



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israel dropped its extradition request for Hamas leader Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook, who is in a New York jail. A deal is apparently being worked out to deport him to Jordan. [Page 3]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will stress Israel's right to build in Jerusalem and elsewhere when he meets with President Clinton on Monday in Washington, an Israeli official said. Netanyahu is scheduled to meet Sunday evening with Jordan's King Hussein, who is also in the United States. [Page 2]

■ A little more than half of Israeli Jews support the creation of a Palestinian state, according to a Tel Aviv University study. The poll also showed that 59 percent think that the chances of another Arab-Israeli war are very high.

■ Israel will buy 15 Blackhawk helicopters and 34 helicopter engines for \$300 million, it was announced after a meeting at the Pentagon between Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry.

■ A majority of Russians exhibit a low level of hostility toward Jews, though these feelings have decreased during the last two years, according to a public opinion research company in Russia. A representative of the company said a relatively low level of public anti-Semitism, however, does not mean a rise in tolerance.

■ The Allies sought more than 100 Nazi secret agents in Spain at the end of World War II, but dictator Francisco Franco had refused to hand them over, a Spanish newspaper reported. Most of the Nazi agents — all but one appears to be dead — probably lived out their lives in Spain peaceably, according to the newspaper.

■ Israeli officials delayed implementation of a directive that would require doctors to inform schools about students with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. The director general of the Health Ministry said no disclosures would be made without the consent of the students and their families.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Congress' spring agenda includes multitude of church-state initiatives

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The 105th Congress is shaping up into a critical front on the church-state battlefield.

As lawmakers gear up for a busy spring with their return next week from a recess, a handful of measures are poised to make runs at the wall separating church and state.

Such initiatives include a school-prayer amendment to the Constitution, several pieces of legislation aimed at shifting social-service programs from the government to religious communities, and various school-voucher initiatives.

The efforts come as the U.S. Supreme Court considers the constitutionality of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the 1993 law that makes it harder for government to interfere with the free practice of religion.

That ruling, which is expected by July and which all sides of the church-state debate are watching closely, could have a significant bearing on congressional measures dealing with religious liberty issues.

For Jewish activists and church-state watchdogs, the issues now before Congress are familiar.

All of them came up in the last session in one form or another.

"What is different now is atmospherics and packaging," said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League.

Indeed, last month's hasty vote in the House on a resolution supporting displays of the Ten Commandments on public property is an example of a measure that some observers say was geared more toward scoring political points than formulating actual policy.

At the same time, however, many of the legislative initiatives carrying church-state and religious liberty implications have emerged in new forms.

Among them:

• **School prayer:** A tough battle lies ahead for proponents of the Religious Freedom Amendment to the Constitution, a measure that would allow for prayer in public schools and other forms of religious expression on public property.

Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) authored the amendment, which one Jewish observer described as a "thermonuclear" device looming over the church-state battlefield.

Opponents, including most Jewish groups across the political and religious gamut, have vowed to make the defeat of the initiative a top legislative priority.

Bogged down by language disputes

They say the First Amendment already protects religious expression, that the proposed language would allow government to fund religious institutions and that the initiative would run roughshod over the rights of religious minorities.

In the last Congress, efforts to win passage of three similar amendments became bogged down by disputes over language.

This year, however, most advocates have agreed to unite behind one proposal.

Despite the unified approach and a pledge by the Christian Coalition to spend up to \$2 million to lobby for the amendment, legislative observers remain doubtful that it will muster the two-thirds majority necessary to pass a constitutional amendment.

• **Charitable choice:** The welfare law adopted last year contains a provision known as "charitable choice" — a requirement that states contract with religious agencies to provide services for the needy.

The author of the charitable choice provision, Sen. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.), is seeking to extend the principle, adding it to a number of public-health and social-service bills introduced this term.

While supporters of charitable choice say religious providers can do a better job than the government in running social-service programs — drug rehabilitation, for example — critics contend that the practice could lead to

religious discrimination and excessive government entanglement with religion.

One of the Jewish groups' chief concerns is that the provision allows taxpayer money to flow to religious groups that run strictly sectarian programs.

They also fear that the arrangement could permit churches to force someone to worship in order to receive benefits.

"If you're of the wrong religion in a particular community, there isn't going to be anyone to serve you," said Marc Stern, co-director of the legal department of the American Jewish Congress.

Church-state watchdogs are seeking to strip the provision from pending legislation, or at the very least alter the wording so that states may only contract with religious organizations that are not pervasively sectarian.

"We believe there must be appropriate safeguards in place when these kinds of contractual relations take place," said Richard Foltin, legislative director and counsel of the American Jewish Committee.

But the task of defeating or toning down the Ashcroft language remains daunting, observers say, given the variety of legislative vehicles carrying it and the fact that one such law — embedded in last year's welfare bill — is already on the books.

In addition, opponents face an uphill battle because, as Stern put it, the argument against funding church-based social-service programs is harder to win because church-state concerns "end up being seen as an obstacle to an otherwise salutary public policy."

• **School vouchers:** Republican leaders have pledged to make school vouchers a top priority in the 105th Congress.

Legislation known as the Safe and Affordable Schools Act has emerged as the leading vehicle, though voucher programs have been inserted in several bills.

Sponsored by Sen. Paul Coverdell (R-Ga.), the act would provide \$50 million in grants to fund a five-year pilot program offering vouchers to low-income parents whose children attend an "unsafe" school.

The vouchers would enable them to select a parochial school.

'Affront to constitutional separation'

School-voucher initiatives — also known as "school choice" — have split the Jewish community. Orthodox and Republican Jewish groups point to vouchers as the best way for addressing the educational problems in America and for improving access to a quality Jewish education.

Most in the organized Jewish community, however, continue to reject the idea of handing out taxpayer money for use at religious schools, calling it an affront to the constitutional separation of church and state.

The outlook for voucher legislation remains unclear.

In the last Congress, debate over a school-voucher plan for the District of Columbia died in the Senate when Republicans were unable to override a Democrat-led filibuster.

This term promises more charged debate amid what will likely be the most concerted push for voucher legislation to date.

The fact that the Coverdell bill was the first piece of legislation introduced in the new Senate "is indicative of the leadership's intention to take it very seriously," according to Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, which advocates voucher initiatives.

President Clinton's opposition to voucher programs, however, remains a key obstacle.

• **Workplace Religious Freedom Act:** While working to counter what they see as legislation that would erode church-state separation, Jewish activists are also hoping to win a victory for religious liberty through the Workplace Religious Freedom Act.

With solid support from just about every leading Jewish group, the bill has emerged as a centerpiece of the Jewish community's legislative agenda.

The legislation is aimed at ending religious discrimination in the workplace by forcing employers to accommodate their employees' religious needs, including granting time off for religious observance.

Current law requires employers to "reasonably accommodate" the needs of religious employees, whereas the proposed standard would require employers to prove a "significant difficulty or expense" if they decided not to accommodate a worker's religious needs.

Unlike other legislative proposals advanced under the banner of religious liberty, the Workplace Religious Freedom Act "would actually do something for real people," said Stern of AJCongress.

"It wouldn't be an ideological statement. It would actually address real problems."

Similar legislation was introduced at the end of the past two Congresses, without success.

Supporters remain confident that the bill, sponsored by Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) in the House and by Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) in the Senate, will pass this time around, particularly if they can convince lawmakers to seize upon it as the term's most promising — and least meddlesome — religious liberty issue. □

Netanyahu plans to tell Clinton Israel will continue construction

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will stand behind his construction policies in Jerusalem and the territories when he meets with President Clinton on Monday, an aide said.

"The prime minister will make clear in Washington that Israel stands by its right to build in Jerusalem and in settlements," Netanyahu's spokesman Shai Bazak said Thursday.

His statement came amid reports that Clinton would press the Israeli prime minister to agree to freeze activity in the settlements as part of an effort to create an atmosphere in which faltering peace negotiations could resume.

Clinton is considering an Israeli proposal to go directly into accelerated final-status negotiations as a key aspect of a package he is putting together with the aim of breaking the deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

But American sources have said that in return, Netanyahu will be called on to make concessions.

In addition to a freeze on construction activity, the sources said the Israeli leader might be asked to commit to carrying out the second and third redeployments from West Bank rural areas on schedule, and to consult with the Palestinians on their scope beforehand.

The first redeployment, which was slated for March, was not implemented after the Palestinian Authority objected to the scale of the pullback, saying that it was insufficient.

As for the Palestinians, Clinton will demand that Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat take significant steps against terrorist groups.

Netanyahu reiterated his accusation Thursday that the Palestinian leader had given the green light for violence because of the political impasse with Israel. □

Israel drops extradition request, paving way for a deal with Jordan

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Fearing increased Palestinian terrorism, Israel has dropped its request to extradite jailed Hamas leader Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook from the United States.

The decision to drop the extradition request, made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in consultation with his security chiefs, cleared the way for the United States to deport the man regarded as Hamas' foreign minister.

The Israeli announcement comes as a deal is apparently being worked out to send Marzook to Jordan.

In an interview from a New York prison, Marzook told the wire service Reuters, "My understanding is that everything is done" to go to Jordan.

Formally, Israel only suspended its 18-month quest to bring Marzook to an Israeli courtroom to stand trial for directing Hamas operations. But U.S. officials said the move effectively ends the chances that Marzook would face the Israeli justice system.

Marzook's fate now rests with the U.S. government, which arrested him at New York's Kennedy Airport in 1995.

The arrest came after he was placed on the U.S. "watch list" of probable terrorists.

Israel and the United States claim that there is sufficient evidence to prosecute Marzook for orchestrating suicide bombings.

Marzook has denied any connection to Hamas' military wing. He maintains that he was only involved with fund raising and organization of the political and social side of Hamas.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service moved quickly this week to reopen its case against Marzook, a legal immigrant who lived in the Washington, D.C., suburbs prior to his arrest.

But if a deal is worked out with Jordan, the INS proceedings would be a formality.

Marzook would agree to be sent to Jordan under certain conditions that the State Department would impose.

Marzook painted Netanyahu into a corner with his surprise announcement in January that he would no longer fight extradition to Israel.

'They would never extradite me'

Apparently feeling that his case was losing visibility, Marzook decided that he would rather face his accusers in an Israeli courtroom than wait out the fight against extradition, which could have dragged on for years.

Now, he says of the Israelis, "I knew they would never extradite me," Reuters reported.

Announcing the decision Thursday in Jerusalem, Netanyahu spokesman Shai Bazak told reporters: "The decision was taken on the basis of overall considerations concerning security and the prevention of terrorist attacks."

If the Israeli premier had brought Marzook to stand trial in Israel, security advisers warned, the move would likely have further inflamed Palestinian passions. As it is, Palestinian violence has intensified in recent weeks.

Hamas had warned of a terror campaign aimed at Israel and the United States if Marzook was deported.

But now Netanyahu has opened himself to criticism that by passing on the opportunity to bring a Hamas leader to justice, he looks weak in the war on terrorism and undermines demands that Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat crack down on Hamas in areas under his control.

Fears among legal authorities that prosecutors

could lose the case at a trial also factored into Netanyahu's decision, officials said.

Reaction to the Israeli decision was subdued.

"Unfortunately I think that Israel has subjected itself to more terrorist attacks," said Steven Emerson, an investigative journalist who has written extensively on Middle Eastern terrorism. By deciding to drop its extradition request Israel has sent a message "that Hamas can basically blackmail Israel."

Officials with Jewish groups expressed similar frustration in private, but publicly stood behind Netanyahu's decision and called on the U.S. government to find another way to keep Marzook in custody.

"It would be regrettable if anything were done to allow this guy to walk," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Jess Hordes, Washington director of the Anti-Defamation League, said, "We understand the Israeli decision and are not going to second guess it. We wish it were otherwise and that there were no threats made."

At her weekly briefing with reporters in Washington, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno said Israel "took this action in an effort to foster an atmosphere in which the renewal of Palestinian efforts against terrorism can be obtained and the negotiation process placed back on track."

Reno said Marzook would remain in custody and is essentially "in the position he was in before the Israeli government filed its extradition request."

Reno refused to comment on specific U.S. plans, but said, "We are reviewing all of our options." □

Hebrew University criticized for lecture on Rabin murder

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Demonstrators scuffled this week with Hebrew University of Jerusalem security guards outside an auditorium where a lecture on the "Rabin murder conspiracy" was being presented.

Protesters prevented people from entering the hall to hear the speaker, who claimed that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by Israeli agents.

The speaker, Barry Hamish, addressed a nearly empty hall, leaving two hours later surrounded by security guards.

Reports that the university had decided to provide funding for the lecture sparked a sharp outcry.

University officials rebuffed criticism of their decision to hold the lecture, citing freedom of speech.

Hamish, who says he writes for foreign news organizations abroad, maintains that the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security service, was involved in a conspiracy to carry out the Nov. 4, 1995, assassination.

He bases his theory on discrepancies in testimony given by police regarding the range from which Rabin was shot. During the lecture, which was heard by a handful of journalists, Hamish showed the amateur video that was taken of the assassination.

The speaker maintained that the prime minister's bodyguard, who was wounded in the shooting, and his personal driver, were also in on the plot.

Throughout the lecture, angry protests took place outside the closed doors. The demonstrators prevented about two dozen students from entering the auditorium.

In the past, the Shin Bet's VIP protection unit filed a complaint with Israel's Government Press Office, saying that Hamish had used his press card to gain entry to one of Rabin's public appearances, and then waved an anti-Rabin sign from the audience. □

Synagogues in Russian towns struggle for funding, members

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — More than a dozen Jewish communities across Russia have reclaimed synagogues since the fall of communism six years ago.

But most of them open their doors only once a week for Shabbat services because of a lack of worshippers.

Only the largest Russian Jewish communities — in Moscow and in St. Petersburg — boast a rich religious life.

“In other centers, Jewish religious life is just flickering,” Russia’s chief rabbi, Adolph Shayevich, told Jewish activists who gathered here last week to discuss the future role of the synagogue in Russia.

The second conference of the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations, an umbrella body for most of Russia’s synagogues, attracted leaders of 30 congregations.

Estimates of the Jewish population in Russia run between 600,000 and 2 million.

Shayevich said little had been done since the group’s first conference in 1993 to further Jewish religious revival in Russia. The two main problems facing synagogues have been a lack of funds and the declining population resulting from the mass emigration of Russian Jews, he added.

The financial situation improved somewhat after the creation of the Russian Jewish Congress last year. The congress now pays for public utilities in most of the synagogues and it sponsors projects aimed at fostering religious activity.

A recent survey of Russian Jewry revealed that 75 percent of Jews in Russia never go to synagogue.

Conference participants complained that the younger generation was not interested in going to synagogue.

“To attract Jewish youth there should be a knowledgeable leader who could lead young people,” said Viktor Shapiro, chairman of the Jewish community in Kaliningrad and the leader of a congregation of 40 young Jews.

Andrey Osharov, a community leader from the central Russian town of Kostroma, said Shabbat services in his synagogue attract 25 to 50 people out of the town’s 1,000 Jews.

“If we had a rabbi, we would have attracted more people to the services,” Osharov said.

Many synagogues that do not have permanent rabbis are served by emissaries of the worldwide Lubavitch movement who visit periodically.

Most rabbis working in Russia are Lubavitch representatives.

‘Leaders have to go look for the Jews’

Some conference participants voiced the view that refurbishing synagogues would increase attendance.

“Some feel embarrassed to go to a poor-looking synagogue which they can not be proud of,” said Yakov Bril, chairman of the synagogue in Krasnoyarsk, in central Siberia.

Bril’s synagogue is financing itself.

Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt believes that Russian synagogues can support themselves if local leaders learn how to involve unaffiliated Jews.

“The leaders have to go look for the Jews, get people involved and make the synagogue look attractive,” he said.

To survive over the long-term, synagogues will have to draw financial support from local Jewish business-people and become “real communities with membership,” he said. □

Mysterious papers bolster Czech search for Jewish assets

By Randi Druzin

PRAGUE (JTA) — Czech Jewish leaders have said the discovery of documents has bolstered the community’s search for assets stolen by the Nazis during World War II.

But the Czech Interior Ministry, where Jewish leaders say the papers were found, said no such document exists.

Late last month, an employee at the Institute of Contemporary History here unearthed a document from government archives that listed items, such as paintings and Persian carpets, taken from a Moravian Jewish family during the war, said Tomas Kraus, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic.

The employee, Helena Krejcova, also found correspondence between Nazi officials in Prague and Berlin, Kraus said.

In the letters, he said, the officials argue over the destination of the plundered items.

Krejcová had announced the discovery on German television and it was mentioned in the prominent German magazine *Der Spiegel*, according to Kraus, who has a copy of a Nazi list of plundered Jewish property.

But Oldrich Sladek, head of archive reports at the Interior Ministry, said no such papers exist.

The ministry has a Nazi document from November 1944 that determines how property should be located and transported out of occupied territories, Sladek said.

But “there is not a specific property listed,” he said.

In the fall, Kraus met with officials from Czech President Vaclav Havel’s office. Some 1,500 survivors of the Holocaust live in the Czech Republic.

The Czech officials expressed their desire to assist in the search for plundered Jewish property, Kraus said.

But no joint initiative has been established.

However, a four-person team made up of representatives from Kraus’ organization and from the Institute of Contemporary History has been formed.

The team is preparing questions to submit to municipal government officials across the nation in an effort to determine how much property was stolen, how much it was worth and where it went. Kraus said the team would be looking for property such as valuable furnishings and ornaments. Many items could be in private homes, he said.

“Some of it can likely be found in Germany, or perhaps Switzerland,” he said.

Kraus said his organization had not yet determined what course of action to take once the property is located.

But he said his group’s search for plundered Jewish property was in part inspired by the recent controversy surrounding Swiss banks and the fate of the assets of Holocaust victims. If there are lost possessions there, he said, “there must be some here too.” □

Finally, grandma is allowed to drive

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An 82-year-old grandmother of three has become the oldest Israeli to get a driver’s license.

After more than three decades and some 35 failed driver’s tests, Shulamit Dizen of Ashdod recently passed her road test and received a license. She originally wanted her license to visit her parents in Tel Aviv.

Dizen maintained that she had been a fine driver from the start. “It’s just that I would get nervous during the tests,” she said. □