



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) unveiled a revised amendment to the Constitution that would allow prayer in public school. A coalition of groups opposed to school prayer condemned the initiative.

■ Israel's Cabinet approved a legislative initiative that would require all conversions in Israel to be approved by the Orthodox rabbinical courts. A first of three readings of the measure, which Reform and Conservative Jews view as divisive, could be passed by the Knesset as early as this week. Reform and Conservative representatives in Israel are working with some politicians to reach a compromise and avert the legislation's passage.

■ Israeli troops and Palestinians continued to clash in the territories as relations further deteriorated. In the Gaza Strip, Israeli soldiers shot and moderately wounded a Palestinian after he ignored orders to stop. Outside Rachel's Tomb near Bethlehem, soldiers dispersed Palestinians with tear gas. [Page 1]

■ A Palestinian human rights group appealed Israel's decision to demolish the Hebron-area home of the suicide bomber who killed three Israeli women in last Friday's attack in Tel Aviv.

■ The Union of Councils for Soviet Jews and the American Association of Jews from the Soviet Union are seeking 250,000 signatures in a petition drive to try to ameliorate the impact of last year's U.S. welfare reform legislation. The groups are also planning a Capitol Hill rally April 14 to draw attention to the pain of legal immigrants and refugees caused by the reform.

■ French National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen sought a court injunction against a book that quotes him as saying that the French president is in the pay of Jewish organizations.

■ A friend of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's killer pleaded not guilty to charges that she knew of the assassination plot and failed to notify authorities. The trial of Margalit Har-Shefi will resume in May.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Did Arafat give a green light? Answer could determine future

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Did Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat give the green light for militant groups in the self-rule areas to resume terror attacks against Israel?

According to top Israeli officials, the answer is a resounding yes. Palestinians, not surprisingly, dismiss the Israeli charges. And for their part, American leaders come down with a murky maybe.

In the wake of last Friday's suicide bomb attack at a Tel Aviv cafe, the question is more than academic.

And the answer, while it may never be known for certain, has dire repercussions for the future of the peace process.

With mutual trust already at a low point, Israeli-Palestinian relations could blow up all together if Arafat is seen as using militant forces and street violence to further his own political agenda.

In interviews after last Friday's suicide bombing at a Tel Aviv cafe, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu placed the blame for the deadly attack squarely on Arafat.

On March 9, as Israel was planning to launch construction of a controversial Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa in eastern Jerusalem, Arafat met with leaders of Islamic fundamentalist groups and gave them an indirect go-ahead to resume their terror campaign, Netanyahu charged.

Israel's chief of army intelligence, Maj. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, gave the same assessment Sunday.

"Arafat gave the green light and so far has done nothing to cancel the signal," he said.

At the March 9 meeting, Ya'alon said, Arafat spoke angrily about Israel's "expansionist" policy at Har Homa, broadly hinting that he would no longer oppose terrorist actions by Hamas or Islamic Jihad.

Less than two weeks later, a Hamas suicide bomber entered a Tel Aviv cafe and set off an explosion, killing three Israeli women and leaving many political observers linking Arafat's signals with the militant's actions.

For their part, American officials initially were reluctant to jump to such conclusions, saying that intelligence reports gave insufficient evidence to charge that Arafat deliberately caused the resumption of terror.

U.S. navigating difficult path

In the absence of such hard evidence, some observers believe that the Israeli charges are part of an attempt to discredit Arafat on the world stage.

U.S. officials were clearly trying to navigate a difficult path between the escalation of charges emanating from Jerusalem and the Palestinian Authority, who blamed Netanyahu's acts for the resumption of violence.

At the United Nations last Friday, the United States vetoed for the second time in two weeks a Security Council resolution criticizing the Israeli construction plan. The move came despite U.S. opposition to the Har Homa project.

But in recent days, the Clinton administration appears to have shifted the burden to Arafat to prove that he is clearly opposed to violence.

At a weekend news conference in Helsinki, Finland, where he held a summit with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, President Clinton said, "The Palestinian Authority has to make it clear that it is unalterably opposed to terror."

The State Department reiterated that point Monday, stressing that the message must be sent to the militants themselves.

Clinton's comment came as a correction to an earlier statement at the same news conference in which he said, "There must be absolutely no doubt in the minds of the friends or of the enemies of peace that the Palestinian Authority is unalterably opposed to terror."

Although he soon corrected that statement, sources in Washington later said that Clinton had "botched" his handling of the issue.

For her part, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said on CBS' "Face the Nation":

"There is no concrete evidence" of Arafat's involvement in terror,

but then added, "There clearly is a perception of the green light."

Palestinian officials, meanwhile, flatly dismissed the charges against Arafat.

Ziad Abu-Ziad, coordinator of the Palestinian Authority's Jerusalem Committee and editor of the quarterly Palestine-Israel Journal, described the charges as "nonsense."

"Arafat is under constant pressure by the [militant] opposition," he said in an interview. "But he is strongly opposed to violence."

As proof, he cited how Arafat called Israeli President Ezer Weizman to condemn the Tel Aviv attack.

Ziad insisted that militant groups represent only a marginal portion of Palestinian society, and he described terror attacks as "acts of despair by individuals."

Other Palestinian officials have repeatedly stated that the blame for last Friday's terror attack rested on the Israeli decision to start construction at Har Homa last week.

As the charges and countercharges mount, the future of the peace process remains murky.

Israel's Inner Security Cabinet met Sunday and demanded that the Palestinian Authority "fulfill its commitment to fight terrorism and violence, as a necessary step to advance the political process."

As part of this commitment, the ministers called on the Palestinian Authority to crack down on terrorist groups and to strengthen security cooperation with Israel — as the Palestinians agreed to do in the Hebron agreement signed in January.

The Palestinians' determination to crack down on militant groups was thrown into doubt Monday, when Mohammad Dahlan, the head of the Palestinian security service in the Gaza Strip, flatly rejected the Inner Security Cabinet's demands.

"We will not accept or deal with the Israeli conditions, and we will treat them as if we didn't hear them," Dahlan said at a news conference.

Clinton administration reacts with alarm

After the wave of terrorist attacks exactly one year ago, Arafat demonstrated that he knew how to take action against Islamic militants.

At one point, there were some 1,000 militants in Palestinian jails — but most of them have been released over the course of the past year.

The Clinton administration reacted with alarm to these releases, the Washington Post reported Monday.

Concern about the releases arose during Arafat's recent meetings in Washington with Clinton and Albright, and CIA Director-designate George Tenet made name-by-name demands that the Palestinian Authority rearrest the most dangerous militants, according to the newspaper's report.

Nonetheless, Arafat recently gave the order to release 150 fundamentalist activists, among them Ibrahim Makadmeh, who is believed to be the mastermind behind many terrorist attacks.

When the terrorist bomb exploded last Friday, Makadmeh was speaking at a Hamas rally in Gaza, threatening that Palestinian militants would embitter Netanyahu's life and cause him to "scold the day he was born, and wish that Jerusalem was washed to the sea."

Shortly after Makadmeh made the speech, he went underground, apparently concerned that Arafat wanted him behind bars again. The Palestinian Authority attorney general, Khaled al-Kidra, denied reports that Makadmeh had been rearrested after the bombing. Kidra said Makadmeh was still at large, but that Palestinian officials had issued a warrant for his rearrest.

Meanwhile, violence continued in the West Bank, where Palestinian stone-throwers engaged in daily clashes with Israeli soldiers in the aftermath of the cafe bombing and the start of the Har Homa construction.

On Sunday, Ya'alon accused Jibril Rajoub, who is in charge of Palestinian security forces in the West Bank, of staging the rioting in Hebron, where scenes of angry Palestinians pelting Israeli soldiers with a hail of stones were reminiscent of the worst days of the Palestinian uprising.

Rajoub denied the charges Monday, saying that they were false accusations made by the Israeli army intelligence chief to cover his own failures.

Despite the overheated atmosphere, Arafat left the region this week, traveling to Islamabad, Pakistan, for a previously planned conference of Islamic countries, and then to Morocco.

On Monday, Foreign Minister David Levy called on Arafat to return immediately to the region to deal with the crisis.

The prospects of an Israeli-Palestinian rapprochement, meanwhile, seemed more remote this week than they have in years.

"Whoever wants to blow up the peace process may have found his golden opportunity," said Ziad.

At this point, both Israel and the Palestinians appear to have found ample reason to blame the other side for causing that potential explosion. □

Russian Parliament, Yeltsin clash over fate of seized art

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Members of Russia's lower house have said they would continue to push for a law banning the return of art that the Red Army seized from Nazi Germany during World War II.

Last week, President Boris Yeltsin vetoed legislation that would have made all works of art brought to the Soviet Union during the war Russian property.

The Russian Parliament had overwhelmingly backed the measure, but it needed the president's signature.

The sensitive issue of restitution of works of art taken by the Soviet army has been a subject of negotiations between Moscow and Germany. In 1990, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a friendship treaty providing for the mutual restitution of war plunder.

A spokesman for the German Embassy in Moscow was quoted as saying that Russia's stand on the seized art was a "thorn in the side" of otherwise good Russian-German relations.

Yeltsin, in a letter to the chairman of Parliament's upper house, said the proposed bill sought to solve the problem of "trophy art" unilaterally "without taking into account international norms of law."

The vetoed bill would have created a complicated procedure for the return of seized art treasures.

It also said cultural artifacts that were family souvenirs or archives, including letters and photographs, could be returned to those who had inherited them "for humanitarian reasons."

Said the deputy chairman of the Communist-dominated culture committee of the lower house, who was the bill's main author: "The law may be redrafted to create a distinction between art from our [wartime] allies and that confiscated from our enemies."

The Parliament could override the veto if both houses approve the bill again by a two-thirds majority.

Among other reasons, the issue is of importance to the Jewish community because during the World War II era, many Jews lost precious works of art. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Recalling Soviet Jewry campaign, Christians seek end to persecution

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In the Egyptian village of Ezbet Dawoud, 300 miles south of Cairo, gunmen thought to be Islamic militants walked into a predominantly Christian enclave this month and shot everyone in sight.

News accounts of the attack on Egypt's Christian minority, the second of its kind in a month and one of the bloodiest since 1991, reached Christian and Jewish leaders as they were gathering on Capitol Hill for a daylong conference on the worldwide persecution of Christians.

The attack, while neither singular nor unprecedented, provided a timely, graphic illustration of what many say is a growing trend of anti-Christian persecution around the globe.

For more than a year, evangelical Christian leaders have been seeking to raise awareness of the issue and launch a campaign to end anti-Christian persecution.

And they are using as a model the Jewish community's successful efforts to free Soviet Jews.

Jewish groups have begun to lend their support to the cause. At the Capitol Hill forum, which was sponsored by the Center for Jewish and Christian Values, American Jewish officials shared with their Christian counterparts lessons learned from the community's 30-year campaign on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

"While we think of the Soviet Jewry movement as a major success," said Jess Hordes, Washington director of the Anti-Defamation League, "we tend to forget that it was a very long and difficult road."

For decades, Soviet Jews were locked behind the Iron Curtain, frequently refused permission to emigrate and persecuted when they tried. Many of the lessons derived from that effort, which ultimately led to the release of more than 1 million Soviet Jews, "are transferable to the issues before us today," Hordes said.

Addressing the gathering, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) said, "The campaign to save Soviet Jewry is an example of what can be done when our conscience informs our policy. Today I think it can serve as a call to action for those who now seek to protect Christians who are persecuted throughout the world."

Christian children as slaves

Most of the abuses, church leaders say, are occurring within militant Islamic countries and the few remaining Communist nations. In Pakistan, law prohibits speaking or acting against the Islamic prophet Mohammed, and violations are punishable by death. In Sudan, the Islamic government has bombed and burned Christians villages and taken Christian children as slaves. In China, thousands of Christians have been imprisoned.

Other frequent violators of religious liberty include Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam, Nigeria, Cuba and Uzbekistan, according to those who monitor such abuses.

"The shocking untold story of our time is that more Christians have died this century simply for being Christians than in the first 19 centuries after the birth of Christ," Nina Shea, director of the Puebla Program of Freedom House and a leading expert on the issue, writes in her book, "In the Lion's Den."

"They have been persecuted and martyred before an unknowing, indifferent world and a largely silent Christian community."

In fact, it was a Jewish scholar, Michael Horowitz, who is credited with penetrating public consciousness with this issue. A senior fellow at the Hudson Institute in

Washington, Horowitz wrote an opinion piece for The Wall Street Journal in July 1995, discussing the "overwhelming" evidence of "growing and large-scale persecution of evangelicals and Christian converts." Horowitz championed the cause at a time when Christian leaders were paying little attention to the issue. Indeed, many church leaders now admit to having been asleep at the wheel.

Since the publication of his piece, the movement to end anti-Christian persecution has been slowly gaining momentum. In January 1996, the National Association of Evangelicals issued a "call to action" on the issue, urging the U.S. government to take vigorous steps to combat anti-Christian persecution. In September, both houses of Congress adopted a non-binding resolution condemning the "egregious human rights abuses and denials of religious liberty to Christians around the world."

And in November, the Clinton administration formed an advisory committee of prominent religious leaders and scholars to help promote religious freedom. The panel includes two Jews, Rabbi Irving Greenberg of New York and Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt.

Now, some lawmakers are aiming to put the force of legislation behind the effort. Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.) are seeking to introduce legislation in both houses requiring that the White House have a special adviser on religious persecution and that sanctions be established to punish international violators of religious liberty. Providing for sanctions "will put some real teeth into the issue," Specter said at the gathering.

Advocates, moreover, hope that such legislation would provide a shot in the arm similar to what the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment provided for the Soviet Jewry movement. That legislation linked U.S. trade policy to a country's emigration practices.

"We are witnessing the beginning of a broad-based movement which will insist that the United States government take serious and important steps to use its influence to persuade the offending foreign governments to stop these denials of basic human rights," said Richard Land, president of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Clear, unified message

Jewish leaders in attendance, still outraged by a resolution adopted by the SBC last year calling for the conversion and "salvation" of the Jewish people, agreed to look past Land's participation in the forum and focus on the matter at hand.

Advocates said one of the initial steps the United States should consider is amending asylum guidelines of the Immigration and Naturalization Service to enable persecuted Christians to immigrate to America more easily.

Jewish officials stressed the importance of organizing grass-roots involvement around a clear, unified message as Christian leaders move forward with their campaign.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, enumerated several strategies that the Jewish community once used, including putting a human face on the problem, as church leaders bring the cause to their congregants.

Above all, Jewish leaders emphasized the need for patience. Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, stressed the need for perseverance and said Christian leaders should expect the campaign to be a "long-term process with many twists and turns."

The advice appeared to infuse church leaders with new confidence and resolve. Addressing Jewish leaders at the gathering, the Rev. Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals said, "You have given us through your experience with Soviet Jewry the opportunity to see that the future can be created." □

Is pigskin kosher for burns? Orthodox scholar, families differ

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — A furor is erupting over the use of pigskin in the treatment of Orthodox Jewish children with serious burns in New York's pre-eminent pediatric burn center.

But the controversy may be rooted in ignorance, according to an Orthodox expert in Jewish medical ethics.

"Jewish law has no objection whatsoever to the use of pigskin in the treatment of burns," according to Rabbi Moshe Tendler, a professor of medical ethics at Yeshiva University, where he also serves as a professor of Talmud and as a dean.

"God did not make pigs in order to make footballs," Tendler said in a telephone interview.

"Pigs were made for man's utility. The non-edible use of pigs is perfectly 100 percent all right," he said. "The prohibition against pig is only eating it."

The imbroglio, detailed in an article by Katherine Eban Finkelstein in the March 19 issue of the New York Observer, a Manhattan-based weekly, dates back to January.

At that time, Jewish parents from the haredi, or fervently Orthodox, community complained to New York City's Health Department that doctors at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center's burn center were using pigskin, rather than human skin, to treat their burned children. In response to the complaints, the city agency launched an investigation, especially because most of the children being treated with pigskin were Orthodox, the Observer reported.

Pigskin is cheaper to use than human skin and is not considered the highest standard of care available today to treat burns, the Observer article said, raising questions about whether there was some discrimination involved.

And because New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center's burn center houses the largest skin bank in the country, it seemed doubly puzzling to the patients' families that they would be offered only pigskin.

Pigskin offered to Jewish children

One complainant was a Chasidic family that arrived at New York Hospital's burn center with its 4-year-old son, Samuel Cohen. He had been badly burned over most of his face, back, head and arm from a pot of soup, according to the Observer story. The boy's father, Abraham, wearing a black suit and yarmulke, with peyos curled behind his ears, was clearly an Orthodox Jew.

According to the article, Samuel's doctor, Michael Madden, a senior surgeon at the burn center, recommended the use of pigskin, a course of treatment that the elder Cohen thought odd, if not insensitive.

Human skin is a preferred treatment, according to the article, and pigskin is rarely used these days, particularly on deep burns such as those Samuel Cohen suffered.

But pigskin was offered to Jewish children six times in two months. Jewish children accounted for one-quarter of patients at the pediatric burn unit in 1995, the latest year for which figures are available.

Hospital spokeswoman Myrna Manners told the Observer that pigskin dressings are used on all patients when appropriate and that they are never used without the consent of the patient and, if necessary, his or her spiritual adviser.

According to Tendler, pigskin is a valid treatment in burn cases because its use lessens the chances that a patient's immune system will reject the graft, which can happen when human skin is used.

Using pigskin also prevents the possibility that the

patient will be contaminated by human tissue, which could contain the AIDS virus or hepatitis, Tendler said.

But the elder Cohen consulted several rabbis and doctors, according to the article, and decided that because it is rarely used these days, he did not want it used on his son.

"Once they used the word 'pig,' I don't have to tell you what happened," said Jacob Landau, quoted in the story and identified as a Chasidic community activist who has spoken with several of the children's parents.

"What's going on is of great concern to us," Landau said in the story.

Glenn Warden, an internationally recognized burn surgeon and chief of staff at the Shriners' Burns Institute in Cincinnati, told the Observer, "I'm not Jewish, I'm Methodist, but come on. I would obviously not offer pigskin to the Jewish community. That's just common sense. Jesus, you think they'd know that in New York!"

But according to Tendler, that view is based on a complete misunderstanding of what Jewish law has to say about the use of non-kosher products for medical purposes.

"They're just totally ignorant of Jewish law," he said. "Haredi does not mean learned. It can also mean ignorant of Jewish law," he said. □

Judge to decide next month about accused Nazi in Chicago

By Jeffrey Weill

JUF News

CHICAGO (JTA) — U.S. District Judge David Coar will decide next month whether Bronislaw Hajda, 73, of Schiller Park, Ill., lied to U.S. immigration officials about his alleged service in the Nazi SS during World War II.

If convicted, Hajda, a retired machinist, will lose his U.S. citizenship and could face deportation to his native Poland. Hajda immigrated to the United States in 1950 and became a U.S. citizen in 1955.

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Special Investigations suspects Hajda of serving as an armed guard at the Treblinka labor camp in Nazi-occupied Poland and participating in the one-day massacre of hundreds of Jews when the camp was liquidated July 23, 1944.

Hajda contends that he was a prisoner from 1942 to 1944 at a Nazi labor camp in Pustkow, Poland.

According to Charles Sydnor Jr., an expert on German history who served as a government witness in the trial, five former Treblinka guards testified to the Soviets after the war that a man named Bronislaw Hajda was a guard at Treblinka who helped round up and murder Jews when the labor camp was liquidated in 1944 as the Red Army was approaching.

Hajda's sister, Kazimiera Mrozinska, who lives in Poland, also signed statements claiming that her brother served as an SS guard. While she now denies signing any statements, OSI handwriting experts have determined that the signature is hers.

While there were no eyewitnesses to place Hajda at Treblinka, two survivors testified to the atrocities they encountered at the labor camp. When armed guards converged on the camp, the Jewish prisoners were ordered to lie face down on the ground in the roll call area. Nearly all were shot to death in a nearby forest.

"It was a living hell. Nothing can compare to it," said Simon Friedman of Florida, one of the Treblinka survivors who testified. Friedman was shot twice and left for dead during the massacre. He then escaped. Both Friedman and Fred Kort of California, the other Treblinka survivor who testified, maintained that their duty was not to convict Hajda, but to tell what they experienced. □