



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) introduced the Religious Freedom Amendment, which is aimed at bringing prayer back into America's public schools. [Page 2]

■ A Jewish high school student in Long Island, N.Y., was stabbed in the chest by a schoolmate who was heard making anti-Semitic comments before and after the assault. The attack has been labeled a bias crime by police and the suspect is expected to be tried as an adult.

■ A Michigan judge was suspended for allegedly making anti-Semitic and racist slurs while running for election in 1992. Judge Andrea Ferrara's comments were taped during phone conversations with her ex-husband, who was suing for custody of their children.

■ U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross said difficult problems had to be overcome to move the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks forward. [Page 2]

■ A senior Israeli source in Washington said Israel would lodge a formal protest with the U.S. government if American intelligence did, in fact, tap telephone conversations from the Israeli Embassy, Israeli media reported. Israeli officials continued to deny reports of an Israeli mole in the U.S. government and maintained that the report was based on faulty decoding of an intercepted conversation.

■ Jeffrey Solomon, second-in-command at UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York was appointed president of the new Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies. The foundation is expected to focus on Israel-Diaspora relations and Jewish identity.

■ U.S. Reps. Jim Saxton (R-N.J.) and Peter Deutsch (D-Fla.) called on President Clinton to urge the Palestinian Authority to nullify a recent decision to impose the death penalty on anyone convicted of selling land to Jews. They said the action violates the terms of the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act, the mechanism through which the United States aids the authority.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Whither the Christian Coalition without Ralph Reed at the helm?

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Ralph Reed quickly became the man the organized Jewish community loved to hate when he exploded on the national political scene eight years ago as executive director of the Christian Coalition.

The Anti-Defamation League attacked the telegenic darling of the religious right as the leader of a movement that threatened religious freedom and pluralism in America.

The American Jewish Congress ridiculed his legislative blueprint, asking whose American family he claimed to represent when his organization issued its "Contract with the American Family," which called for school prayer, school choice and limits on the right to abortion.

And this week, one of Reed's top priorities — bringing prayer to public schools as part of a Religious Equality Constitutional Amendment — began its latest legislative journey when U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) introduced a bill on the House floor. Votes on the measure are not expected until early this summer.

So now that Reed is leaving the Christian Coalition to run a campaign consulting company, one might expect a little rejoicing by the Jewish activists who have spent the past decade locked in battle against the premier religious right organization.

But the only audible relief is reflected in the joke making its rounds among Jewish groups as activists wonder out loud how they will raise money now that they no longer have Reed to vilify.

Instead, these activists fear that Reed will muster greater strength in American politics now that he has shed the yoke of restrictive federal rules by leaving the Christian Coalition.

As a non-profit organization, the group cannot engage directly in electoral politics or contribute money to candidates.

In his new role, Reed could rise as a formidable opponent in the campaign arena as he seeks to strengthen local, state and national candidates sympathetic to his agenda.

But the big question is: How will the coalition move without Reed at the helm, once his departure goes into effect on Sept. 1.

If the group sheds its compromising and pragmatic approach that has dominated its policies under Reed, the religious right could rapidly find itself losing influence.

Under his guidance, for example, the group was the first to offer to compromise during last year's acrimonious Republican Party platform debate on abortion.

Reed praised as a strong supporter of Israel

But the group could also find another leader willing to moderate positions in order to exert more influence.

"We will be watching very closely who succeeds Reed," said Phil Baum, executive director of the AJCongress.

"I do not have the same confidence in Pat Robertson as I do in Ralph Reed," Baum said, referring to the group's founder and president.

On Reed's watch, the Christian Coalition grew to become a major player in the Republican Party.

In a sign of its raw political power, Bob Dole delayed announcing Jack Kemp as his running mate in the 1996 presidential election until aides had secured the coalition's blessing.

Reed also led the group to apologize for what he called his constituents' "embarrassing" history in the civil-rights movement.

He also single-handedly sought to improve relations between Jews and evangelical Christians when he apologized for what he termed insensitive language and pledged to work to eradicate references such as "Christian nation" from the religious right's vocabulary.

Reed also won praise as a strong supporter of Israel. He most recently signed onto an ad in The New York Times, pledging support for a united Jerusalem under Israel's rule.

Founded from the grass-roots organization built during Rev. Pat

Robertson's failed 1988 presidential campaign, the coalition boasts almost 2 million members.

Once pledging to run stealth campaigns, the group has moved into the spotlight, distributing 45 million voter guides during the last election cycle at churches across the country. The guides targeted candidates who did not share the group's views.

Reed will leave the group just as a Federal Election Commission investigation into these activities as well as others reaches full steam.

A decision is pending on whether the coalition violated its tax-exempt status by engaging in restricted political activities.

But it is the legislative arena where Jewish activists will be focusing their primary attention when Reed moves on.

Jewish groups from across the religious spectrum have opposed the coalition's demand for prayer in public schools and a constitutional amendment banning abortion.

At times, Orthodox Jewish activists have worked with the coalition to support school-voucher programs under which students receive government subsidies to attend private and parochial schools.

While Reed will no longer run the day-to-day operations of the coalition, he will remain on its board and is serving on the search committee for his successor.

For years, Matt Brooks, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition, a Republican group, has struggled to fend off charges that the Christian Coalition's cozy relationship with the GOP endangered American Jews.

"Ralph is pragmatic, and, in the world of the Christian conservative movement, wanted to build bridges and broaden the base," Brooks said.

"Unfortunately a lot of elements in the movement are not motivated by the same principles as Ralph. It's going to be interesting to see which way they move," he added.

As far as the National Jewish Democratic Council is concerned, there is no good way to move.

"Ralph Reed's pragmatic approach, if it was not just public relations camouflage, was never widely accepted by his community," said Stephen Silberfarb, associate director of the NJDC.

"He was a formidable opponent before, and we expect he will be one now." □

School prayer proponents began battle with House bill

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — School prayer advocates have assembled the largest congressional force in their 30-year-quest to overturn Supreme Court rulings that ended organized prayer in America's schools.

U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.), with more than 100 of his House colleagues, formally introduced the "Religious Freedom Amendment" at a Capitol Hill ceremony Thursday. The amendment would extend free-speech protections to all forms of religious activity, including students who seek to lead their classmates in prayer.

In fact, this is the central goal of the measure, Istook said.

The amendment would read: "The people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage or traditions on public property, including schools, shall not be infringed. The government shall not require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity, initiate or designate school prayers, discriminate against religion, or deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion."

Just as the religious right has made its passage the

crown jewel of their legislative agenda, Jewish groups across the religious spectrum have vowed to make its defeat a top priority.

The Christian Coalition has pledged to spend at least \$1 million on advertising to support the amendment's passage.

But despite the large number of co-sponsors of the amendment and the expensive campaign for passage about to be unveiled, the House and Senate are likely to fall short of the necessary two-thirds approval required to pass a constitutional amendment.

House hearings on the measure are expected this summer, with a vote possible in the fall. Senate advocates are deferring, at least for now, to their House colleagues on the matter. □

U.S. envoy confronts problems in prodding for renewed talks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross is encountering hardened positions on both sides as he attempts to revive Israeli-Palestinians negotiations.

Ross met for three hours Thursday in Gaza with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat before going to Jerusalem to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

He was scheduled to meet with Arafat again Friday in the West Bank town of Ramallah before traveling on to Egypt for talks with President Hosni Mubarak.

"There are difficult problems that have to be overcome, but we all realize the importance of trying to find ways to move forward," Ross told reporters in Gaza after the first meeting with Arafat.

Israeli-Palestinian contacts all but stopped in mid-March, when Israel started construction of a new Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem.

The Palestinians have been calling for a halt to the project, and to settlement expansion, as a precondition for restarting negotiations.

Israel also has a precondition — the resumption of intelligence-sharing, which the Palestinians suspended nearly two months ago to protest the Har Homa construction.

During Ross' previous visit to the region less than a month ago, he succeeded in arranging a meeting among top security officials from both sides and CIA representatives.

However, except for limited instances, Israeli-Palestinian security coordination has not resumed.

In a separate development, Jewish settlers began renovation work Thursday at a house recently purchased from a church on Jerusalem's Mount of Olives.

The settlers plan to establish a Jewish seminary at the site.

Palestinian Authority officials denounced the move, saying it was politically motivated.

The Archbishop of the Armenian church sold the house to a foreign company that was operating on behalf of Jewish millionaire Irwin Moscowitz, according to Palestinian sources.

Moscowitz, who has purchased land around Har Homa, was a key figure in the opening of a second entrance to an archaeological tunnel in Jerusalem's Old City last September, a move that led to three days of violent and fatal clashes.

Palestinian officials, seeking to block Israeli expansion in areas they claim as their own, earlier this week announced that any Palestinian who sold land to Jews would face the death penalty. □

Latest ruling on Kiryas Joel may mean a return to high court

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — It looks like the controversial church-state separation case centered on the New York village of Kiryas Joel is headed back to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The state's highest legal venue, the New York Court of Appeals, on Tuesday handed down a decision which is being viewed as a victory by the communal Jewish groups who have fought the establishment of a school district designed to cater specifically to the needs of a religious community.

At the same time, Orthodox proponents — who have regarded challenges to the constitutional legitimacy of the Kiryas Joel School District as discriminatory — are looking to a different, but related case now before the Supreme Court as a way to determine the ultimate outcome of the matter.

Kiryas Joel is an Orange County, N.Y. village whose residents are all Satmar Chasidim.

The roughly 250 profoundly learning and developmentally disabled children from that community had, for years, been provided with state-funded, special educational services by the nearest public school district, Monroe-Woodbury, whose teachers came to the Satmar yeshivas.

That ended in 1985, when a U.S. Supreme Court ruling prevented public school teachers from working in parochial schools. That led many of the handicapped students to begin attending public school in the next town. But some of their parents said their children were taunted because they spoke Yiddish, wore sidelocks and clothes in a style unique to the Chasidim.

The concern of the parents led to the enactment of a 1989 state law, which created a special school district for the Satmars' benefit.

District a 'subterfuge' and a 'camouflage'

The law, in turn, prompted Louis Grumet, the executive director of the New York State School Boards Association, to file a lawsuit challenging it.

Jewish organizations lined up behind each side as that case wended its way through the lower courts and ultimately reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 1994.

The country's highest court termed unconstitutional the law setting up the school district and identifying it by name, so the New York State Legislature and then-Gov. Mario Cuomo re-wrote the statute permitting the special school district with what they thought was more neutral language.

In a 1996 decision handed down by the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court, the court termed the 1994 law creating the public school district a "subterfuge" and a "camouflage" because the demographic criteria it required were designed to benefit only Kiryas Joel's Satmar community.

Last year's decision was appealed by the state and by the Satmar community, with the help of Orthodox legal advisers, to the state's highest court, which essentially held up the earlier ruling deeming the statute still unconstitutional. Though no decision has been formally made, the state is expected to appeal it to the highest court in the land.

"The state shouldn't waste its time with an appeal, but should find constitutional ways to educate these kids," said Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department.

Stern said the constitutionally supported separation of religion and politics benefits the Jewish community as a minority group.

"Jews have always been able to participate equally" in the American political system "because religion hasn't mattered in the organization of politics, and the existence of this school district says that religion does matter.

"That concept isn't good for us because we're just 2.5 percent of the American population and shrinking," he said.

Furthermore, Stern said, "Neither of the area's public school districts has sat down to decide what will happen if they lose" the case.

"If the Supreme Court should decide not to hear the case," he said, "these kids will have no place to go."

Representatives of Orthodox groups said the ultimate outcome of the case depends on the Supreme Court's decision in the Aguilar vs. Felton case, which prompted the current dispute. That case, which the Supreme Court is expected to decide in June, involved the participation of public school employees in parochial settings.

If the court rules that it is okay for them to provide students with the remedial or special education to which they are entitled under state law, then it will render the whole Kiryas Joel debate moot, said David Zwiebel, general counsel to Agudath Israel of America, which represents fervently Orthodox Jews.

"This entire odyssey began" with the court's decision forcing those teachers out of religion-based schools, he said. "If the court reverses it, it will restore the situation to where it was pre-1984."

"Today's decision increases the stakes and importance of the court's consideration" of the Aguilar case, he said.

Nathan Diamant, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, said his organization, which represents the centrist Orthodox community, was disappointed with Tuesday's ruling.

"Once again the Constitution's provisions designed to promote a religiously pluralistic society have been turned on their heads and used to strike down the accommodation of religious citizens," said Diamant. □

Orthodox parties in Israel press legislation on religious councils

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Knesset members from the Orthodox religious political parties said they would leave the coalition if the government did not initiate legislation to prevent representatives from non-Orthodox streams of Judaism from being appointed to local religious councils.

The Orthodox lobby said it planned to meet with the prime minister next week to discuss the matter.

The High Court of Justice recently ordered Interior Minister Eli Suissa of the Shas Party to appoint representatives from the left-wing Meretz movement to the local religious council of Netanya.

Meretz has insisted that the representatives be from the Reform movement.

Orthodox parties in other municipalities have also tried to circumvent court-ordered appointments of non-Orthodox representatives to the religious councils, maintaining that the candidates do not meet other criteria.

The local councils have jurisdiction over religious matters. The move is the latest effort by the Orthodox to consolidate their control over Jewish life in Israel.

During its last Knesset session, the plenum passed a first of three readings of a bill, also submitted under pressure from the religious parties, that would set into law the Orthodox establishment's sole authority over conversions conducted in Israel. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Israeli who vanished now faces charges of aiding Iran's military***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli businessman disappeared in March. Three weeks later, a Tel Aviv judge allowed that he was being detained by Israel's domestic security service.

Israeli media had already begun to report Nahum Manbar's disappearance, speculating on his whereabouts amid allegations that he was involved in selling Iran components to manufacture chemical weapons.

"This is a complex security affair, which needs to be investigated not only in Israel, but also in other countries, and therefore the investigation takes time," Judge Dan Arbel, president of the Tel Aviv Magistrates Court, said April 16 in deciding to permit publication of Manbar's detention.

The judge did not reveal any details about the investigation, but he warned at the time that "the suspect may face a grave penalty of many years in jail" if the allegations against him are proven true.

This week, Manbar, 51, was charged in Tel Aviv District Court with aiding Iran, trying to damage state security and obstruction of justice.

Sections of the charge sheet released for publication said that from 1990 to 1994, Manbar supplied Iran with raw material for the manufacture of mustard and nerve gas.

Manbar, who faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment if he is convicted of aiding an enemy of Israel, is maintaining his innocence.

At the same time, questions linger about the circumstances surrounding his initial disappearance because it was not without precedent.

'A stain on our democracy'

Several other Israeli citizens have disappeared for lengthy periods before it was learned that they were held by Israeli security services.

These secret detentions have raised concerns among some in the legal and political community.

"This is a stain on our democracy and our legal system," Moshe Negbi, a respected analyst of legal affairs, wrote recently.

Zvi Aharoni, a former senior agent at the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic intelligence agency, once said in an interview with Ma'ariv that "there is a hysteria in Israel to hold people in secret detention, even when it's not necessary."

Among those who have been held secretly were:

- Motke Keidar, who was involved in the Lavon Affair, in which Israelis conspired in the mid-1950s to bomb an American library in Egypt in an effort to sabotage Egyptian-American relations. He was held secretly for 17 years in a prison cell. Other prisoners called him Mr. X because they did not know his true identity.

- Marcus Klingberg, a Tel Aviv University professor, was arrested and secretly sentenced in 1983 to serve 18 years in prison for spying for the Soviet Union. His case first surfaced in the British media in 1987, and later in German reports.

An Israeli news blackout was lifted in 1993, though details about the case and his capture remain unclear. According to Israeli reports, Klingberg immigrated to Israel in 1948, and was last seen in January 1983 en route to a scientific convention in Western Europe.

- Mordechai Vanunu, a technician employed at Israel's nuclear facility at Dimona, disappeared in 1986 and later reappeared in an Israeli jail. Vanunu was lured from

London to Rome in 1986 and kidnapped by Israeli agents, who brought him to Israel.

He was sentenced in 1988 to serve 18 years in prison for disclosing Israeli nuclear secrets to the London Times.

Under Israeli law, a judge can order a total ban on any details relating to the arrest of someone. At the request of police, a judge is authorized to prevent a meeting between the suspect and a lawyer for 14 days.

Avigdor Feldman, an attorney who represents both Klingberg and Vanunu, said that in many cases, the detainees themselves agree that their detention not be publicized.

But he added that the courts are usually generous in granting bans on publication in cases of state security.

But the practice is controversial, and some change in how such prisoners are handled is about to occur.

New legislation that will go into effect May 12 requires police to enable a meeting between a detainee and an attorney within 10 days after an arrest is made.

Under the new detention law, only a district court judge will be authorized to extend the detention period for up to 21 days, subject to a specific request authorized by the attorney general.

The new law, however, does not address the practice of keeping the person's detention secret. This will continue to be left to the discretion of the court.

In contrast to the others, Manbar's disappearance was relatively brief.

Manbar was born on Kibbutz Givat Brenner, and after completing his army service, he began a business career.

He left Israel in the mid-1980s with only \$600 in his pocket, and, living overseas, he gradually became a millionaire. For years, he lived in a spacious villa in St. Paul de Vence on the French Riviera, with his wife and two children. They recently moved to Lugano, Switzerland.

Manbar reportedly began to make significant money after he met with an Iranian delegation in Vienna in the early 1990s. According to reports, he allegedly struck a deal under which Russian tanks and other military equipment that were destined for Poland were eventually forwarded to Iran.

Manbar 'sold his soul to the Iranian devil'

As contacts with the Iranians developed, U.S. intelligence reportedly detected that Manbar had sold Iran elements of non-conventional arms. By 1994, the Israeli businessman was banned from entering the United States and American firms were warned not to do business with him.

Meanwhile, Israeli security services warned friends of Manbar to stay away from him, without specifying why.

Manbar's friends have insisted that his dealings with Iran took place with the full knowledge of Israeli authorities, and that when he was warned in 1993 to end those ties, he complied.

But security sources have maintained that "Manbar had sold his soul to the Iranian devil."

This week's indictment alleged that Manbar met several times with the head of Tehran's chemical warfare project, signed a contract and received \$16 million.

According to the indictment, Manbar told Israeli intelligence officials at the end of 1991 that he had contacts with Iran, but did not raise the matter of the chemical arms sales. However, in 1992, Israeli intelligence acquired information that raised their suspicions of his involvement in Iran's chemical weapons development.

The indictment said that when he was warned to cut off his ties with Iran, Manbar promised to do so, but in fact continued them until 1994. □