



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Palestinian officials said they might petition Israel's High Court against Israeli orders to close four offices in eastern Jerusalem with alleged links to the Palestinian Authority.** Israeli police have given the organizations until Sunday to close. [Page 2]

■ **The Israeli Cabinet engaged in a marathon session as Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu sought his ministers' approval for the first of three further Israeli redeployments in the West Bank.** The first phase reportedly would be about 10 percent of the territory in the West Bank, including lands defined as Area C, which are under sole Israeli control.

■ **The Anti-Defamation League released a report on the "disturbing and dangerous" rise of anti-Semitism in the Egyptian press.** The study, which includes dozens of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel editorial cartoons, comes on the eve of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's visit to Washington for an Oval Office meeting with President Clinton.

■ **The World Jewish Congress and the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists called on a New York law firm to contribute fees earned from its representation of Credit Suisse to the Holocaust memorial fund set up by Swiss banks.** Robert Rifkind, a senior partner at Cravath, Swaine & Moore and the president of the American Jewish Committee, did not rule out the idea, but said he was "not prepared to prejudge the consideration."

■ **The Council of Jewish Federations and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society urged the White House and Congress to provide the Immigration and Naturalization Service with enough resources to ensure both that "its integrity is preserved" and that "applicants in compliance with the requirements do not have to wait any longer than absolutely necessary to naturalize."** The statement came as the INS was being scrutinized for naturalizing tens of thousands of immigrants without proper background checks in an effort to deal with a backlog of applicants.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Up close and personal: Visitors witness conflict over Har Homa

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A delegation of American Jewish leaders this week ran headlong into the conflict over Israeli plans for Jewish construction in eastern Jerusalem.

Members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, here on their annual mission, stopped to visit Har Homa and to hear Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert describe plans to build thousands of housing units.

But the visit Wednesday was interrupted by the shouts of two Arab Knesset members — Taleb Alsana and Abdel Malek Dahamshe — who accused Olmert of stealing property belonging to Palestinians. In front of several camera crews, Dahamshe shouted, "This is Palestinian land. The Israelis have already confiscated 80,000 dunams of Arab land by force."

Olmert countered that three-quarters of the land designated for the Har Homa building site had been expropriated from Jews.

Olmert also told the group that the ground-breaking, originally set to begin earlier this week, had been delayed for "technical reasons," and not because the government had caved in to international pressure.

The incident did little to ease the concerns of those conference delegates who questioned Israel's timing on the Har Homa issue.

The conference late last week issued a statement announcing the "unanimous support" of its 53 member-organizations for Israel's "unrestricted right to build within the municipality of Jerusalem." It stopped just short of specifically endorsing the Har Homa construction.

That relative restraint reflected a private international conference call in which some members said that even though they support Israel's right in principle to build anywhere within its borders, they take issue with the timing. They say they believe that the current rush to build in eastern Jerusalem could harm the peace process.

Upon visiting the site in Jerusalem, Philip Meltzer, president of the Association of Reform Zionists of America, said, "Our position is that Israel has every legal right to build in Har Homa or any other place in Jerusalem. What we do question is the wisdom of making that decision at this time."

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, acknowledged that while everyone agrees on the principle of Israel's right to build, there are different views within the conference on issues of "timing, of what and where to build."

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu offended some members of the conference when he addressed the topic of religious pluralism during a speech to the group Tuesday.

'Stupid and irresponsible'

Netanyahu appeared to blame non-Orthodox groups for complicating the issue of non-Orthodox conversions. Under pressure from his Orthodox coalition partners, Netanyahu is supporting legislation that would reinforce Orthodox control over conversions in Israel.

In an obvious reference to the Reform and Conservative movements, which have petitioned the High Court to recognize their right to perform conversions in Israel, Netanyahu said, "Somebody made it complicated by going to the court. It was stupid and irresponsible."

He added, "Now that the matter is in the court, the court is telling us, either you legislate or we will legislate something."

Some American leaders clearly took exception to the prime minister's remarks. Rabbi Paul Menitoff, executive vice president of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis, said the prime minister "had implied that we were stupid and irresponsible for bringing the issue to the court. That's blaming the victim."

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, also took issue with Netanyahu, but gave him credit for saying that he was "looking for creative solutions" to the conversion problem.

As delegates spent four busy days meeting with political and military

officials, the continuing unrest on Israel's northern border also injected itself into the visit.

In Metulla, on the Lebanese border, members witnessed an exchange of fire between the Israel Defense Force and Hezbollah gunmen stationed north of the border.

While up north, the group made a special point of meeting with the family of Azam Azam, the Israeli Druse imprisoned in Egypt on spying charges.

They assured the family that it would campaign for Azam's immediate release. Accompanied by the military, the delegation also visited the tiny Jewish enclave in Hebron, where it was briefed by settler spokesman Noam Arnon.

Stressing that the Israeli-Palestinian agreements prohibit Israelis from purchasing apartments or land in Hebron, Arnon urged the leaders to investigate whether they, as non-Israelis, could buy property in the overwhelmingly Palestinian city.

Betty Ehrenberg of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs called the Israel visit her "most informative to date." Recalling the shelling on the Lebanese border, she said, "Seeing things up close brought the complexity of the Lebanon situation home to me. I see why Israel's defense force is facing a dilemma."

Hoenein agreed. "Seeing things on the ground is always very helpful," he said.

"We got a sense of the complexity of the issues. It gives us a much better understanding." □

Israel orders Palestinians to close 4 Jerusalem offices

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has added more fuel to Palestinian anger with the announcement that four Palestinian offices in eastern Jerusalem must be closed because of their alleged connections to the Palestinian Authority.

The order, given Tuesday by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, comes amid heightened Palestinian criticism over an Israeli decision to build a new Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem.

Israeli police have given the Palestinian organizations until Sunday to close. Palestinian officials said they might petition Israel's High Court against the closure order.

When issuing the order, Netanyahu echoed previous Israeli leaders by maintaining that the Palestinian Authority has no right to operate in Jerusalem.

He defended the Har Homa decision by stating that Israel has the full right to build anywhere within Jerusalem's municipal boundaries.

The closure order came at the recommendation of an anti-terror team, which said the institutions were linked to the Palestinian Authority.

One of the places was a mapping office, which Israel had ordered closed last August.

The Palestinian Authority agreed at the time to close the office and move it to Abu Dis, an Arab neighborhood outside of Jerusalem.

But the office reopened a month later in Orient House, the Palestinian Authority's de facto headquarters in eastern Jerusalem.

Along with issuing the closure order, Netanyahu instructed Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani to immediately keep Palestinian security forces from operating in the eastern half of the city.

The Palestinian preventive security forces, operating under the command of Jibril Rajoub, have been actively policing and gathering intelligence among eastern Jerusalem's Arab population.

Visiting German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel

criticized the timing of the closure order, saying that it exacerbated tensions.

"Given the present difficult situation, I think we should avoid decisions which foster mistrust," he said.

The United States also criticized the Israeli move against the Palestinian offices.

"This is a time when it is very important that the parties take steps that will build confidence between them," said State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns. "It is therefore very difficult to understand why the Israeli government made such a decision at this time when there is a very difficult environment in the relationship with the Palestinians."

The American Jewish Congress criticized the State Department for its "shockingly short memory" in criticizing Israel's decision to close the four Palestinian Authority offices. An essential part of the Israeli-Palestinian accords is that the Palestinians operate only in the self-rule zones of Gaza and the West Bank, the group said.

Meanwhile, the Israeli Foreign Ministry was checking information that visiting French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette had visited Orient House with a Palestinian official and had made political statements there.

Israel has long sought to prevent senior foreign diplomats from holding official talks at Orient House. □

Civil plaintiffs in Papon trial raising funds to publicize case

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — The civil plaintiffs in the case against former Vichy official Maurice Papon are setting up a fund to help pay the cost of bringing hundreds of people to the southwest city of Bordeaux for the trial.

The plaintiffs and their lawyers also plan to set up a headquarters near the court that will be equipped with telephones, fax machines, archives and interpreters for the 150 civil plaintiffs and witnesses, and for the 150 reporters and 30 lawyers who are expected to attend the trial.

The group estimates its costs at some \$175,000.

The campaign to collect funds will begin in mid-March and will appeal to the Jewish community and in the media.

The group is also looking for local residents willing to lodge some of the trial's participants.

The trial, which is expected to take place in the fall, will give the French people an exhaustive examination of the Vichy government's role during the Holocaust.

"It is a historic trial which is going to draw a lot of people," said Michel Slitinsky, spokesman for the civil plaintiffs. "The law courts take care of organizing the judicial debates but doesn't get involved in receiving people."

Legal proceedings against Papon, which were first undertaken in 1981, were delayed by successive French governments in the hope that Papon would die before a trial took place that would recall a period many French people would rather forget.

The trial is expected to last two months.

Papon, 86, is charged with crimes against humanity for ordering the deportation of 1,560 Jews, 223 of them children, to Nazi death camps when he was secretary general of the Bordeaux region's local government during Germany's wartime occupation of France.

His prominence in French public life after the war as Paris police chief in the 1960s and as budget minister in the 1970s has made it an exceptionally high-profile case.

Cultural events around the time of the trial are also being organized, including lectures by historians, and documentary screenings and exhibits, one of which will be about Jewish children during the Nazi occupation. □

Church-state watchdogs lambast House support of 10 Commandments

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Church-state watchdogs were quick to lambast the House's backing this week of an Alabama judge who hangs a wood carving of the Ten Commandments in his courtroom.

Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-Ala.), sponsor of a resolution on the issue, called it "an important symbolic gesture" affirming that the Ten Commandments represent the "cornerstone of Western civilization and the basis of our legal system here in America."

Most Jewish groups had a different take.

The resolution "sends a disturbing message of government support of religion and creates atmosphere in which religion is given tacit governmental approval," the Anti-Defamation League said in a statement.

In February, a U.S. circuit judge ordered Judge Roy Moore to remove the posting of the Ten Commandments from his Alabama courtroom. Moore appealed, and the state Supreme Court has granted a stay to review the matter.

Alabama Gov. Fob James promised last month that he would call out the National Guard and state troopers if necessary to prevent any court-ordered removal of the plaque.

The so-called "sense of Congress" resolution, which was adopted Wednesday in a vote of 295-125, makes no reference to the Alabama case.

It has no force of law and will not directly impact the pending legal case. It simply puts the House on record in support of displays of the Ten Commandments at government offices and courthouses.

Nonetheless, opponents criticized the resolution as a blatant effort to intervene in a state court case.

"This really just pours gasoline on a fire in Alabama," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United For the Separation of Church and State.

"The issue here is not church-state separation, nor federalism," said Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress. "It is whether we will have a nation ruled by law or anarchy. Representative Aderholt has chosen anarchy."

Not all Jewish groups agreed, however.

'Seen as voting against 10 Commandments'

The Orthodox Union called it "appropriate" for the House to express its support for display of the Ten Commandments. "This is clearly constitutional under the Establishment Clause," said Nathan Diamant, director of the O.U.'s Institute for Public Affairs.

"To say otherwise is to say that we must also remove 'In God We Trust' from our coinage and from other public buildings."

Legislative observers said the resolution posed a dilemma for a number of lawmakers.

"It's a trap because it sets up a situation where members are forced to be perceived as voting against the Ten Commandments," one observer said.

Of the 25 Jewish members of the House, only four voted for the resolution. Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) was only one of four Republican lawmakers to break ranks with the party on the issue.

The three Jewish Democrats who voted for it were Reps. Bob Filner of California, Benjamin Cardin of Maryland and Norman Sisisky of Virginia.

During the floor debate, one of the Jewish opponents, Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), called the resolution a "denigration of religion." Such a resolution, he said, assumes that "religion cannot make it on its own." □

Avis accused of discrimination against Jewish names and accents

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Recent charges that Avis Rent-A-Car engaged in an elaborate religious discrimination scheme may point to a larger problems of anti-Semitism in corporate America.

At least six former employees said this week that Avis' corporate accounts department regularly discriminated against customers with Jewish-sounding accents or names, USA Today reported this week.

The policy came in response to complaints that callers used yeshivas to set up corporate accounts, which allow drivers younger than 25 to rent cars, John Carley, chief counsel for Avis, told USA Today.

When some of these cars were returned with damage, these Avis workers said, they were told to watch out for yeshivas.

"Telesales agents used the word 'yeshiva' to refer to Chasidic Jews," former employee Elaine Rodgers said in a sworn declaration that was filed Monday in North Carolina.

Rodgers submitted the statement to support a lawsuit filed by black customers who charged that they were victims of racial bias.

"Formally, there was no program called 'yeshiva.' If, anecdotally, the problem was described by people that way, my information is, yes, there was that phrase used to describe the problem," Carley told USA Today.

Other Avis officials stressed that the company had a strict policy against discrimination and planned to investigate these charges.

The former agents said they were on guard for strong Jewish accents, especially from densely populated Jewish areas, including New York.

In addition, one former employee said the agents gave less-favorable rates to businesses that they believed were Jewish-owned.

The number of anti-Semitic incidents in the United States is decreasing.

But the number of Jews filing discrimination complaints has risen sharply.

In 1990, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reported that 195 Jews filed discrimination cases.

That figure rose steadily for six years, with 319 Jews filing such complaints last year.

"I think there is a problem of discrimination in corporate America," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Thirty years after Congress passed major civil rights legislation, "we may have to re-examine if there is a need for better, stronger and more explicit" laws, said Foxman.

He sent a letter this week urging Avis President Stephen Holmes to address the matter. □

Police probe two stabbings

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli police this week are investigating two separate stabbing attacks.

In Jerusalem, a 50-year-old city resident was moderately wounded Thursday when he was stabbed in a public park near the King David Hotel.

A Palestinian apparently carried out the attack, officials said.

Near Hebron, an Israeli taxi driver was lightly wounded when an argument erupted between him and his two Arab passengers. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

In whose image? Cloning debate triggers theological questions

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Forget about counting sheep. Dolly raises enough pressing questions about faith, immortality and the nature of self to last an insomniac's lifetime.

A genetic clone created by scientists in Scotland and unveiled to the world last week — the first carbon-copy mammal and most-famous sheep — has generated a host of theological and moral concerns.

Across denominational lines, there appears to be clear consensus within the Jewish community that the controversial feat — which could presage the ability to clone human beings — constitutes a morally unjustifiable intrusion into the realm of the Divine.

Some see cloning as a kind of modern day Tower of Babel — an attempt by people to raise themselves to the level of God through human achievement.

"Do we move into the area of God by creating human beings? said Rabbi Kassel Abelson, chairman of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly.

"How does the clone relate to the original subject? Who is responsible for the clone?

"These areas need thought, exploration and careful consideration."

From a biblical perspective, rabbis are particularly troubled by the notion of a human made in one's own image rather than the image of God, as stated in the Book of Genesis.

"If you begin to manufacture people, that flies in the face of the very value system that is inherent in the text," said Rabbi Richard Address, director of the Reform movement's committee on bioethics.

"It flies in the face of the mystery of human existence, what makes you you."

Rabbi Moshe Tendler, an Orthodox professor of Jewish medical ethics at Yeshiva University in New York, sees additional dangers in the new technology.

'Enslavement of man'

"The real problem is whenever man has shown mastery over man, it has always meant the enslavement of man," Tendler, who could not be reached for comment, was quoted as saying by The New York Times.

Some of the more ghastly scenarios batted about include the possibility of cloning donor bodies that could be harvested for organs, as well as the creation of a sort of techno-slave culture.

The scientific breakthrough also sounds a particularly disturbing note for Jews, given Nazi Germany's pursuit of a society of superior beings.

"Can you really do this in a Jewishly sanctioned framework in light of the Holocaust, where you had genetic experimentation on human beings carried out in that context?" said Address of the Reform movement.

Most ethicists believe that the practice of cloning humans would fly directly in the face of lessons derived from the Holocaust.

Robert Pollack, a professor of biological sciences at Columbia University, believes that cloning humans would stand as a violation of medical ethics standards adopted at an international conference in Nuremberg in the 1940s.

In the wake of the Holocaust and the horrible medical experiments performed on its victims, physicians gathered at that symbolic site to formulate a set of guiding principles on issues surrounding human experimentation.

They agreed that no experimentation should be performed without full disclosure and voluntary participation. Moreover, the volunteer must be free to withdraw at any time.

Pollack believes that cloning violates that standard: "I don't see how" a cloned person "can withdraw without committing suicide," he said.

Despite a frantic waving of red flags in the wake of the cloning breakthrough, the reality is that human cloning may be impossible to stop. The biotechnology, scientists say, is relatively simple.

"In science, the one rule is that what can be done will be done," Tendler said.

That is why Jewish theologians and medical ethicists see a pressing need to weigh in on the cloning debate as it begins to be shaped.

Their hope is that society will think twice about trying to play the role of God and focus instead on less morally objectionable applications of the scientific knowledge.

"Technology by definition is neutral," Address said. "What we do with it and how we choose to use it will determine whether it's a blessing or a curse." □

Yeltsin likely to veto law on art seized from Germany

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin is likely to veto a measure declaring art treasures seized from Germany after World War II to be Russian property.

However, the lawmakers who drafted the bill passed by the Duma, the lower house of Parliament, plan to call for a national referendum if Yeltsin vetoes the law.

Nikolai Gubenko, deputy chairman of the Communist-dominated Duma's culture committee, who was the bill's main author, was quoted as saying that Yeltsin was preparing to veto the law to preserve good Russian-German relations.

The sensitive issue of restitution of works of art taken by the Soviet army has been a subject of negotiations between Moscow and Germany since 1990, but talks have yielded little progress.

Gubenko said that if Yeltsin uses his veto, the question could be resolved by a referendum.

Six years ago, Gubenko, who at the time was the Soviet minister of culture, categorically refused to return a major book collection to the Lubavitch movement.

The Schneerson library, which consists of 12,000 volumes of books and manuscripts that had been collected by five generations of Lubavitch rebbes, is now stored in the Russian State Library, formerly known as the Lenin Library.

The disputed collection had been confiscated in the early 1920s by Soviet authorities and transferred to the Lenin Library.

The Lubavitch movement has been battling in the Moscow courts since 1990 for the return of the books. □

Lebanese ban on book lifted

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Lebanon has lifted a ban on sales of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's book, "A Place Among the Nations."

In explaining why the ban was lifted, Lebanese Information Minister Bassem Al-Sabei said that reading the book could give Lebanese citizens some insight into "the ideas that control the behavior of the enemy's prime minister." □