



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israel lifted the security measures imposed on the territories before the Passover holiday and allowed the entry of 55,000 Palestinian workers. Meanwhile, a Palestinian was killed north of Jerusalem after the driver of the car in which he was traveling ignored orders from Israeli troops to stop. [Page 3]

■ An Israeli tourist was stabbed and lightly wounded in northern Jordan. The alleged assailant was detained, while the cause of the attack was not known.

■ The United States reportedly will deport jailed Hamas leader Mousa Abu Marzook to Jordan. Marzook has been held in the United States on suspicion that he supported Hamas terrorists in Israel and the West Bank. [Page 2]

■ A special session of the Knesset defeated four motions by the Labor and Meretz parties calling for a state inquiry into the Bar-On affair. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had no plans for a Cabinet reshuffle in the fallout of the affair.

■ Convicted spy Jonathan Pollard petitioned Israel's High Court demanding the state disclose what is being done to secure his release from a U.S. prison. [Page 2]

■ Test results on a suspicious package sent last week to B'nai B'rith headquarters in Washington, D.C., showed that the petri dish labeled as a biological agent actually contained household chemicals and the standard red chemical lining found in such containers.

■ The U.S. Department of Justice won a court order of deportation against Ferdinand Hammer, 75, a Sterling Heights, Mich., man who served as an armed Waffen SS guard at the Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen concentration camps during World War II.

■ The Swiss government is poised to appoint Elie Wiesel as international chairman of a fund for needy Holocaust survivors. But Wiesel said he was unaware that he had been given the appointment. [Page 4]

Liberal religious groups decry own failure to inspire activism

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When Americans think of religion's influence on political and social policy these days, what comes to mind is the religious right — and for good reason.

The political left is today grounded in a secular point of view that not only leaves out the overwhelming majority of Americans who identify themselves as religious, but also ends up being used by the religious right to lay sole claim to the voice of religious authority, said leaders of liberal religious movements at a conference here recently.

Progressive religion is failing to inspire liberal political activism and, in the process, failing to make much of an impact on the political policies which shape the lives of most Americans, they said.

"We have too often been indistinguishable from the left wing of the Democratic party," said the Rev. Jim Wallis, a progressive evangelical Christian who founded and is co-publisher of *Sojourner's* magazine, a Washington-based publication offering a liberal view of the Christian social mandate.

"We have been too willing to give up our very religious identities that give our political involvement its prophetic" context, Wallis said.

He, along with leaders of Reform Judaism, the National Council of Churches and the Catholic Church, offered a frank self-critique during the Consultation on Conscience, organized by the Reform movement's Religious Action Center.

It was co-sponsored by the Interreligious Public Policy Briefing '97, which is a joint effort of several Christian and interfaith organizations.

"We need to talk about how liberal religion can recapture the public square," Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said in his remarks introducing the panel discussion.

"Conservatives and fundamentalists on the religious right remember what we have forgotten: That America is the most religious of modern democracies."

Liberals have abandoned religious language

Citing the fact that progressive religion provided the impetus for the abolitionist, disarmament and civil rights movements, Yoffie said that today's liberals have abandoned religious language.

"Perhaps liberals are no longer religious. Perhaps we are lost without the towering religious figures we had in the past. Perhaps we've misunderstood church-state separation," he said.

The Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, agreed, suggesting that political liberals have over-interpreted the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state.

"Religion should be separate from the state, but not from the society in which we live," she said.

Her organization represents most of the country's mainline Protestant and Orthodox Christians.

Underlying the overall problem, according to Yoffie, is the fact that "with regard to social justice we are insufficiently radical. We are too often unable to sustain spiritual indignation."

Another central problem is that religiously motivated liberals have abandoned any focus on standards of personal morality and behavior, he said, "leaving it to the Pat Robertsons and Jerry Falwells," referring to two politically conservative and influential evangelical Christian leaders.

A Jewish perspective was presented by Leonard Fein, who is a veteran progressive political activist and writer.

Now working as director of the Reform movement's Commission on Social Action, Fein was a founder of *Moment* magazine and of *Mazon*, a national Jewish anti-hunger organization.

Fein has also taught political science on the faculties of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Brandeis University. In a speech studded with references to Torah, Fein said that many Jews, in the process of assimilating, have left behind the sense of "permanent outsidership" that it

takes to "abjure the golden calf or golden elephant or golden donkey," comparing the scramble for political status to idol worship.

As a first step toward overcoming the sense of futility which proves debilitating for many progressively minded, religiously motivated people, Fein suggested that political activists focus on telling their success stories, rather than their failures.

Citing a synagogue in southern California that recently hired a full-time caseworker to work with abused children, Fein also suggested that people start small rather than try to change federal legislation right off the bat.

That synagogue's program "isn't fancy," he said, "but it's God's work."

Father Bryan Hehir, a leading Catholic theologian who teaches about social activism and foreign policy at the Harvard University Divinity School and its Center for International Affairs, was also on the panel. □

Jordan apparently now willing to accept jailed Hamas leader

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jailed Hamas leader Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook, in the face of U.S. deportation proceedings, reportedly will be allowed to go to Jordan on humanitarian grounds.

The move follows Israel's decision a few weeks ago to drop its request to extradite Marzook from the United States in apparent fear that putting him on trial in the region would provoke Palestinian violence.

One Israeli official in Washington welcomed the news even as he cautioned that Israel had not confirmed the reports. If, indeed, Marzook is sent to Jordan, it is a "better option than other options," he said.

King Hussein not only "understands the danger of Hamas to the peace process and to Israel, but also to his own regime and own status," said the official, who declined to be named. "He is the best to control extremists and has a very high level of cooperation with us."

Marzook had lived in the United States for about 15 years when he was detained on the suspicion that he was a terrorist when he tried to re-enter the country in July 1995. Marzook maintains that he was only a fund-raiser and organizer for the political wing of Hamas.

But Israel and the United States have held that there is enough evidence to prosecute Marzook for orchestrating suicide bombings in Israel.

Israel had asked for his extradition to bring him to justice for his alleged role in 10 terrorist attacks between 1990 and 1994 that took 47 lives. Credit for the attacks was claimed by Hamas' military wing.

Marzook took Israelis by surprise in January when he announced that he would no longer fight the extradition, apparently believing that his public profile was flagging and needed a boost.

After Israel dropped its extradition request, a U.S. judge refused to release Marzook, saying that he once again was subject to charges of violating immigration laws. Those charges were suspended when Israel's request was made.

At the same time, a deal evidently was being fashioned which resulted in Jordan's decision to accept Marzook. There had been some speculation that the State Department would impose conditions on his deportation to Jordan. That might have included keeping him under house arrest and restricting his political activities.

But a Jordanian official reportedly said today that he would come "without any commitments whatsoever."

Some sources said this week that they feared Marzook would remain a terrorist threat if he is allowed to

communicate freely with his Hamas colleagues in the region.

One, however, said it is likely that despite the Jordanian denials, Marzook would be subject to certain restrictions, but that as part of the terms of the deal, neither Jordan nor the United States would be likely to disclose the details of those restrictions. □

Pollard seeks Israeli court order disclosing official efforts in case

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Convicted spy Jonathan Pollard has petitioned Israel's High Court of Justice to order the government to acknowledge that he spied for Israel and to disclose what efforts, if any, it has been making to secure his release from a U.S. jail.

Pollard, a former U.S. Navy intelligence analyst, was convicted in 1986 of passing information to Israel and was sentenced to life in prison.

In the seven-page petition filed against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Pollard said that successive Israeli governments had failed to fulfill promises to help him and pay for his legal expenses.

Pollard, who was granted Israeli citizenship last year, backed his claim with the original U.S. charge sheet to which he admitted guilt. His lawyer, Larry Dub, said the sheet contained the names of Israeli officials with whom Pollard was in contact. Israel's censor barred publication of further details of the petition.

The Prime Minister's Office issued a statement that Netanyahu, prior to his election — and afterward — worked intensively for Pollard's cause. Israeli officials have said that Netanyahu consistently has raised the issue in his meetings with U.S. officials. □

Bound for space: Israeli pilot selected for NASA shuttle mission

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A 40-year-old combat pilot has been chosen to become the first Israeli to travel on a NASA space shuttle mission.

The pilot, who under army regulations cannot be named, was identified as an F-16 pilot and trained electrical engineer.

If approved by NASA, he would join the space shuttle crew on a mission next year, which also would coincide with the organization's 50th anniversary celebrations. The project would take place under a scientific space research agreement between Israel and the United States.

Abi Har Even, the director of Israel's space agency, said the pilot was chosen by the air force after a rigorous selection process, and that the agency acted as a civilian intermediary with NASA. He said the pilot would serve as the mission's "payload specialist," overseeing a space experiment Israel has yet to propose and finance. □

Soviet warplanes fly over Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — MiG-29 fighter planes, considered the primary challenge to Israel's air force, were sighted in Israeli skies last week.

Israel Television quoted Israeli air force officials as saying that the planes were brought in from an unnamed country to test Israel's various weapons systems against the planes' capabilities.

The MiG-29, built in the former Soviet Union, is used by a number of Arab states' air forces, including Syria and Iraq. □

Israel reviews security capability amid reports of Syrian nerve gas*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli officials are calling for a review of the country's ability to protect itself against a chemical weapons attack amid reports that Syria has begun to arm surface-to-surface missiles with a new, highly fatal nerve gas.

At the same time, Israel has warned Syria that any attack with chemical warfare would be met with a severe response.

Commenting on a report in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz that Syria started to fuel missiles with nerve gas, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said Israel has means "far and above what the other side can even imagine" to deter such threats. He was apparently alluding to Israel's nuclear arsenal, the existence of which Israeli officials have refused to confirm or deny.

Officials in Washington refused to confirm the details of the Israeli newspaper report, but pointed to the episode as proof that the global community needs to work towards implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The treaty, which took effect this week, bans the production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons.

The U.S. Senate ratified the treaty last week. Israel has signed the accord and pledged to adhere to its contents, but has not formally ratified the accord. Syria, like most Arab states, has refused to sign the pact.

Ha'aretz reported that with the help of Russian experts, Syria has begun developing a fatal nerve gas called "VX." The agent is far more difficult to counter than Sarin, the nerve gas Damascus is believed to currently have in its arsenal. Unlike Sarin, which takes effect when inhaled, is easily dispersed by wind and can be countered through air-tight gas masks, VX appears in a powder form. It settles on the skin and can be absorbed into the body.

According to the newspaper report, Syria obtained the formula to produce VX from a Russian general and chemical weapons expert who is believed to have smuggled several cases of the material out of Russia.

Civil defense preparations discussed

The report on the nerve gas prompted renewed discussion in Israeli security circles of civil defense preparations against chemical warfare. The government planned to discuss the matter at its next Cabinet meeting.

Israeli army sources were quoted as saying that the Israel Defense Force must update its civil defenses against chemical warfare, in light of the advanced weapons.

An owner of one Israeli firm that manufactures gas masks and other equipment used against chemical warfare said the masks can protect individuals against breathing in the VX, but do not provide any protection against contact with the skin.

At the same time, U.S. defense officials said Israel could counter such an attack using weapon systems currently under development that would shoot down missiles before they began to descend on their targets.

Currently under joint U.S.-Israeli development, both the Arrow anti-missile and the Nautilus laser system are scheduled for deployment early next century.

Syria's Al-Ba'ath newspaper on Wednesday called the report a "misleading campaign" by Israel to deflect attention away from the impasse in Middle East peace, which it blamed on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line stance.

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said reports that Syria was manufacturing nerve gas had surfaced earlier, and he has raised the matter in discussions with his British and American counterparts.

In an apparent effort to calm tensions, Mordechai said this week that Israel was not interested in any confrontation with Syria, and called on the sides to talk instead and try to reach peace. At the same time, he warned any country from trying to provoke Israel.

U.S. officials have pledged to monitor the developments closely. Meanwhile, the United States still considers Syria to be a state sponsor of terrorism, according to the State Department's annual report on global terrorism issued this week.

While there is no evidence that Syrian officials have been directly involved in planning or executing international terrorism attacks since 1986, "Syria continues to provide safe haven and support for several groups that engage in such attacks," the report states. □

(JTA correspondent Matthew Dorf in Washington contributed to this report.)

Israel continues to seek ways to break impasse in peace talks*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Israeli-Palestinian negotiations remain at an impasse, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week called on the two sides to find a formula to begin the final-status talks.

Netanyahu, speaking Wednesday on CNN, reiterated Israel's demand that the negotiations must be conditioned on a Palestinian crackdown on terror. Netanyahu said that Israel bore no illusions that the war against terror could be 100 percent successful. But he added that Israel expected a 100 percent effort by the Palestinians against it.

The negotiations, along with Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation, were broken off by the Palestinians after Israel began building the Har Homa neighborhood in southeastern Jerusalem in March.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy is scheduled to discuss the impasse when he meets in Washington with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

U.S. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said no date had yet been set for the meeting, but Israel Radio said it would take place May 16.

Meanwhile, Labor Party Knesset member Yossi Beilin continued his own efforts to advance the peace track. Beilin, an architect of the Israeli-Palestinian accords, said his plan was based on a number of points, including an Israeli agreement to halt construction at Har Homa and a Palestinian commitment to crack down on terror.

Beilin's dovish attitude toward the Palestinians is not shared by other members of the Labor Party, which held a stormy discussion this week over whether to support Palestinian statehood in its party platform. The matter is expected to be decided at an upcoming party meeting.

In another development Wednesday, Israel lifted a closure it had imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip before the start of Passover. Israeli authorities allowed into Israel some 55,000 Palestinian workers, who must be married and older than 30.

The Israeli head for security cooperation with the Palestinians in the West Bank, Col. Moshe Elad, said that despite the lifting of the closure, tensions remained high in the territories.

In a sign of those tensions, a Palestinian was killed north of Jerusalem on Wednesday when Israeli police opened fire on the car in which he was traveling after the driver ignored their orders to stop.

Police said they shot at the car's tires and it slammed into a truck.

Israeli officials were investigating whether the Palestinian was killed in the crash or as a result of bullet wounds. The driver fled the scene. □

Swiss, Jewish groups end fight over makeup of Holocaust fund*By Fredy Rom*

ZURICH (JTA) — After weeks of wrangling between the Swiss government and Jewish groups, there appears to be agreement on the composition of an executive board that will oversee the distribution of millions of dollars to needy Holocaust survivors.

The Swiss government is set to appoint Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel to serve as the international chairman of the Holocaust Memorial Fund's executive board, according to sources closely involved with the fund.

But when asked for his reaction to the move, Wiesel said he was unaware of the development, or even that Jewish groups had been pushing for his appointment.

He did not rule out the possibility of accepting the position, but expressed some hesitation.

"My field is writing and teaching," he said during a telephone interview in New York.

In another development, the Swiss Bankers Association expressed its "unequivocal support" for publicly disclosing the names of the holders of dormant accounts dating back to the Holocaust.

The step, which represents a major departure from Switzerland's strict adherence to its bank secrecy laws, was welcomed in Washington by Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee and one of Switzerland's harshest critics.

Describing the step as a "major breakthrough" during a speech Wednesday on the Senate floor, D'Amato said the names of account holders could be made public "within a matter of days or weeks," adding that there would be "certainly hundreds, maybe more" of accounts disclosed by the Swiss.

Months of mounting pressure regarding the whereabouts of Holocaust-era bank accounts prompted the Swiss to establish the Holocaust Memorial Fund.

Created earlier this year with contributions from Switzerland's largest banks and industrial firms, the fund is valued at about \$190 million.

According to the March 1 bylaws establishing the fund, Switzerland was to name four of the executive board's members and the World Jewish Restitution Organization would recommend the other three members.

The WJRO, which was created in 1992 by the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish Agency for Israel and other leading Jewish groups, has spearheaded international efforts to determine the whereabouts of assets deposited by Holocaust victims in Swiss banks during the war years and to investigate Switzerland's wartime dealings with the Nazis.

Swiss Jewish leader to head fund

The Holocaust Memorial Fund was created to make payments to needy Holocaust survivors as soon as possible while the questions regarding the missing assets are worked out — a process that could take years.

The Swiss Federal Council, or Cabinet, announced on April 16 its four appointees to the board.

Among them was Rolf Bloch, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Switzerland, whom the Swiss named to preside over the board.

Bloch, a highly respected member of the Swiss Jewish community, has been moderate in his criticism of the Swiss banks and government.

Wiesel has been more outspoken.

Earlier this month, the WJRO proposed its three nominees, including Wiesel, Israeli elder statesman Yosef Burg and Knesset member Avraham Herschson.

But for several weeks, the Swiss said they were

waiting for the WJRO to present its nominees in a formal written request. But WJRO officials maintained that they had already made the written request.

In addition, the Swiss appeared to balk at the WJRO request that Wiesel serve as the executive board's international chairman, a position the Swiss said was not included in the bylaws setting up the fund.

With Switzerland's decision to accept Wiesel, the board is now expected to begin its work soon. Despite Wiesel's title, Bloch will remain head of the executive board.

In February and March, Jewish and Swiss officials stated that distributions from the fund could begin as early as August. But given the recent wrangling between the two groups, there may be some delay before payments begin. However, in welcoming Wiesel's appointment, Bloch said the payments would likely begin this summer. □

Accused war criminal's death quashes deportation efforts*By Bill Gladstone*

TORONTO (JTA) — Forty-seven years after he allegedly lied about his wartime past to gain admission into Canada, Josef Nemsila has died, thereby ending the government's attempt to deport him.

The accused war criminal died April 18 of complications from diabetes.

Nemsila was accused of serving in the notorious Hlinka Guard in the Nazi vassal state of Slovakia and taking part in the roundup of the country's 100,000 Jews and their deportation to Auschwitz and other death camps in Poland.

"Our reaction is 'Here we go again,'" Irving Abella, national chair of the war crimes committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress, said, citing two previous deportation cases that ended with the suspects' death in the last two years.

"We've been saying for years that we've waited so long to bring suspected war criminals to court that all of them will die of natural causes, not having faced the bar of justice, having lived in this country for 50 years or more in comfort with their families surrounding them," said Abella.

"That's not how we wish to deal with Nazi war criminals."

The government's attempt to deport Nemsila was temporarily thwarted after a federal judge ruled last year that he was protected from deportation by an obscure 1910 law that granted him legal domicile status after five years of residency in Canada.

The decision was overturned upon appeal, however, when another judge ruled that Nemsila had never been lawfully admitted into Canada because he lied to immigration officials about his wartime past upon arriving in 1950.

Although Nemsila was not a Canadian citizen, his lawyer, Barbara Jackman of Toronto, was planning an appeal of the latest ruling.

Only after this planned appeal could a second deportation proceeding have taken place.

In a related development, CJC officials, conscious of the difficulties of gathering evidence against war crime suspects more than half a century after World War II, recently established a so-called "snitch line."

The idea is to encourage alleged war criminals to give damning testimony against others who are being sought. In exchange for their cooperation, informants would receive a promise from CJC not to press for their deportations.

B'nai Brith Canada officials attacked the system as "morally reprehensible." □