



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli President Ezer Weizman and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat are scheduled to meet Tuesday in an effort to find ways to break the stalemated Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The meeting comes prior to a planned shuttle mission by U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross. [Page 2]

■ Several thousand people demonstrated outside the Israeli Prime Minister's Office on Saturday night demanding the appointment of a state commission of inquiry into the Bar-On affair. The turnout was less than organizers hoped for, drawing 10,000 people according to their estimates, and 6,000 people according to police figures.

■ Israel began its observance of Holocaust Remembrance Day with a somber state ceremony at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem. Commemorative events were held in cities across the United States and Europe.

■ Israeli Supreme Court President Aharon Barak suggested that a rabbi who serves on the Chief Rabbinical Court of Appeals be named to the Supreme Court. But the rabbi turned down the offer after he was advised to do so by a spiritual leader in the fervently Orthodox community. [Page 2]

■ Switzerland will send a delegation of parliamentarians to the United States immediately after the publication of a long-awaited U.S. government report about Swiss wartime financial dealings with the Nazis, according to a spokeswoman at the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The purpose of the visit, she said, will be to explain the role of Switzerland as a financial center during the war.

■ The Swiss Popular Party, part of the government coalition in Bern, has launched a large anti-Semitic campaign ostensibly in reaction to pressure on Switzerland to reckon with its wartime role. The party placed anti-Semitic ads in important Swiss newspapers protesting what it called the "blackmail" of the Swiss people, and put up anti-Jewish posters in the Zurich area.

NEWS ANALYSIS

New premier sympathetic to concerns of British Jewry

By Joseph Millis
London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON (JTA) — As 18 years of Conservative rule in Britain are swept away in a tidal wave of anger, discontent and frustration, Anglo-Jewry is waking up to the fact that the new Labor-led government will be the first in a generation to be without any recognizable members of the community.

In addition, some of the community's better known political supporters — both Jewish and non-Jewish — are among the more than 170 Conservative parliamentarians who lost their seats in the May 1 elections that brought Prime Minister Tony Blair to power.

But Britain's youthful new premier can be expected to be sympathetic to the needs of the country's Jewish population.

A devout Christian and Britain's youngest prime minister since 1812, the 44-year-old Blair has close links with the Jewish community and sees Judaism's values and morals as mirroring his own.

Some of his biggest backers in the run-up to his landslide victory last week were prominent members of the Jewish community.

In addition, when they were young lawyers, Blair and his wife, Cherie, shared offices with Eldred Tabatchnik, who is currently the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the community's national lay leadership organization.

The three have remained close friends ever since.

The new Labor government is expected to take a tough line on racism.

When it was in the opposition, the party had initiated legislation to make Holocaust denial illegal, in line with the policies of other western European countries.

Labor is also likely to support moves to tighten legislation on the publication of racist and anti-Semitic literature.

Regarding the Middle East, there are likely to be few changes in Britain's stance, especially since the country is already thought to be among the friendliest in Europe toward Israel.

There will be few, if any, specific policy changes because these are governed both by the civil servants at the Foreign Office — once referred to as the "Camel Corps" because of a perceived pro-Arab bias — and by the joint policies of the European Union, with which Britain is now expected to have closer ties.

Israel 'shouldn't be a political football'

Robin Cook, the foreign secretary in the new Blair government, has been at pains to stress that there is little difference between the Labor Party and the Conservatives on Middle East policy.

Issues affecting the Middle East "shouldn't be a political football" between Britain's two main parties, he said.

Cook, who is from Scotland, will play a key role in Britain's negotiations for a new treaty among the 15 members of the European Union that is slated to be finalized next month.

Perhaps the most high-profile Jewish politician to lose in last week's Labor landslide was Malcolm Rifkind, the foreign secretary of the outgoing Tory government.

He was once considered a candidate to take over the leadership of the Conservative Party.

Labor's Greville Janner, a veteran campaigner on behalf of the Jewish community, also will be missing from the incoming Parliament.

Janner, a member of the World Jewish Congress, decided not to run for another term.

Also gone is Conservative John Marshall, who represented a district in northwest London that has a large Jewish constituency.

Although not Jewish, Marshall was well liked by the community and spearheaded some parliamentary campaigns on its behalf, including a call for anti-racist legislation.

Of the 659 seats in the House of Commons, Labor won 419, giving

it 179 more parliamentary seats than all the other parties combined.

The Conservatives won only 165 seats, suffering their heaviest defeat since 1832 and ending their 18 years in power that began with Margaret Thatcher's 1979 victory.

After losing last week, former Prime Minister John Major relinquished his leadership of the Conservative Party.

There are now several contenders for the unenviable job of reviving the badly bruised party.

Although Britain has no sizable "Jewish vote," some of Britain's 659 constituencies have a Jewish population that presumably swung to Labor — like most of the general populace.

During the election campaign, the "Holy Grail" of Jewish votes, as one political analyst put it, was courted because of its "perceived influence," not for its large numbers.

British Jewry totals around 300,000, the vast majority of whom live in and around London.

"The community is small, but it is disproportionately influential in business, the professions and sciences," the analyst said. □

Weizman, Arafat to discuss how to break impasse in peace talks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With Israeli-Palestinian negotiations frozen since March, there were indications this week that some progress may be made by the two sides in the coming days.

Israeli President Ezer Weizman and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat are scheduled to meet Tuesday in an effort to find ways to break the stalemated Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The meeting, to be held at the Erez Crossing separating Israel from the Gaza Strip, comes days before a planned shuttle mission to the region by U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross.

In addition, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was considering a number of confidence-building gestures aimed at restarting negotiations.

Foreign Minister David Levy said Sunday that the Weizman-Arafat meeting was arranged in full coordination with the prime minister and himself.

This is not the first time the president has directly intervened in an effort to break a deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

The first Netanyahu-Arafat summit last summer was precipitated by Weizman's informing the prime minister that he intended to meet with the Palestinian leader.

Israeli officials said the purpose of this week's Weizman-Arafat meeting would be to defuse tensions between Israel and the Palestinian authority and to seek ways to renew suspended security cooperation between the two sides.

Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and security coordination hit a standstill in March, after Israel began construction of Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem and after a Palestinian suicide bomber detonated an explosion March 21 at a Tel Aviv cafe, killing three Israelis and wounding 47 others.

Netanyahu has categorically rejected any suggestion that Israel halt building of the new Jewish neighborhood in order to restart the negotiations.

But in recent days, the Palestinians have indicated that they may drop their demand for the suspension of the Har Homa project as a condition for resuming negotiations.

"No doubt all the sides are deeply concerned about the impasse in the negotiations," Arafat adviser Dr. Ahmed Tibi, who helped finalize the Weizman-Arafat meeting with Israeli officials, told Israel Radio on Sunday.

"I hope that in the meeting ideas will be raised which will break this crisis," he added.

After Ross' previous visit to the region in mid-April, there was little discernible progress between Israel and the Palestinians.

At that time, American officials called on Israel to offer a number of confidence-building gestures to the Palestinians.

Netanyahu held consultations last Friday to discuss such gestures, including a plan to launch housing projects for Arabs living in Jerusalem.

He also discussed a proposal to amend the law regarding the status of Jerusalem Arabs who received permanent residence there after 1967.

Under the proposed change, Arabs who move to the West Bank or abroad would not lose their rights as permanent residents, as has been the practice.

In another development Sunday, the Israel Defense Force lifted a closure imposed on the West Bank village of Tsurif after the March suicide bombing at the Apropro Cafe in Tel Aviv.

The village was home to members of a Hamas terrorist cell that was responsible for the bombing and other attacks on Israelis during the past two years. □

Rabbinic court judge rejected proposal to join Supreme Court

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In an apparent effort to ease friction between Israel's Supreme Court and the fervently Orthodox community, court President Aharon Barak recently suggested that a member of the Chief Rabbinical Court of Appeals be named to the Supreme Court.

But Rabbi Shlomo Dichovsky turned down the offer after he was advised to do so by a spiritual leader in the fervently Orthodox community.

Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv said it was unacceptable for a member of the rabbinical court to sit on a civil court.

Religious and secular groups have kept a watchful eye on the composition of the Supreme Court, which is sometimes called on to decide matters of public policy that touch on religious issues.

Some recent rulings have made relations between the court and the fervently Orthodox community tense.

In one such decision, the court ruled that Bar Ilan Street, a main Jerusalem thoroughfare that runs through a fervently religious neighborhood, remain open to traffic on the Sabbath until a suitable alternative route is found for secular drivers.

Israeli media reported Sunday that Barak had approached Dichovsky several weeks ago about filling the slot vacated by retiring Judge Tzvi Tal.

An observant Jew, Tal is considered the court's expert on religious law.

If Dichovsky, who lectures on Jewish religious law, had been appointed, he would have become the first rabbinical court member to sit on the high court.

With Dichovsky's refusal, Hebrew University law professor Yitzhak Engelrad was named to replace Tal.

Engelrad, 64, was named to receive this year's Israel Prize for law.

His appointment must now be endorsed by a committee that oversees the selection of Supreme Court justices. □

French neo-Nazis sentenced for 1990 cemetery desecration

PARIS (JTA) — A painful chapter for France's Jewish community has ended after a French court sentenced four neo-Nazis for the 1990 desecration of 35 graves at a Jewish cemetery in the southern town of Carpentras.

In an April 24 decision, the court sentenced Olivier Fimbry, 26, and Patrick Laonegro, 29, who were identified as the ringleaders, to two years in prison, the maximum penalty under the law.

Two other skinheads, Yannick Garnier and Bertrand Nouveau, both 27, each received 20-month sentences for their roles in exhuming the body of Felix Germon and impaling it on a beach umbrella.

The four also desecrated 34 other graves during the night of May 8-9, 1990.

They were arrested last year after they confessed to the desecration of the Carpentras cemetery. A fifth member of the group was said to have died in a motorcycle accident.

The four said at the time that they had desecrated the graves and disinterred Germon's body to pay tribute to Adolf Hitler and to mark the anniversary of Germany's surrender, May 8, 1945.

The cemetery desecration caused an outrage in France and sent 100,000 people, including then-president Francois Mitterrand, out onto the streets of Paris in a mass demonstration to voice their outrage.

Many of the protesters wore yellow stars like Jews were forced to wear during the Holocaust.

The four skinheads were all members or sympathizers of the French and European Nationalist Party, a tiny far-right party which became known in the 1980s in connection with bomb attacks on immigrant hostels and on a left-wing magazine.

Verdict disappoints Jewish officials

Last week, Jewish officials said they were disappointed that the verdict only involved prison sentences.

Henri Hajdenberg, head of CRIF, the umbrella group of secular French Jewish organizations, said the four should also be taught about the true nature of the Holocaust.

"Besides prison terms and fines, wouldn't it be advisable to send [the perpetrators] to a Holocaust documentation center so that the ultimate consequences of the hate ideologies that fascinated them would come to life before their eyes?" Hajdenberg said in a statement.

In its ruling, the court described the desecration as stemming from "the most primary and violent anti-Semitism that went so far as to hunt down individuals beyond death."

"The men committed an intolerable attack upon the sacred meaning of death," the court added.

During their trial last month, the men testified they were fascinated with the Third Reich.

All four said they owned swastikas, brown shirts and other Nazi memorabilia, and confessed to having committed acts of racist-driven vandalism and violence in the late 1980s.

Two of the defendants appeared repentant.

Fimbry "apologized sincerely" to Magdeleine Germon, the widow of Felix Germon, and to "the Jewish community and the city of Carpentras."

"I learned my lesson. I hope that they can forgive me," he said.

Magdeleine Germon, 87, attended the trial. A civil court previously awarded her about \$8,600 in damages, a sum her lawyer later described as "insufficient."

Last September, Germon was attacked and beaten by an unidentified man after she publicly rejected an apology from one of the vandals responsible for the cemetery desecration. □

European states take steps to protest Iranian terrorism

By Joseph Kopel

LUXEMBOURG (JTA) — In a sharp diplomatic shift, the European Union has decided to stop its so-called "critical dialogue" with Iran and to take a series of measures against the Islamic Republic.

The E.U. move last week came as the American Jewish Committee called on Iran's trading partners in Europe and Asia to cease all trade with the nation it said "not only supports terrorism throughout the world but orders terror as an instrument of national policy."

In a full-page ad in *The New York Times* on April 30, the AJCommittee applauded the United States' "tough stand" against Iran, but added that "too many other nations, no less aware of the Iranian record, have sought to profit from business as usual with terrorism's sponsors."

The E.U. decision, announced here after a meeting of the group's 15 foreign ministers, included a call to suspend high-level meetings between E.U. and Iranian officials.

The decision came in the wake of an April 10 German court ruling that Iran's leaders were behind the 1992 murders of four Iranian dissidents in Berlin.

Within days of the ruling, more than 100,000 demonstrators marched on the German Embassy in Tehran.

But the demonstration was less a protest against Germany than against the Islamic Republic's more traditional foes, with the protesters chanting "Death to America" and "Death to Israel."

In the wake of the court ruling, all E.U. countries except Greece recalled their ambassadors from Tehran. Australia, Canada and New Zealand also recalled their envoys.

"There is no basis for the continuation of the critical dialogue between the European Union and Iran," the E.U. foreign ministers said in a statement issued after this week's meeting.

As part of its new stance, the European Union will continue its arms embargo on Iran, will not grant visas to Iranians with intelligence or security positions and will seek to remove all Iranian intelligence personnel from E.U. countries.

The E.U. policy of critical dialogue was aimed at preserving its trade ties with Tehran while also attempting to get Iran to improve its human rights record and to work in greater cooperation with the West. The European Union is Iran's most important trading partner.

The United States has been sharply critical of the E.U. policy, repeatedly urging the Europeans to cut their links with Tehran and to join the economic sanctions Washington imposed on Iran for its sponsorship of international terrorism.

At their meeting this week, the E.U. foreign ministers said they wanted to have a constructive relationship with Iran, but this was only possible "if the Iranian authorities respect the norms of international law and refrain from acts of terrorism."

Despite the new measures against Tehran, the ministers also agreed that individual E.U. member states could return their ambassadors to Tehran if they wanted to resume diplomatic contacts with Iran.

According to diplomats here, this was seen as a sign that the E.U. countries are reluctant to damage their economic ties with Iran. □

Graduates of JDC program aim to invigorate Hungarian Jews

By Michael J. Jordan

BUDAPEST, Hungary (JTA) — For 20 years, Katalin Talyigas led a secure existence as a respected Hungarian sociologist.

But her life underwent a profound change when she became a “Buncherian.”

Four years ago, Talyigas participated in the Buncher Leadership Program, a three-week course in Israel that since 1989 has fortified Jewish communities around the world.

There, she says, she was inspired by the dynamic, upbeat attitudes and commitment of community leaders.

The message hit home. When she returned to Budapest, Talyigas left academia.

Now, she is secretary general of the Hungarian Jewish Social Support Foundation and devotes much of her time to the needs of elderly Hungarian Jews.

“As a social worker I can do more than as a sociologist,” said Talyigas, 54. “I realized the Holocaust survivors need really good services, and I felt it was my obligation to serve them.”

Hoping to find more people like Talyigas, Buncher officials were back in Budapest last month for two days of seminars and recruitment.

Local interest in the program continues to grow, as Europe’s third largest Jewish population — estimates range from 80,000 to 130,000 — is beset by indifference and fragmentation.

Twenty Hungarians have graduated from the Buncher program in the past four years.

But through the recruiting efforts of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which sponsors the Buncher program, another 17 candidates plan to travel to Israel in June for a training session that will be conducted in Hungarian.

“I wanted to speed this up because I don’t want to wait 20 or 30 years to have enough Jewish leaders in Hungary,” said Israel Sela, director of JDC Hungary.

“How many years will they be able to rely on external sources for support? The goal is to enable the community to become self-sufficient.”

For Hungarian Jews, the primary challenge is to revive the thriving community spirit that was destroyed by the Nazis.

Prior to World War II, Hungary was home to about 800,000 Jews, who enjoyed an integral role in science, culture and the economy. About 600,000 Hungarian Jews died during the Holocaust.

Soon after the war, communism and its four decades of anti-religious doctrine prompted many Jews to retreat further from their religious beliefs.

Youth programs aim to bolster community

Now, little more than seven years after the fall of communism, one of the community’s top challenges is to bring tens of thousands back into the fold.

By some estimates, there are only 10,000 “active” Jews here — or about one-tenth of the total community.

Organizers hope to bolster the community through youth programs.

But untold thousands of Hungarian Jews continue to hide their identity, or are unaware of their Jewish roots because their parents concealed it from them.

A second task facing organizers is to unite the community.

There are several Jewish associations that sometimes have testy relations, and these are split along generational lines.

Another issue confronted by the Buncher program is fund raising.

The old-style approach of going door to door with the hand extended no longer works. Leaders now must sell donors on specific programs and projects, according to the group’s instructors.

Of all the obstacles facing the community, the biggest may be the pessimism of local Jews. The recent seminars hosted by the Buncher organization were marked by long discussions about the myriad problems facing the community, rather than brainstorming solutions.

“It’s a cop-out to complain you don’t have the financial resources or the know-how to do things,” said Buncher director Susanne Millner-Scher, who facilitated the Budapest session.

“You have to roll up your sleeves and get to work.” □

Court rejects Jewish request to change Priebke trial venue

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — A military tribunal has rejected a request by Italian Jews to transfer the war crimes trial of former Nazi SS officers Erich Priebke and Karl Hass to a civilian court.

Priebke, 83, a former SS captain, and the 84-year-old Hass, a former SS major, are on trial before a military court for complicity in the March 1944 massacre of 335 men and boys at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome. About 75 of the victims were Jews.

Lawyers representing Rome’s Jewish community, which is a civil plaintiff in the trial, had said the two should be tried for genocide, which is punishable under Italy’s penal, not military, code.

Both the defense and prosecution opposed the request. The tribunal rejected the request at a court session April 24, when the prosecution opened its case against the two.

“Priebke and Hass were voluntary executors of an illegitimate order,” military prosecutor Antonino Intelisano told the court in his opening statement.

Both men have admitted taking part in the massacre, but claim they had to follow orders or face being killed themselves. The mass execution was ordered by the Nazis in reprisal for an Italian partisan bomb that killed 33 German soldiers.

Last August, a military court found Priebke guilty of involvement in the massacre.

But the court freed him, ruling that he could not be punished because the statute of limitations had run out and because of other extenuating circumstances.

That verdict triggered protests by family members of the victims, who barricaded the courthouse for hours until Priebke was rearrested, pending an extradition request from Germany.

Three months later, the verdict was annulled by an appeals court, which ruled that the judges had been openly biased in Priebke’s favor, and ordered a new trial for Priebke.

Hass was a witness in the first Priebke trial and later was charged himself.

Last month’s court session in a fortified courtroom at Rebibbia Prison on the outskirts of Rome came on the eve of a national holiday marking Italy’s liberation from Nazi occupation by the Allies in 1945.

Hours before the court session opened, unknown persons hurled white paint at two plaques outside the Ardeatine Caves, and now a national shrine. During Liberation Day ceremonies April 25, Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro laid a wreath at the caves. □