



NEWS AT A GLANCE

King Hussein's intervention may bring Hebron deal closer

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — There were indications this week that Israel and the Palestinian Authority might reach an eleventh-hour agreement for turning over most of Hebron to Palestinian self-rule.

On Sunday, Jordan's King Hussein joined efforts to break the impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

After meeting with Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat in the Gaza Strip, Hussein flew to Israel to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Hussein brought with him to Israel a compromise proposal regarding further Israeli redeployments in rural areas of the West Bank, the issue that has held up an agreement.

Palestinian sources said that during the Hussein-Arafat talks the Palestinians agreed to an American proposal that the further redeployments be concluded in 1998.

The sources said that if Israel also agreed to the timetable, a Hebron accord could be initialed Monday.

The sources said the agreement would also include a letter of commitment from the Palestinians to fight terror and disarm the fundamentalist Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups.

Jordanian Information Minister Marwan Muashar described the Hussein-Arafat meeting as "very successful."

He added that during the meeting in Gaza, Hussein and Arafat spoke by phone with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Netanyahu.

After it was announced that Hussein was traveling to Tel Aviv to meet with Netanyahu, an American official said U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross had canceled earlier plans to leave the region Sunday night.

After weekend talks in Cairo, Ross said he had done his best to help the sides conclude an agreement.

He and other officials conceded that agreement had been reached on the redeployment of Israeli troops from most of Hebron, but that differences still remained on a timetable for further Israeli redeployments in rural parts of the West Bank.

Ross had planned to return to Washington after his talks Saturday with Mubarak produced no breakthrough. Ross did not meet with Arafat, who was also in Cairo at the time.

A meeting Ross held later Saturday with Netanyahu also failed to produce an agreement.

On Saturday night, the Palestinian Authority issued a statement saying that the "peace talks have hit a deadlock."

Under the terms of the 1995 Interim Agreement, Israel was to begin the first of the three redeployments within six months after the inauguration of the Palestinian legislative council last March.

Netanyahu said he would agree to a first pullback within weeks of the implementation of the Hebron agreement. He added that the final redeployment would be completed by September 1999.

Last week, Ross proposed a compromise date of mid-1998, but Arafat rejected the proposal.

Hussein's second trip to autonomous areas

Palestinian Authority officials said they had expected the United States to do more to press Israel into implementing the Interim Agreement.

The Jordanian monarch, accompanied by several government ministers, flew by helicopter to Gaza.

The two helicopters landed near Arafat's offices, after Israel refused permission for them to touch down at the new Palestinian Authority airport near Rafah in southern Gaza. Israel has not yet agreed to the opening of the airport.

Sunday's visit marked the second time Hussein traveled to the autonomous areas to meet with Arafat. In October, he and the Palestinian leader met in the West Bank town of Jericho. His meeting with Netanyahu

■ Swiss Interior Minister Ruth Dreifuss said her country had a fear of facing its wartime role and should work to bring relief to those who had suffered in the Holocaust. But the minister, who is Jewish, reiterated Swiss President Arnold Koller's statement that the government would not apologize for remarks made by his predecessor, Jean-Pascal Delamuraz, who said Jewish calls for Swiss restitution to Holocaust victims amounted to "blackmail."

■ The World Jewish Congress and U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) released newly uncovered documents showing that the Swiss laundered Nazi gold through Spain and Portugal to be converted into cash for use by the Nazis. D'Amato said that for the first time in the ongoing probe into the Swiss-Nazi relationship, documents confirm that the Swiss were actively and directly involved in shipping gold for the Nazis.

■ Florida's Department of Transportation abandoned a plan to erect crosses as memorial markers at fatal car accident sites on state highways. [Page 3]

■ Israeli lawyer Roni Bar-On decided not to take the position of attorney general. [Page 2]

■ Canadian Jewish leaders urged their government to pursue some 300 German veterans of World War II who currently live in Canada and are receiving pensions from the German government. Canadian authorities have come under criticism for what Jewish leaders say is a lack of aggressiveness in investigating suspected war criminals. [Page 3]

■ Israel's High Court of Justice asked Transportation Minister Yitzhak Levy to consider opening a Jerusalem road to traffic in exchange for closing another thoroughfare during prayer times on Shabbat. [Page 2]

■ Egypt's ambassador to Israel, Mohammed Basiouny, warned that the peace treaty between the two countries could collapse if Israel did not reach accords with other Arab nations, including Syria.

marked the first time Hussein traveled to Israel in the context of the peace negotiations, and came barely three weeks after Foreign Minister David Levy encountered a cold welcome on his first official visit to Amman.

In Hebron, meanwhile, two firebombs were thrown at an Israeli car traveling on the road between the settlement of Kiryat Arba and the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

No one was injured and there was no damage.

Also Sunday, Jewish settlers prepared to inaugurate a new apartment building, Beit Fink, near the Avraham Aveinu complex in Hebron's Jewish quarter.

Representatives of Hebron's Jewish community said the building was purchased during the term of the previous Labor government. □

Attorney-general appointee steps down amid controversy

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli lawyer Roni Bar-On, whose appointment as attorney general raised hackles in political and legal circles, has decided not to take the position.

Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi said Sunday night that Bar-On decided to step down because of the "organized media and political" attack against him.

Earlier in the day, the swearing-in of the veteran Likud activist as Israel's next attorney general was delayed to give the High Court of Justice time to consider a petition submitted by Labor Knesset member Ophir Pines regarding the nomination of the controversial appointee.

Hanegbi said he and the prime minister had urged Bar-On to stay in the position, at least until the High Court ruled on the petition against his appointment.

Edna Arbel, state prosecutor, will serve as acting attorney general, Hanegbi said.

The appointment of Bar-On, a close associate of Hanegbi's, had drawn sharp criticism from coalition and opposition members. The Cabinet approved his appointment last Friday, with 12 ministers voting in favor, 5 abstaining and one opposing.

Science Minister Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, who voted against Bar-On, was quoted as telling the Cabinet, "A political party activist cannot be appointed as attorney general. This position must be filled by an outstanding jurist."

Sharp criticism of the appointment also emerged from legal circles.

"One would expect the person chosen to have accumulated for himself a record of total dedication to the rule of law — and not allegiance to his patrons," a district court judge told the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

"It's too bad the government decided to abandon this long-held tradition of choosing a legal professional qualified to preside over the Supreme Court."

Coalition and opposition members suggested that Bar-On would serve as a lackey for Hanegbi, who would wield the real influence over the attorney general's decisions.

Hanegbi rejected the criticisms, saying that Bar-On is "a person with the highest amount of integrity."

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai also defended the appointment, saying that it was "approved by the government in a totally legitimate manner."

"Believe me, we discussed many of the reservations we are now hearing in the public — and ultimately, decided he was the best choice," Mordechai told a Tel Aviv news conference.

Bar-On, 48, is primarily known for his work in criminal law.

After brief stints working for the state prosecutor

and Jerusalem district prosecutor in the early 1970s, he opened a private practice in 1975.

He was also very active in Likud circles. He and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert are close associates.

Bar-On was slated to replace Michael Ben-Yair, who announced his resignation in December.

Ben-Yair, who is moving to the private sector, is said to have resigned because Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not trust him.

One of Ben-Yair's last recommendations was to open a criminal investigation into former Justice Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman.

Ne'eman resigned as justice minister last year after police launched an investigation after he allegedly obstructed court proceedings relating to the case of Shas Knesset member Aryeh Deri.

After stepping down, Ne'eman was replaced by Hanegbi.

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. □

Transportation minister weighs compromise on Shabbat travel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's High Court of Justice has asked the nation's transportation minister to consider a compromise on Shabbat travel on a road that cuts through religious neighborhoods here.

An expanded panel of seven justices Sunday suggested closing Bar Ilan Street during prayer times on the Sabbath. In exchange, the court said, another street would be open to link the main entrance to the city with the northern neighborhoods.

Transportation Minister Yitzhak Levy is scheduled to give his decision in 10 days. Until then, the street will remain open on Shabbat.

Shabbat traffic on Bar Ilan has led to a series of often-violent demonstrations. Fervently Orthodox Jews want the street closed for the Sabbath; secular Israelis view its closure as an infringement on their freedoms.

The justices offered the proposal after secular groups complained that Levy would only partially meet the recommendations of a public committee formed to review the matter. The committee had been created at the recommendation of the court.

Petitioner Lior Horev said Levy would close Bar Ilan during Sabbath prayer times, as the committee had recommended.

But, according to Horev, Levy would not fulfill the committee's other stipulation: that public transportation be provided on the Sabbath.

Horev said he and other secular petitioners accepted the justices' recommendation in principle. But they have additional conditions, Horev said.

"We want to know that no other roads [in the capital] will be closed in the future," Horev told Israel Radio.

Horev also said the petitioners wanted assurances that no further violence would result.

Over the weekend, some 150 fervently Orthodox Jews protested Sabbath travel. Two men were detained after being accused of damaging a police van.

Representatives of the fervently Orthodox community said they would not accept the court's compromise.

"We will not agree to any Sabbath violations, on any road," Yehuda Meshi Zahav told Israel Radio. "There is no [fervently Orthodox] Jew who will agree to open one road in exchange for closing another one." □

Florida scraps plan to erect crosses at car accident sites

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In response to the Florida Jewish community's complaints of insensitivity, the state's Department of Transportation has scrapped plans to use a cross as its official roadside memorial marker.

In a state that is home to some of the most treacherous roads in the country, the transportation department decided last year to begin clearing away some of the shrines erected at the sites of traffic fatalities.

Saying that some of the elaborate homemade markers were potential road hazards, Florida decided to begin using a cross, similar to a Red Cross emblem, as a universal memorial symbol.

Jewish groups charged that the symbol too closely resembled the Christian cross and urged the state to either adopt a non-sectarian symbol or be prepared to honor requests from people of different faiths.

"We felt this policy trampled on the rights of all non-Christians, that it offended many who are Christian and don't believe the state should be in the memorial business, and that it violated the spirit and possibly the letter of the First Amendment," said Jack Lipsey, president of the American Jewish Committee's South Central Florida region.

Under the policy, implemented Jan. 1 and dropped last week, Jewish families would have been barred from erecting Stars of David at accident sites in memory of loved ones.

Florida abandoned the policy in the face of objections from Jewish and civil liberties organizations. There were also threats of a lawsuit.

"It was never our intention to offend anyone with our new policy," Ben Watts, Florida's secretary of transportation, said in a statement. "We simply want to make motorists more aware of highway safety when they drive by the memorial markers."

Watts said the department would change the markers "since some Floridians strongly believe that the department's markers resemble a cross rather than an internationally recognized safety symbol as we intended it to be."

The department will now attempt to design a new memorial marker, Watts said. Proposals include a simple wooden post with room for a plaque.

Jack Karako, southeast regional director of the American Jewish Congress, said he still questions whether the state should be in the business of using taxpayer money to erect highway memorials.

He said, however, that as long as no one has any objection, "certainly a non-denominational marker is something that's probably a good compromise that will not offend anyone else." □

Canadian Jews urge pursuit of German veterans in Canada

By Bram Eisenthal

MONTREAL (JTA) — Canadian Jewish leaders have reacted with indignation to reports that some 300 German veterans of World War II who now reside in Canada are receiving pensions from the German government.

"Remember these people wore the uniform of, or collaborated with, the most evil regime in humanity which sponsored mass murder and genocide," said Eric Vernon, a senior Canadian Jewish Congress official in Ottawa. "These people ought not be rewarded for that service, even 50 years later."

Some 1,800 German veterans in Canada have been receiving the equivalent of \$6,000 a year since the war ended — a total of more than \$10 million annually, according to a report last month in the Times of London.

Hundreds of German veterans in the United States were reported to be receiving the pensions as well.

But the German government last month denied a request by the World Jewish Congress to reveal their names.

German Embassy officials in Ottawa declined to comment.

A senior Canadian Justice Department official acknowledged in an interview late last week that he had received a list of German pensioners in Canada, but said he did not have further details about their wartime records.

"The list was a list of people who received pensions, not one of war criminals," said Paul Vickery, senior counsel for the department's war crimes division. "We are not in the business of pursuing German soldiers, but rather war criminals from the World War II era."

Vickery denied a Canadian news report that he would not use information contained in the list of pensioners to pursue alleged war criminals.

"I did not say we would not use the list under any circumstances," Vickery said.

Canadian authorities have come under criticism for what Jewish leaders here say is a lack of aggressiveness in investigating and prosecuting suspected war criminals.

"They just don't give a damn at the Canadian government level," said Bernie Farber, the CJC's national director of community relations. In government circles, Farber added, there is "a lack of the fire in the belly we need from them in tracking these murderers down."

An American private investigator last month handed over to Canadian authorities taped interviews he secretly made with 58 former Nazis who reside in Canada. Steven Rambam said at the time that seven of those he interviewed fully confessed that they had murdered people during the Holocaust.

Vickery last week said in an interview that one of the tapes he personally reviewed "contains a series of denials of involvement" in war crimes. "The balance of the tapes are being reviewed. We are not ignoring information brought to us by Mr. Rambam or anyone else."

Rambam has threatened to make public the names of those he interviewed if Canada's Justice Department does not make use of the information by the end of February. □

Peres makes unusual visit to Likud Party headquarters

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Opposition leader Shimon Peres this week received a warm welcome in unlikely surroundings — Likud Party headquarters.

The former prime minister was invited by Likud Knesset member Uzi Landau to participate in a discussion Sunday on the law for the direct election of the prime minister.

Under the new law, the prime minister is directly elected in general elections.

Israelis cast separate ballots for political parties in the Knesset.

Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu narrowly defeated Peres in the elections in May.

The Labor Party chairman shrugged off any special significance for the visit to the Likud headquarters on Tel Aviv's King George Street.

"It's part of a democratic process," Peres told reporters. □

Author of controversial book on wartime Germany honored

By Daniel Dagan

BONN (JTA) — The Bonn-based Journal for German and International Politics has decided to award author Daniel Goldhagen its annual Democracy Prize.

In a statement, the journal said Goldhagen, more than any other scholar, stirred the conscience of the German public with his book "Hitler's Willing Executioners."

In August, the book sold out its first German edition of 40,000 copies in less than a week and prompted a flurry of debate.

For many Jews in Germany, the book's value lies in that it tells non-Jewish Germans that the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers and was not perpetrated solely by SS officials in the death camps.

They point to Goldhagen's suggestion that the persecution began in schools, at the workplace, in stores, at every street corner — that it was committed by millions of "simple" Germans from every walk of life.

Goldhagen, whose book has been on Germany's bestseller list for months, told the editors of the journal, "When I wrote my book I believed it was only about how to understand and think about the past.

"More and more, I have come to realize that the book is also about the present and the future."

Meanwhile, the public debate continues about Goldhagen's thesis, though with less intensity than when the book was first published here last year.

Frank Schirmacher, co-publisher of the daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, wrote, "Goldhagen is building a new mythology around the Holocaust. He traces it back to the Faustian depths of German consciousness and, by doing so, prevents it from being dealt with on a rational basis.

"If one is to believe the arguments in this book, the advance of the Germans into the 21st century is something to be observed with skepticism and fear."

The Munich-based Sueddeutsche Zeitung ran an article saying, "The lasting disgrace is not just the many who were Hitler's willing executioners, but also the millions who looked away when it would still have been possible to look.

"It is this moral indifference that nearly all Germans were guilty of at that time — which does not by any means suggest, as Goldhagen asserts, that the Holocaust was a national project."

Rudolf Augstein, founder and publisher of Der Spiegel, wrote in the Hamburg-based weekly: "One should be allowed to ask whether there is anything new to be gained from the book. The answer would be very little, one could even say next to nothing.

"But the simple fact that the history of the Holocaust is being gone into again can only be good, and will certainly cause a stir. If Goldhagen manages this, he will have achieved quite a lot." □

Germany blasts U.S. actors for supporting Scientology

By Daniel Dagan

BONN (JTA) — German leaders have reacted angrily to an advertisement in which some of Hollywood's top stars equated Germany's treatment of members of the Church of Scientology with the persecution of the Jews during the Holocaust.

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl said the people who signed the ad did not deserve a reply because they knew nothing about Germany "and they don't want to

know, either; otherwise, they would not have lent their names to this campaign."

The prime minister of the German state of Bavaria, Edmund Stoiber, described the ad that appeared last week in the Paris-based International Herald Tribune as a smear campaign.

Leaders of the German Jewish community also criticized the ad, saying that it was an insult to the Jewish victims of the Nazis.

Among the 34 signers of the ad were actors Dustin Hoffman and Goldie Hawn, director Oliver Stone, author Mario Puzo and talk show host Larry King.

German Scientology leader Heber Jentzsch responded to Kohl's remarks by saying that the chancellor should think twice about his criticism in view of the fact that the "big majority" of those who signed the ad were Jews.

The German government maintains that Scientology is primarily a money-making organization and that its leaders seek world domination.

A German court ruled last year that the Church of Scientology misrepresented itself as a religion in order to pursue its fund-raising activities.

In December, German leaders said they would keep people linked to Scientology out of certain public jobs, such as teaching, and decided to create a central office to oversee a campaign against the organization.

The state of Bavaria recently decided to use its intelligence service to scrutinize the activities of the Church of Scientology.

"This organized oppression," the ad stated, sounds like "the Germany of 1936 rather than 1996."

"Extremists of your party should not be permitted to believe that the rest of the world will look the other way. Not this time."

The ad prompted widespread criticism in the German press.

The Berlin-based daily Die Welt referred to Scientology as "a psycho group."

The daily General-Anzeiger of Bonn called the ad "a libelous document" and said the "big names" who signed it did not guarantee that they had any insight into complicated issues. □

French teacher accused of Holocaust denial activities

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — A French high school teacher has been suspended after being accused of engaging in Holocaust denial.

Vincent Reynouard, 27, who teaches math in the Normandy town of Honfleur, was suspected of using the school computer to file documents denying the Holocaust and using the fax machine to send the writings to his followers. He was also accused of giving his students statistical equations regarding the rate of mortality in Nazi concentration camps, the daily newspaper Liberation reported.

Reynouard denies any wrongdoing and claims that he is the victim of a witch hunt.

According to Liberation, the public prosecutor took up the case after Reynouard's suspension last month.

If charged and found guilty of contesting the truth of historical crimes against humanity, he faces up to one year imprisonment and a \$60,000 fine.

This was not the first time the instructor was accused of denying the Holocaust. In 1991, he was convicted of distributing Holocaust-denial literature, but the local school board decided to give him a second chance and allowed him to continue teaching. □