

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli Knesset members from across the political spectrum discussed the possibility of a change in the country's policy in Lebanon. They talked about a unilateral troop withdrawal from the southern Lebanon security zone. [Page 3]

■ Israel plans to release 23 Palestinian female prisoners, including some convicted of murder, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told his Cabinet. The premier also said he would ask that Jewish prisoners convicted of murdering Arabs be released.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat met at the Israel-Gaza border to discuss the next steps in the peace process. The two leaders agreed to have committees resolve outstanding issues stemming from last month's accords on an Israeli pullback in Hebron.

■ Jordan's King Hussein contacted Israeli air controllers to convey his condolences about the 73 Israeli soldiers and crew who died in last week's collision of two military helicopters. The monarch spoke as he flew over Israel en route to London.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will be questioned in connection with an alleged deal surrounding the short-lived appointment of lawyer Roni Bar-On as attorney general, the premier's office said. The appointment had allegedly hinged on the Shas faction's support of the Hebron agreement.

■ Some 5,000 members of Swiss churches and Christian groups gathered in Bern, carrying banners condemning anti-Semitism and urging quick compensation for Holocaust victims. Meanwhile, Swiss business leaders are ready to add to a \$70 million memorial fund being set up by the nation's three largest banks.

■ Twenty-five religious leaders, including representatives from the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform branches of Judaism, are urging the federal government to give equal attention in protecting the environment when it comes to economically depressed areas.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Many across Europe identify with revelations about Albright**

By Ruth E. Gruber

WARSAW (JTA) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is far from alone in discovering her Jewish origins as an adult.

A 50-year-old Jewish university professor who was born in Poland after World War II said, "When I was small, I went to Protestant church with my nanny.

"I liked very much going to church with her."

She, like thousands of other Jews in Eastern and Central Europe, grew up ignorant of her Jewish roots.

"My parents never said anything," she said in an interview. "It was something I guessed eventually, from things that the nanny would say. Only when I was grown up, did my mother start talking about it as if it was something I should know."

Last week, after conducting extensive research in Europe, the Washington Post revealed that at least three of Albright's grandparents were Jewish and that they, along with more than a dozen other relatives, died during the Holocaust.

The New York Times ran a follow-up story last Friday suggesting that she had been informed of her Jewish roots a few years ago.

But Albright, who was raised a Roman Catholic and is now an Episcopalian, told the Washington Post that she had not known about her Jewish ancestry before the newspaper confronted her with its findings about her past.

In Prague, Albright's first cousin, Dagmar Simova, said in an interview that it was entirely possible that Albright only learned of her background as a result of the Washington Post probe.

"It is possible that she didn't know" about her Jewishness until last week, said Simova, who lived with her cousin's family in England during the war.

The Holocaust "wasn't a topic we discussed," Simova said.

"We were strangers living in a strange land, and Madeleine was only a little girl," Simova added.

Whenever Albright first learned about her Jewish past, it seems clear that the news was broken to her only later in life.

"It is really a common occurrence in this part of the world," Stanislaw Krajewski, the Poland consultant for the American Jewish Committee, said in an interview.

Krajewski, born in 1950 and today an observant Jew, did not find out he was Jewish until he was well into his teens.

His parents, like the parents of the Jewish university professor, were Communists who had broken with Judaism long before he was born. They told him nothing of his family heritage.

Parents built a 'safer' neutral identity

Parents had numerous reasons for concealing their Jewish identity from their children in postwar Eastern and Central Europe.

Some wanted to slam the door on the tragic past and not involve their children in their own suffering.

Some wanted to build a "safer" neutral identity for their children in Communist countries where anti-Semitism lingered, religion in general was repressed and many Jewish topics were officially taboo.

"I know so many people who did not know they were Jewish," said the university professor.

"It's very common."

She remembered how she used to recite Catholic prayers with her grandfather, who died when she was 4.

"Later I learned that he had been in the Warsaw Ghetto. In retrospect, I think that with the Catholic prayers he was trying to teach me something for my safety — just in case. So many children were saved because they knew Catholic prayers."

Polish sociologist Pawel Spiewak recently described an "idle" Jewish identity that exists among many people, even today. They are people who

"don't want to be Jewish, they try to hide their Jewish roots," Spiewak said.

"They are afraid of attacks. The feeling of danger makes it difficult for some Jews to admit they are Jewish," he added.

The phenomenon was common throughout Eastern and Central Europe in the wake of the Holocaust.

In Czechoslovakia and Hungary, many Jews — like Albright's parents — were already highly assimilated or had converted to Christianity before World War II.

Albright's family fled Czechoslovakia in March 1939, days after Nazi forces occupied the country.

The family returned to Czechoslovakia after the war, but fled to the United States in 1948 after a Communist coup in Czechoslovakia.

"Some Jews went to the United States after the war because they wanted to be Jews under better circumstances," Hungarian sociologist Andras Kovacs said in an interview.

"Some went to the United States because they wanted to be non-Jews under better circumstances," he added.

"It was easier to hide in the U.S., far away from the country of origin.

"The U.S. provided a better field for those wanting to assimilate."

Kovacs has carried out extensive research in Hungary on Hungarian Jews and how they view their identity.

In the 1980s, he conducted interviews with 117 Hungarian Jews.

"Thirty-one interviewees found out from strangers and not their relatives or members of their families that they were Jews, or deduced the fact from certain indications," he wrote.

"Nine of the interviewees did not wish to tell their children that they were of Jewish origin, and 31 would only do so if the situation made it unavoidable or necessary."

The fall of communism in 1989 and 1990 changed attitudes in this regard.

New democratic governments instituted religious freedom for the first time in many decades, sparking a revival of Jewish communal life — and an explosion of people discovering, recovering or reclaiming their Jewish roots.

In Poland, "one of the most typical groups of people finding out they are Jews are people who were babies or small children during World War II," said Krajewski.

"Some are now learning of their ancestry from their elderly, adoptive parents who feel that they have to reveal this before they die."

Liberating for some, traumatic for others

No firm statistics exist on how many people have recently learned of their Jewish roots, but hundreds of people belong to a new organization, Hidden Children of the Holocaust, which brings together people who were hidden by non-Jews during the war.

"I found out six years ago from my mother that I am Jewish," said Uri Filipowicz, a leader of the newly formed Union of Polish Jewish Students.

"I don't want to leave Poland — but I don't want the fact that I'm Jewish to be just another empty word, so I decided to learn as much as I could and make this my road."

Learning suddenly of one's Jewish roots is liberating for some, mainly younger, people.

But it can also be traumatic, particularly for older individuals.

Kovacs wrote that some of the people he interviewed described "feelings of persecution, defenselessness and fear" in their first confrontations with their Jewish identity.

In some cases he documented, "the revelation of the secret was a great shock for the children and often led to the disintegration of the parental family."

In Poland, Krajewski and other members of the Jewish Forum, an association of Jewish professionals and businesspeople, last fall created an anonymous telephone hot line aimed at helping people go public with their Jewishness.

Recently, some support groups for these people have been organized.

Callers, he said, included "Jews of all ages" who had only recently discovered their heritage.

"Among callers," he said, "were people who, for example, said that they haven't told their spouse that they were Jewish, or that they only learned about their Jewish identity from their mother on her death bed." □

(JTA correspondent Randi Druzin in Prague contributed to this report.)

Italy considers establishing Holocaust remembrance day

By Ruth E. Gruber

MILAN, Italy (JTA) — Italian legislators are seeking to establish an annual Holocaust memorial day.

Spearheaded by writer Furio Colombo, a member of Parliament from the ruling left-wing Olive Tree Alliance, the motion proposed that Oct. 16 be designated a "Day of Memory."

On that date in 1943, the Nazis rounded up and deported more than 1,000 Roman Jews.

The motion, backed by some 200 members of Parliament, also calls for using the day to teach the Holocaust and the dangers of racial and religious persecution.

Such a memorial day, the motion said, would allow all Italians, and particularly young people, to recall "discrimination, racial hatred and the crime of persecution, as well as the behavior of those from all political sides who risked their lives and possessions to oppose them."

The parliamentary motion was presented Feb. 6, but Colombo announced his initiative earlier in the week during a keynote speech at an international conference in Milan.

The conference marked the opening of the newly renovated premises of the Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation.

The center is Italy's only institute dedicated to the documentation of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and racism.

The Italian government "considers that the defense of memory is an important thing for the future of Italy," Deputy Prime Minister Walter Veltrone told the conference. "We have an obligation to carry collective memory, a sense of history, to future generations."

Several hundred people attended the conference, which focused on the work of Jewish historical and cultural centers.

Representatives of research institutes in a number of countries described how more than half a century later, direct memory of the Holocaust is fading, but a renewed interest in Holocaust studies and research is alive.

The speakers included representatives from Yad Vashem, the Warsaw Jewish Historical Institute, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, the London-based Institute of Jewish Policy Research and the Center for Research on Anti-Semitism at Berlin Technical University. □

Knesset members discuss withdrawal from Lebanon*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The long-standing debate about Israel's military presence in southern Lebanon is being renewed.

In an effort to arrive at some consensus, conservative and liberal Knesset members joined former senior security members for a weekend meeting to discuss options for Israeli policy in Lebanon.

The options included calling for a unilateral Israeli troop withdrawal from the security zone not connected to a peace agreement with Syria or Lebanon, according to some of the meeting's participants.

The meeting came days after 73 Israeli soldiers and crew died in a crash of two helicopters that were transporting troops to southern Lebanon.

But Labor Knesset member Yossi Beilin, one of the meeting's organizers, stressed after the more than three-hour brainstorming session that it had been scheduled about a week prior to the Feb. 4 mid-air helicopter collision over northern Israel.

Israel has maintained troops in the 9-mile-wide security zone since 1985 to serve as a buffer for northern communities against attacks by Hezbollah and other groups.

But a number of politicians have long argued that the zone does not fulfill this defensive objective. At the same time, they add, the Israel Defense Force is sustaining mounting casualties in the ongoing hostilities with Hezbollah gunmen operating in southern Lebanon.

Seven IDF soldiers hurt

On Sunday, seven Israeli soldiers were wounded in the security zone in a clash with Hezbollah militants. In retaliation, Israeli jets attacked suspected Hezbollah targets.

More than 200 IDF soldiers have reportedly been killed since 1985 in southern Lebanon, which Israeli journalists have compared to the American quagmire in Vietnam.

Beilin, along with co-organizer Gideon Ezra, a Likud Knesset member and former deputy director of the Shin Bet, have previously called for an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. They maintain that the current strategy has not significantly improved security for Israel's northern settlements, which have come under repeated Hezbollah rocket assaults.

Last week, as Israel was burying the dead from the worst military air disaster in the country's history, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would continue the Israeli presence in Lebanon.

His public security minister, Avigdor Kahalani, recently drew sharp criticism for calling Israeli troops serving there "sitting ducks." Kahalani, a member of the Third Way Party, proposed a phased Israeli troop withdrawal on condition that some international force replace them in the security zone.

Other Knesset members who attended the gathering at Ezra's home included Yehuda Harel of the Third Way, Yitzhak Cohen of the fervently Orthodox Sephardi Shas Party and Michael Eitan of Likud.

Eitan and Beilin recently co-authored a position paper aimed at creating a broad national consensus for what Israel's negotiating stance should be in the upcoming final-status negotiations with the Palestinians.

Another participant in the weekend meeting was Yossi Ginossar, a former top official with Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service. He later said that the purpose of the meeting was to raise ideas, not necessarily to endorse one particular proposal.

"This was a forum for an exchange of information," he told Israel Radio.

Meretz Party leader Yossi Sarid said he supported the meeting's goals, though he did not participate.

Sarid, who opposes a unilateral Israeli pullback, has proposed stationing a pan-Arab force in southern Lebanon, including troops from Jordan, Egypt and Morocco.

"The Arab forces will be motivated to prove that they can do the job better than anyone else."

Uri Lubrani, the coordinator of Israeli activities in Lebanon, dismissed the proposal for a unilateral withdrawal.

"There is no alternative to allow us to withdraw unilaterally without political dialogue and security arrangements to ensure the security of northern settlements," he told Israel Radio.

A number of coalition and opposition members protested the meeting, saying that it was inappropriate to hold the discussion during the mourning period for last week's victims of the helicopter crash. □

Knesset leaders discard bill to bar Arabs from premiership*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A controversial proposal to bar Israeli Arabs from running for prime minister has been thrown out of the Knesset.

Knesset speaker Dan Tichon of the Likud and five of the seven deputy speakers ruled last week that the proposed bill would violate laws against racist legislation and therefore would not be brought before the plenum for a vote.

The two deputy speakers who voted in favor of presenting the bill were David Tal of Shas and Haim Dayan of Tsomet.

The initiative, which was sponsored by Gesher Knesset member Michael Kleiner, drew sharp protests from Arab Knesset members and others in the opposition.

"This is not a proposal appropriate for an enlightened country," Labor Knesset member Shlomo Ben-Ami told Israel Radio. "It is unlikely that an Arab would ever become prime minister, but the right to run and to vote in elections is a fundamental one."

In December, Azmi Beshara, an Israeli Arab Knesset member, declared his intention to run for prime minister in the next Israeli elections.

He admitted at the time that he had little chance of winning, but that his candidacy would advance the interests of Israel's Arab citizens.

Kleiner defended his bill, saying that it was logical that the Jewish state have a Jewish leader. □

Report: Assad OK after 2-week coma*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Syrian President Hafez Assad recently recovered from a two-week coma, a British newspaper reported this week.

The 66-year-old Assad apparently collapsed in December, went into a coma and gained consciousness last month after being treated by Russian doctors flown into Damascus, The Sunday Times reported.

At the time, Syrian officials had said Assad was hospitalized for prostate surgery.

In recent years, Assad has suffered from heart problems, diabetes and a rare form of leukemia.

His poor health has resulted in a campaign to groom his son Basher to be his successor. Basher's older brother, Basel, was killed in a car accident. □

Rosenbaum vows to fight as Brooklyn jury deliberates

By Adam Dickter
New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK (JTA) — Norman Rosenbaum has vowed to continue his battle for justice even if a jury acquits the two men charged with violating the civil rights of his brother Yankel, the Chasidic scholar who died in the 1991 Crown Heights riots.

Regardless of the outcome of the case, "we will go forward," Norman Rosenbaum said in an interview last week on the way to the federal courthouse in Brooklyn, where the jury began to deliberate after a three-week trial.

"This case only dealt with two people on the street, out of dozens who attacked and killed my brother," he also said.

In 1991, in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, a group of youths fatally stabbed Yankel Rosenbaum, 29, apparently to avenge the death hours earlier of Gavin Cato, a 7-year-old black boy who had been struck by a car driven by a Chasidic Jew.

Before he died, Rosenbaum identified Lemrick Nelson Jr. as one of his attackers. Nelson was acquitted by a state court in 1992 of killing Rosenbaum.

The jury must now decide whether Nelson and Charles Price, the other defendant in the case, violated Rosenbaum's civil rights — Price by inciting the crowd and Nelson by stabbing him.

In the waning days of the trial, the courtroom was packed with supporters of both sides. African Americans dressed in colorful Islamic garb and Chasidim sat next to each other.

The jury last week had some qualms about selecting a Jewish or black person as its foreperson, pointing to "possible sensitivities in the community," according to a note to the judge.

U.S. District Judge David Trager sent back a note to the jury saying, "No one is disqualified from serving as either a juror or foreperson because of race, religion or national origin."

The jury selected a Jewish woman as its foreperson.

'Jury has good cross-section'

Norman Rosenbaum, a lawyer who lives in Australia, seemed to agree with the judge.

"I believe the jury has a good cross-section in terms of race, gender and age," he said, adding that "the racial makeup should have no effect on justice."

"The reason the jury acquitted Lemrick Nelson the first time was because they failed in their duty as jurors," he said.

The civil rights trial, which has received international attention, seemed to proceed well for the prosecution at the outset, with one witness testifying that Nelson, while living in Georgia, admitted to the slaying.

But the outcome was in doubt after a setback during last week's closing arguments.

In a move reminiscent of O.J. Simpson trying on a glove before a courtroom, lawyers for Lemrick Nelson Jr., who is now 21 years old, had him try on a pair of baggy jeans that prosecutors say he was wearing Aug. 19, 1991, the first of three nights of racial unrest in Crown Heights.

The jeans fit loosely, and as Nelson approached the jury the pants slipped down to his knees.

Nelson's lawyers then argued that their client had been framed.

Rosenbaum, who stormed out of the courtroom at this time, lashed out at prosecutors for not objecting

strenuously enough to the defense's request to have Nelson try on the pants.

"The whole thing was a circus," Rosenbaum said.

In addition, the prosecution's case against Price seemed somewhat bleak after the judge suggested that he would set aside a guilty verdict unless prosecutors could place Price close to the scene of the killing. □

Academic conference begins interfaith dialogue in Russia

By Lev Krichevsky

ST. PETERSBURG (JTA) — Jewish leaders are voicing appreciation for a conference that was viewed by many here as the first step since the fall of communism toward establishing ties between Jews and the Russian Orthodox Church.

Interfaith dialogue is especially important at a time when Russian nationalists are pushing for a return to the Orthodox Christian values of czarist Russia to fill the ideological void left by the collapse of communism.

A clarification of what Judaism stands for is also important, given the traditional anti-Semitism of some of the Orthodox Church's clergy.

Dozens of Jewish leaders, church officials and Russian and foreign intellectuals attended the academic conference, recently held here with the goal of acquainting the Russian church with Judaism. The meeting, organized by the St. Petersburg School of Religion and Philosophy in cooperation with a number of local and international institutions, also sought to familiarize Western Christians and Jews with the difficulties faced by the Orthodox Church during the Communist era.

Among those supporting the conference was Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg, a leading figure in the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church, to which most Russians belong.

The Jewish community was pleased that Christian groups had taken the initiative to hold the conference.

St. Petersburg Chief Rabbi Menachem Mendel Pevzner, who described Jewish relations with the Russian Orthodox Church as "very formal," said the conference was an encouraging start.

"We should be listening today to what [Orthodox Christians] have to say about us," he said.

But some Jewish leaders said that interfaith dialogue in Russia still has a long way to go.

"The Russian church, unlike Christian churches in the West, has not yet expressed its stand on Jews and Judaism, nor its understanding of the importance of such dialogue," said Ilya Dvorkin, head of the St. Petersburg Jewish University.

He referred to the opening session of the conference, during which an Orthodox priest held a Christian prayer service. "I think it was a slap in the face of the rabbi and religious Jews who attended the conference," Dvorkin said. □

Russia to name new Israeli envoy

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russia's next ambassador to Israel will likely be Mikhail Bogdanov, Russian media reported.

Bogdanov, whose appointment is to take place soon, would replace Alexander Bovin.

Bogdanov, 44, is a career diplomat. The appointment would be his first ambassadorship. He has worked with Russian diplomatic missions in Syria and Lebanon.

Bovin, a former journalist, was appointed Soviet ambassador to Israel in October 1991. □