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The committee members' visit to Orient House came amid Israeli diplomatic efforts to prevent a group of European foreign ministers from meeting Palestinian officials there.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy conveyed this message to his Irish counterpart, Dick Spring, during a visit last week to Dublin. Levy told Spring that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had reached an agreement with Israel not to hold a meeting later this year at Orient House with a European Union "troika" of foreign ministers from Italy, Holland and Ireland.

At a meeting during the weekend in Ireland of the 15 E.U. foreign ministers, Spring, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the organization, confirmed his earlier decision to meet at Orient House. But he added that he would confirm whether Arafat had reached an agreement with Israel to hold the meeting elsewhere. □

(JTA correspondent Joseph Kopel in Brussels contributed to this report.)