



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Dore Gold was named Israel's new ambassador to the United Nations.** The announcement put to rest rumors that he would replace Eliahu Ben-Elissar as ambassador to the United States. After meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Ben-Elissar said he was staying on. Gold, a native of Hartford, Conn., has served as the premier's top political adviser.

■ **An Israeli soldier was seriously wounded by a Hezbollah roadside explosion in the western sector of the Lebanon security zone.**

■ **Israel said it would complain to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights about the murders of 2 Palestinian land dealers who had sold land to Jews.** [Page 2]

■ **Israeli security forces operating in the Hebron area detained suspected members of a Hamas terrorist cell responsible for attacks against Israel.** [Page 3]

■ **U.S. lawmakers proposed legislation to create a White House office to monitor religious persecution across the world.** The bill would reportedly allow the United States to ban exports and cut foreign aid to countries that persecute people of other religions.

■ **A U.S. defense contractor agreed to pay \$14.8 million as a settlement in an alleged scheme to divert U.S. military aid to a slush fund controlled by an Israeli air force officer.** [Page 3]

■ **The World Jewish Restitution Organization selected Edgar Bronfman to serve on an interim basis on the executive board of a Swiss fund to aid needy Holocaust survivors.** A permanent replacement for the seat turned down by Elie Wiesel will be named when the WJRO meets in Jerusalem early next month.

Because of the Memorial Day holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, May 26.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Questions of direction persist in wake of failed Mideast mission

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Dennis Ross is no stranger to personal attacks.

Whenever the peace process hits a bump in the road, it seems someone gives the U.S. Middle East envoy a verbal beating.

During the late 1980s, when Israel came under U.S. pressure, some American Jews said Ross was a traitor to the Jewish people.

When Benjamin Netanyahu, as opposition leader in Israel, battled the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords, he attacked Ross for leading Israel down a path to doom.

Now, as Israeli-Palestinian relations remain in a deep freeze, the pointman for U.S. peace process policy once again is facing stinging criticisms.

The criticisms come as questions abound over the direction that Clinton's second-term administration will take in Arab-Israeli peacemaking.

They also come as new diplomatic players are poised to take key positions in the administration.

The most public attack on Ross came from Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, who wrote to President Clinton last week to complain about Ross. Other senior Palestinian officials argued this week with renewed vigor that Ross favors Israel, and some now say publicly that perhaps he is too Jewish to lead the negotiations.

These attacks on Ross come after the seasoned diplomat failed in his latest attempt to break a two-month impasse in Israeli-Palestinian talks.

Both the White House and the State Department are standing firmly behind the U.S. official who has toiled for almost 10 years for Middle East peace.

Thus, after Arafat initially refused to meet with Ross last Friday, at the end of his two-week shuttle mission, the U.S. consul general in Jerusalem told reporters that by refusing to meet with Ross, Arafat was refusing to meet with President Clinton.

The Palestinian leader hastily reversed course and received Ross, who had already left for the airport to return to the United States.

To make sure that the Palestinians got the message, Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright issued statements supporting Ross. They also plan to send him back to the region as early as next week.

Reviving talks dominates U.S. Middle East agenda

Bringing the Israelis and Palestinians back to face-to-face negotiations continues to dominate the American agenda for the Middle East.

Talks stalled after Israel began constructing Jewish housing at Har Homa, in southeastern Jerusalem, and a Palestinian suicide bomber killed three Israeli women at a Tel Aviv cafe.

But as the U.S. administration seeks the elusive formula required to rebuild trust between Israelis and Palestinians, pressure is mounting, often in competing directions, from the Palestinian Authority and Israel — and even from Washington.

One view, backed by Arafat and Israelis supportive of the peace accords, known commonly as the Oslo process, calls for greater American activism.

But U.S. officials have already dimmed the chances for Arafat's call that Clinton step up his personal involvement to break the impasse.

In an unusually blunt speech Sunday, Martin Indyk, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, said, "The core bargain of Oslo has broken down."

There is no "trust" between Israelis and Palestinians, he said.

U.S. diplomats say the Palestinians and Israelis must first recommit themselves to peace talks.

"They've got to want progress in the negotiations more than us," said State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns. "We'll be there with them, we'll mediate for them. But if they don't step up to the plate and compromise with each other, there isn't going to be peace in the Middle East."

But if the impasse continues, with all of its attendant risks of renewed

Israeli-Palestinian violence, some rethinking in the U.S. approach may come, especially after Albright fills out her team.

American activists point to staff changes about to be finalized that will bring Stuart Eizenstat and Thomas Pickering into Albright's inner circle of top State Department officials.

Eizenstat is the undersecretary of commerce who just completed a searing report on Switzerland's dealings with Nazi Germany. Veteran Middle East expert Thomas Pickering has served as U.S. ambassador to Israel, Jordan and the United Nations.

While neither official will have direct responsibility for Middle East policy, both may bring considerable experience and fresh thinking to policy-making at Foggy Bottom.

Indyk, who has worked with Ross for months to secure a package of Israeli concessions and Palestinian understandings aimed at rebuilding trust, is set to return to Washington to head the Near East office at the State Department.

Whether these officials advocate a more activist role for Albright, who has so far shied away from direct day-to-day Middle East problems, will likely depend as much on the parties to the talks as on the thinking at the White House.

Vice president concerned about next elections

Rumors that Vice President Al Gore asked Clinton to refrain from pressuring Israel in order to avoid alienating potential Jewish voters for his anticipated presidential campaign in the year 2000 were denied by White House officials. However, one political operative said, "If we're going to do it, do it now," not two years from now when Gore is in a primary battle.

Meanwhile, the United States is looking for proof that the Israelis and Palestinians are serious about moving forward, said one official.

The formula has been on the table for months, he said, referring to the package of concessions that Israel is prepared to offer the Palestinians if security cooperation resumes and Arafat renews a crackdown on terrorism.

But the Palestinians also want an Israeli pledge to stop expanding West Bank settlements. Netanyahu has refused and so far Clinton, who has himself expressed concern about settlements, has not pressed Israel on the issue.

However, in a sign that the Clinton administration is concerned about settlement activity, U.S. officials confirmed a Ha'aretz report this week that the United States had prepared a study that found that one quarter of the homes in Jewish settlements in the West Bank are vacant.

The report apparently was intended to refute Israeli claims that they need to build at existing settlements to meet housing needs.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the figures in the report far overstated the reality.

As Ross prepares for another attempt at reviving the talks, and the Clinton administration considers its approach, the United States is not about to walk away altogether.

"We must restore the integrity of the negotiating process," Gore said in an address to the Anti-Defamation League in Washington this week.

"Solutions will not always arrive through dramatic gestures. More often they will arrive from patient, steady, determined diplomacy," Gore said. "We're in this for the long term." □

(JTA correspondent David Landau in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

Israel appeals to United Nations on murders of Arab land dealers

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel is planning to lodge a formal complaint with the United Nations Committee on Human Rights about the murders of Palestinians who sold land to Jews.

Israeli Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh said Wednesday that the Palestinian Authority's recent declaration that selling land to Jews is an offense punishable by death was racist and reeks of anti-Semitism.

The U.N. committee decided two years ago to deal with anti-Semitic incidents worldwide.

Two Palestinians suspected of selling land to Jews were murdered this month.

Israel has accused the Palestinian Authority of involvement in the slayings.

While Palestinian officials have denied any responsibility, Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat reiterated this week that the death penalty was a legitimate defense against Israeli settlement activity.

In an interview with the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, Arafat said the death penalty was first imposed by Jordan in 1967, after Israel captured the territory from West Bank.

"How should we call our own who serve the Israeli policy of dispossession? They are isolated traitors and we will act against them according to the law," he was quoted as saying.

Arafat's remarks prompted a sharp rebuke from the United States.

After weeks of qualified criticism, the State Department lambasted Arafat and his deputies for their "reprehensible" statements on the murders of Arab land dealers.

"I don't think we have heard from the Palestinians the kind of resounding renunciation of violence that one would hope to hear," said State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns.

In the Knesset, Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani denounced Arafat's remarks, saying that they are feeding directly into a cycle of violence.

He said Israel would do its part to protect eastern Jerusalem Arabs.

In a related development, Israeli officials expressed concern Wednesday about increasing Arab offers to purchase land in Israel from Jews.

Haim Cohen, the deputy chairman of the Jewish National Fund, said he believed senior Palestinian Authority officials were behind these efforts, and he knew of at least one such sale in north Jerusalem.

The JNF board of directors has decided to take extensive actions to prevent the sale of land in Israel to non-Jews, even if that requires getting bank loans to acquire the land.

The dispute over land has been at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Talks have been stalled since March, when Israel broke ground for a new Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa, in southeastern Jerusalem.

The Palestinians viewed the move as a unilateral step aimed at altering the status quo in Jerusalem before final-status talks on its future.

The Palestinians also broke off security cooperation with Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has demanded the resumption of such cooperation as a condition for the renewal of negotiations.

A shuttle mission by U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross ended last week without getting the sides to resume negotiations. □

Defense contractor settles case, sealing the book on 'Dotan affair'*By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Hailing Israeli cooperation in the matter, the U.S. Justice Department has settled the last charge stemming from a 1987 embezzlement scam orchestrated by an Israeli air force officer.

Rami Dotan schemed with defense contractors to set up a \$10 million slush fund skimmed from U.S. military aid to Israel.

Dotan is currently serving a 13-year jail sentence in Israel for the crime.

This week, the Pratt & Whitney Group of United Technologies Corp., the premier jet engine manufacturer, paid \$14.8 million to settle charges that they falsely billed the United States for \$10 million in work that was never performed.

That money was then diverted to Dotan, according to the Justice Department.

More than \$2 million also was diverted to other companies at Dotan's orders and paid out to other Israeli officers, according to the Justice Department.

"The Israeli police assisted with numerous witness interviews, while the Israeli Ministry of Defense cooperated with significant document requests by both sides," said Frank Hunger, a U.S. assistant attorney general.

The Defense Ministry also "produced scores of Israeli witnesses for interviews and depositions," Hunger said.

Other U.S. defense contractors, including General Electric, have pled guilty to felony charges stemming from the "Dotan affair." □

Israeli minister offers plan to control West Bank water*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A hard-line member of the Israeli government has proposed that Israel declare its sovereignty over large portions of the West Bank in order to ensure control over water sources.

National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon raised the proposal at a meeting of senior ministers on the future of Israeli water sources, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Implementation of the plan would require that Israel significantly reduce the amount of West Bank land it eventually transfers to the Palestinian Authority, Ha'aretz reported.

Sharon proposed that in return, Israel would triple its water supply to Palestinian towns.

The Palestinians would also be obliged to build purification systems for waste water and sewage in order to prevent the contamination of water sources located in the West Bank.

The water issue has become a source of friction between Israel and the United States because Sharon's ministry has refused to fulfill an understanding reached with the former Labor government of Yitzhak Rabin, Ha'aretz reported.

That understanding provided that the United States would allocate \$46 million for an American company to drill three wells for Palestinians in the West Bank.

U.S. officials said Israel had approved two of the wells, but without authorization of the third, the work could not begin.

Sharon has demanded that the Palestinians first provide a plan for sewage disposal in the area.

The U.S. ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, met with Sharon recently to discuss the matter. □

Israel nabs Hamas cell in Hebron

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli security forces have uncovered a Hamas terrorist cell in the Hebron area whose members are suspected of involvement in attacks against Israel. Israel Radio reported that in recent weeks, security forces had detained dozens of residents from villages around Hebron and Bethlehem. The radio said suspected members of the cell were being questioned.

Earlier this year, Israel arrested members of a Hamas terrorist cell from the Hebron-area village of Tsurif, which was responsible for murdering 11 Israelis and wounding dozens in attacks over the past two years.

The six-member cell was responsible for the kidnap-murder of Israeli soldier Sharon Edri, whose body was recovered when the cell was cracked, as well as for the suicide bombing at a Tel Aviv cafe in March, in which three Israeli women were killed. Three members of the cell are being held by Palestinian security forces. □

Jordan to try soldier who killed 7

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Jordanian soldier who shot dead seven Israeli schoolgirls on the border between the two countries will go on trial next week in a military court outside of Amman.

A five-member panel, headed by a brigadier general, will hear the case. Prosecutors said Ahmed Daqamsa, a 28-year-old driver, will be charged with premeditated murder for the March incident, an offense that carries the death penalty.

Daqamsa's lawyer said his client did not deny that he shot the girls who were on an outing at the Naharayim enclave, but that he was provoked by the girls' making fun of him while he was performing noon prayers.

He said his client also said that he considered the shooting a "nationalist" act. □

Sharansky to take on Deep Blue

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Natan Sharansky is going to try his luck next month against Deep Blue, the IBM computer that defeated world chess champion Gary Kasparov in a six-game match earlier this month.

After Sharansky, Israel's trade and industry minister, expressed interest in taking on the supercomputer, IBM invited him to play during an official business trip to the United States slated for next month.

Though no grandmaster, Sharansky perfected his chess game during the nine years he spent in a Soviet jail as a political dissident before coming to Israel in 1986.

Last year, Sharansky won a game against Kasparov, who was playing 25 games simultaneously at the time.

For his part, Kasparov, who is currently in Israel to inaugurate the opening of a new chess center, said he wanted to take on the computer again. □

Palestinians arrest journalist

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian police have arrested Daoud Kuttab, a Palestinian journalist with U.S. citizenship, and are holding him in a Ramallah jail.

Palestinian sources said that Kuttab, who runs a television production company in eastern Jerusalem, apparently broke censorship regulations by broadcasting live from Palestinian Legislative Council sessions.

Last year, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists awarded Kuttab the International Press Freedom Award for his work challenging censorship practices of both the Palestinians and Israelis. □

Documents: Britain leaders knew of early slaughter of Jews

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Newly released British intelligence documents showing that British leaders knew of Hitler's Final Solution from day one provide startling new details about the Holocaust, but few revelations, Holocaust scholars say.

Britain this week released transcripts of intercepted German police radio messages showing that the systematic extermination of Jews began several months before it had previously been believed and that senior British officials had intimate knowledge about the Nazi campaign.

"What these records reveal is how much the British knew of the atrocities as they were happening," John Fox, a lecturer in Jewish history and Holocaust studies at Jew's College in London, was quoted as saying.

Fox had pushed the British government to declassify the documents after the U.S. National Security Agency declassified similar British intelligence information last fall, following a Freedom of Information Act request by a U.S. researcher.

Both sets of documents contain similar findings about the beginning of the German slaughter of Jews.

The British documents simply flesh out additional details.

In the fall, Richard Breitman, a professor of history at American University, went public with British intelligence reports provided by the NSA showing that London knew about the first massacres of Russian Jews in June 1941, following the German invasion of Russia.

Historians had previously believed that the Final Solution was set in motion several months later, in early 1942, when the Nazis began the mass extermination of Jews in death camps.

'A policy of savage intimidation'

The intercepted German police messages showed, however, that mass killings of Jews began taking place in the summer of 1941. A Sept. 12, 1941 British intelligence report referred, for example, to "evidence of a policy of savage intimidation if not of ultimate extermination" of Jews.

In addition to providing a new glimpse into the beginning of the Holocaust, the documents attest to the close cooperation of ordinary German police units with SS troops in the massacre of Jews.

Juergen Matthaeus, an historian and research fellow at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, said the role the German police played in the extermination of Jews "is not a new element when it comes to the history of the Holocaust."

But, he added, it is something that is not "all that prevalent in the public mind" and needs to be underscored.

Holocaust scholars, meanwhile, took a dim view of the re-emergence of estimates that as many as 7 million Jews may have died in the Holocaust. Despite media reports to the contrary, they say there is no evidence to support that claim.

Revelations about Britain's detailed knowledge of the early slaughter of Jews has also raised the question about whether the British shared that information with the United States.

"I'm still working on that one," said Breitman, who plans to publish a book examining the German cables.

"There was intelligence-sharing during the war and agreements were made," he said.

"But no one has deduced into which category this particular information fell."

Breitman anticipates that the British declassification

will lead to a new round of research into "how much the West knew and when, and what might have been done with the information."

Some Jewish leaders are calling for a thorough examination of that matter, particularly in light of the search for historical truth that Switzerland and other nations have been pressured to undertake.

"Now that we've pointed the finger and said what the neutrals did, I think it's time to ask ourselves, 'What could we have done?'" said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, addressing his organization's leadership conference in Washington this week.

"Why, if we knew from day one, was there so little done?" Foxman said. "I think it's time to ask ourselves, what could we have done, what did we do, and why didn't we do more?" □

Argentine court may end probe of 1992 Israeli Embassy bombing

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Five years after the Israeli Embassy was razed by a terrorist bomb, the Argentine Supreme Court is considering closing its investigation of the unsolved attack.

The powerful explosion killed 29 people and wounded 250.

Apart from agreeing on the casualty figures, the court's nine justices have yet to agree on how the March 17, 1992, attack was carried out. No suspects have been apprehended.

Justice Carlos Fayt is trying to get Argentine Jewish officials to agree to a "downgrading" of the investigation because of the lack of results and new evidence, according to local media reports.

But Ruben Beraja, president of the Argentine Jewish umbrella organization DAIA, said, "The court should keep on investigating the case."

Last week, the court held a closed session in an apparent effort to resolve an ongoing controversy over where the bomb had been placed.

The two senior police officials who authored one technical study told the court why they believe a pick-up truck was used to deliver the bomb.

A team of three engineers, who conducted a separate study, reviewed why they think explosives were placed inside the embassy, at a point near the main entrance.

Both studies had been presented to the court previously, and no new evidence was presented by the authors.

"We learned nothing new," said Justice Julio Nazareno.

One Argentine official described the 12-hour court session as "exhausting and pointless, a real waste of time and money."

Yitzhak Aviran, Israel's ambassador to Argentina, said this week that the court "should forget once and for all the pointless idea that the explosives were inside the building."

He said the justices "should admit that Iran was behind the bombing, that the terrorists came from abroad and that Argentina has the duty to find their local accomplices and punish them."

The Argentine government has been severely criticized for not resolving both the embassy attack and the July 18, 1994, bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association, also known as AMIA. That attack, which sparked international outrage, left 86 dead and more than 300 wounded. □