



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Supporters of a school prayer amendment to the U.S. Constitution launched a campaign on Capitol Hill, vowing to bring religion back to the public schools. [Page 3]

■ The White House called on the Palestinian Authority to "immediately" release jailed Palestinian journalist Daoud Kuttab. Police arrested Kuttab, a U.S. citizen, after he broadcast Palestinian legislative sessions that contained speeches critical of Yasser Arafat.

■ Police in Basel, Switzerland are looking into charges that the honorary chairman of the Union Bank of Switzerland made anti-Semitic remarks. The probe comes as a local Jewish politician called on the bank to fire Robert Holzach.

■ The international panel charged with studying the missing assets of Holocaust victims deposited in Swiss bank accounts has not yet begun its work, according to a high-ranking Swiss official. The work of the commission, headed by Paul Volcker, was stalled because the three auditing firms that were to be involved in the probe were afraid of lawsuits.

■ Israel approved the construction of more than 3,000 new homes for Arabs in a village across from Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem. [Page 3]

■ Peace Now said a U.S. study overestimated the number of empty homes in Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. The group conducted its own study recently and found that only about 12 percent of the homes were vacant, about half of what the U.S. study found.

■ A law that would allow Russia to keep works of art seized from Germany after World War II was reportedly rejected and returned to Parliament by Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Many Russians believe the art should be compensation for those killed in the war.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Berlin's Jews go to the polls to cast a vote for their future

By Deidre Berger

BERLIN (JTA) — Jewish community elections in Germany are rarely covered in the German media. But the upcoming election in Berlin on June 1 has catapulted the city's Jewish community into the center of nationwide media attention.

The stories center on real estate scandals, alleged financial mismanagement of community funds, and bitter personal rivalries among community representatives.

The reports, which cast a shadow on the integrity of some leading members of Germany's largest Jewish community, come just two years before the German government is scheduled to move most of its offices from Bonn to Berlin.

Jewish leaders worry that if the negative publicity continues, it could weaken the community and damage the political influence of Berlin's Jewish community in the German capital.

There is also concern that the mudslinging could taint the community's reputation as a watchdog on issues of tolerance, racism and human rights.

The sensationalist headlines have obscured the larger significance of the Berlin elections for the Jewish community.

Many observers expect the outcome to reshape the identity of the fast-growing community of 10,500 members — and to act as a bellwether for the future of Germany's Jewish community of 60,000.

"The Berlin community today has brought the situation of Jews in Germany at large into sharp focus," said Michael Bodemann, a German-Canadian sociologist at the University of Toronto.

He is one of many who believe that the upcoming elections could lead the way to a generational change in power, provide a growing influence for the Russian Jews who now form the majority of Germany's Jewish community, and create a more public role for the community in German society.

Communal election attracts German media attention

The media attention began last year, when a Berlin newspaper printed charges from the heirs of former Jewish property owners in eastern Germany that a young lawyer on the community's board of directors had cheated them on restitution claims.

The newspaper, *Der Tagesspiegel*, documented four cases where clients claimed that the lawyer had advised them to sell their property claims far below market value.

In several cases, the buyer was the son-in-law of Jerzy Kanal, the chairman of Berlin's Jewish community. The lawyer denied improper behavior.

Berlin prosecutors launched a fraud investigation, but later dropped the charges.

The lawyer's supporters launched a counterattack on her opponents in the Jewish parliament, which runs the affairs of the community.

They accused a member of the opposition faction in the parliament of involvement in prostitution and activities linked to the Russian mafia.

They never furnished evidence of the charges, nor was the woman ever under investigation by city authorities.

The conflict reached its peak when the lawyer involved with Jewish property claims accused the family of a venerated member of the German resistance of being "Aryanizers" for purchasing a house in the 1930s that had once belonged to a Jewish family.

The head of Germany's Jewish community, Ignatz Bubis, apologized personally to the family of Hans von Dohnanyi, who was executed in 1945 for his resistance to the Nazi regime.

Media reports on this incident prompted Kanal to hold a news conference, at which he accused a German reporter of being a "proto-facit crypto-anti-Semite."

Meanwhile, within the community, critics of Kanal and his supporters

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accused the board of financial mismanagement, and damage to the community's public image.

The conflict became so divisive that 40-year-old lawyer Michel Friedman, a nationally respected Jewish community leader from Frankfurt who was expected to run for head of the Berlin community, pulled out of the elections.

But the campaign continues, with 56 candidates vying for 21 seats on the community parliament.

After decades of leadership by Holocaust survivors, more than half of the candidates in the current election are under the age of 45.

Once the parliament is elected, its members will choose a new chairman to lead the Jewish community to replace the 75-year-old Kanal. Although the position is honorary, the chairman of Berlin's Jewish community has considerable political influence in Germany.

Many candidates speak Russian

Another new development is that more than half of the candidates speak Russian as a mother tongue.

Two-thirds of the city's Jewish community members were born in the former Soviet Union. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, tens of thousands of Russian Jews have moved to Germany, nearly doubling the size of the Berlin community, and close to tripling the size of Germany's overall Jewish population.

Many of the younger Jews who grew up in Germany, as well as the more recent Russian arrivals, share a more positive attitude about being Jewish in Germany, according to Bodemann and other observers.

He believes the fact that tens of thousands of Jews have voluntarily moved to Germany in recent years will bring new vigor into a community whose members often felt stigmatized by Jews elsewhere for their decision to relaunch Jewish life in Germany after the Holocaust.

In their campaign statements, almost none of the candidates mention either the Holocaust or Israel, the issues that have dominated Jewish life in Germany since World War II.

Instead, election pamphlets reflect a new interest in a stronger Jewish identity and more connection with German life.

"The community must open up," writes one candidate, Katja Biek-Czarnyi. "It can not stand on the sidelines — it must participate in the social life of the city. It is part of the society and should be part of the society."

Says another candidate, Rudiger Mahlo: "We have to change the basis of our Jewish identity. We should move away from the idea of orienting our Jewishness entirely around the Holocaust, away from a negative identity and towards a positive identity in Judaism."

Another candidate for the parliament who has been active in community affairs is Norma Drimmer. She believes that Berlin's Jews have an important role to play in connection with the non-Jewish community.

In past decades, many believed the role of a Jewish community in Germany was to observe the progress of German democracy and speak out for minority rights.

"Now it is time to reflect on our political role and further strengthen it," Drimmer said.

Whatever the outcome of the elections, Drimmer is convinced that the community is at a watershed.

Speaking at a conference held at New York University in early May, she said the German Jewish community must decide how it judges and incorporates the memory of historical experience, and what structures it creates to shape Jewish lives.

Only then, she said, can the community maintain its identity. □

Israel appoints new U.N. envoy; keeps on Washington ambassador

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It looks like Israel's ambassador to the United States is staying — and a new one is headed to the United Nations.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu withdrew reported plans to replace the Israeli ambassador to the United States, Eliahu Ben-Elissar, with his political adviser, Dore Gold.

Instead, Gold has been appointed ambassador-designate to the United Nations.

Netanyahu's appointments of Gold and other key officials this week averted what might have developed into another crisis in his government.

The decision to keep Ben-Elissar was reached after the diplomat flew to Jerusalem for urgent consultations.

Relations between him and Netanyahu apparently have suffered strains, and Ben-Elissar was in the hot seat after recent reports that the FBI had been investigating whether a U.S. government official was passing sensitive information to Israel.

On visits to the White House, Netanyahu also has been seen as allowing Gold to eclipse Ben-Elissar.

Meanwhile, Gold who immigrated from the United States, is in the process of rescinding his American citizenship, a requirement of the U.N. post. That post has been filled by David Peleg for the past year, since the former Labor government's appointee, Gad Ya'acobi, left.

Gold's replacement as the prime minister's diplomatic adviser is Uzi Arad, a senior official in the Mossad intelligence service. Arad, who recently headed the Mossad's research department, has a doctorate in international relations from Princeton University, and has been involved in Israel's multilateral negotiations.

Former AIPAC official to be No. 2 at embassy

In other appointments, Leonard Davis, former head of the Israel office of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, is to become a deputy chief of mission at the embassy in Washington.

The appointments were announced after discussions this week between Netanyahu and Foreign Minister David Levy.

Levy reportedly vetoed a senior posting for Likud veteran Zalman Shoval, who was said to be under consideration for the U.N. spot. Levy maintains that Shoval failed to brief him when Levy was foreign minister under Yitzhak Shamir's Likud government and Shoval was Israel's ambassador to Washington.

The latest round of appointments came at a time when Netanyahu was weighed down by a number of personnel dilemmas. Israel's ambassador to Jordan, Oded Eran, was convinced to withdraw his resignation, which he submitted after not being notified of a secret meeting between Netanyahu and King Hussein.

At the same time, Deputy Finance Minister David Magen of the Geshet bloc resigned this week to protest the way the government is operating.

And there was also a battle over the justice portfolio. Former Justice Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, who was Netanyahu's preferred candidate, was acquitted of perjury charges, but the current minister, Tzachi Hanegbi, announced he would not step down. Hanegbi organized a rally Thursday evening to muster support to keep him in his post, and to appoint Likud Knesset member Silvan Shalom to the science portfolio.

Ze'ev "Benny" Begin resigned from that post in protest after the Hebron agreement was signed with the Palestinians. □

Campaign for prayer amendment begins with tales of 'persecution'

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Christian Coalition this week kicked off a nationwide campaign to build momentum for a school prayer amendment to the Constitution.

Gathered for a Capitol Hill rally for what they billed as a "Religious Freedom Celebration," more than 100 supporters vowed to make a vigorous push for the passage of the so-called "Religious Freedom Amendment," sponsored by U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.).

Their push came as church-state watchdogs continued to deride the measure as unnecessary and dangerous.

"Our goal is to deluge Capitol Hill with over a million petitions, telegrams and phone calls and get a vote on the 'Religious Freedom Amendment' to the Constitution before the 1998 election so that the American people know where every member of Congress stands on this issue before they go to the polls," said Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition.

Flanked by representatives of racially diverse conservative religious groups, including a black church choir, Reed said, "There is no issue that will take a back seat to seeing a day when every child in America can bow their head and begin their day in a public school with prayer."

Istook said his amendment will protect religious expression on public property by putting an end to 30 years of what he termed wrong-headed court rulings that have "hijacked" the First Amendment.

'They have taken the shield'

"The First Amendment was intended to be a shield for our religious freedom and our religious liberty," Istook said. "They have taken the shield and they've made it into a sword to attack religious expression, to censor it, to suppress it.

"We are going to beat that sword back into the shield it was intended to be."

A similar bid to amend the Constitution during the last Congress became mired in disputes over language, and the current campaign faces another uphill battle.

The Istook amendment has acquired nearly 120 cosponsors, including House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Texas). But most observers believe the measure will fall far short of the two-thirds majority necessary for passage.

Istook said he hopes to hold hearings this summer and bring the measure up for a vote this fall. There is no movement in the Senate for such an amendment.

At the rally, the Christian Coalition brought forward several people it called "victims" of religious discrimination, including a wheelchair-bound girl who was told she could not read her Bible on a school bus, and a student who received an "F" on a school paper she wrote about Jesus.

One Jewish observer said the conservative Christian lobby put on an extravagant show that poses new challenges for opponents of the measure.

"It would be a mistake to underestimate the impact of a 30-second sound bite" featuring children "in front of a giant American flag telling stories of religious persecution," said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League.

"We cannot simply rely on amicus briefs and tried and true legal arguments to meet the challenge of that kind of a presentation. We must do more."

Other opponents of the amendment were quick to

point out that most of the cases the Christian Coalition held up as examples of religious discrimination were settled under existing law.

"The truth is students are free to engage in a remarkable array of private religious expression during their free time," said the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of the Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.

"In the rare instances where a public school official has made a mistake about a student's religious rights, the problems can be corrected by a simple phone call or letter."

Meanwhile, Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, renewed an appeal to Reed this week to make good on a pledge he made two years ago to actively support U.S. aid to Israel.

In a recent letter to Reed, Saperstein wrote that he was "profoundly disappointed" after "waiting two years for any public word from you in support of foreign aid to Israel."

Reed, who has announced he is stepping down from his post to create his own campaign consulting firm, said in a brief interview Thursday: "I've already publicly made clear my support for aid for Israel and I'll continue to do that."

Asked whether he intended to press the issue as Congress begins deliberations over the U.S. foreign aid budget, Reed said, "I'll be in touch with leaders in the Jewish community about the best way to go about it." □

Egypt and Israel to meet soon in effort to save peace process

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli President Ezer Weizman and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak are expected to meet soon in an effort to salvage the stalled Middle East peace process.

Israel Radio reported Thursday that the talks would take place within the framework of a new initiative launched by Egypt.

Mubarak met this week with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat. Arafat was prompted to fly to Cairo after what a spokesman said was the failure of U.S. envoy Dennis Ross to get Israeli-Palestinian negotiations back on track.

Officials at the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem welcomed the initiative, and said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mubarak spoke about it by telephone Thursday.

Unofficially, however, Israel Radio reported that sources in Jerusalem were disturbed by what they considered a counterproductive role Egypt has been playing in the process. They pointed to Egypt's role in encouraging the Palestinians to harden their stance, and in fueling international and Arab public opinion against Israel.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa confirmed that there were contacts with Israel, but said no meeting between Mubarak and Weizman was expected to take place in the coming days.

Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have been stalled since March, when Israel broke ground for a new Jewish neighborhood in southeastern Jerusalem and a suicide bomber killed three Israeli women at a Tel Aviv cafe.

Meanwhile, Israel approved the construction of some 3,000 housing units in the Arab neighborhood of Tsur Baher in Jerusalem.

As a gesture to the Palestinians following the groundbreaking at Har Homa, Netanyahu announced that he would also provide for more construction for Arabs in eastern Jerusalem. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Arab collaborators feel neglected in era of Israeli-Palestinian accords***By Gil Sedan*

FUNDUK, West Bank (JTA) — Sadek Billeh says he is not afraid.

The 47-year-old Palestinian has spent nearly half of his life supplying Israel with intelligence information about his Arab brethren.

In the eyes of Palestinians, he is a collaborator — and, over the years, a long list of them have been executed by other Palestinians for cooperating with Israel.

Indeed, this month the bodies of two Palestinians were found in the self-ruled West Bank town of Ramallah. They were murdered because they had been involved in selling land to Jews.

Billeh began supplying intelligence to Israel in the mid-1970s. But he walks around the village of Funduk, near the Palestinian-controlled town of Nablus, with little concern that an assassin, bent on vengeance, could come for him at any time.

Pointing at his forehead, Billeh declares: "When the time comes, the bullet will hit. But only Allah will determine when the time comes."

Billeh, along with thousands of other Palestinians who have collaborated with Israel over the past 30 years, has seen better days.

His cooperation with the Israelis led to the detention of security suspects, but he says it also proved useful to other Palestinians.

Some turned to him to "cut red tape" in their appeals to the Israeli authorities for building permits, work permits and exit visas for travel to Jordan.

In exchange for cash, Billeh obliged.

"I used to be more important than the military governor of Nablus," Billeh boasts.

He collected enough money to build a small plant to manufacture fluorescent lamps.

But after the intifada began in 1987, everything changed. The Palestinian leadership ordered a boycott of his business, and his \$100,000 factory had to shut down.

The next blow came after the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the main Palestinian cities, including Nablus, in late 1995. Israeli intelligence found Billeh and many other informants no longer useful.

"They have dumped us after the Oslo accords," says Billeh, referring to the series of Israeli-Palestinian agreements, beginning in 1993.

"We had often known of terrorist conspiracies in advance and prevented them," says Avi Mashriki, 54, a veteran collaborator from the West Bank town of Tulkarm. "Now there is no one to put on the warning signal."

Damage to Israeli-Palestinian intelligence?

Mashriki, who converted to Judaism in 1989 and moved to Israel, says that "the Israelis have taken off their own antennas in the West Bank," referring to Palestinian informants. "This has done serious damage to Israel's intelligence grip in the territories."

The former head of the Shin Bet, the Israeli intelligence agency that handles Palestinian informants, disagrees.

"Israel has a sufficient number of so-called antennas in the territories to supply its intelligence needs," says Ya'acov Peri. "But the Arab collaborators who have been exposed can no longer be considered a valuable intelligence asset."

After the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian accord, the Jewish state offered hundreds of collaborators the chance to resettle in Israel and many accepted.

By 1994, the Shin Bet set up a special rehabilitation administration to deal with this special group of new immigrants — Arabs who had betrayed their own people.

"We were driven by humanitarian motives," recalls Peri, who headed the Shin Bet at the time. "We felt obliged to help those people who could no longer stay at their original homes."

The rehabilitation administration takes care of some 1,000 families of collaborators who now live in Israel.

But there are at least another 3,000 who have settled in Israel without legal permits, because of their fear of staying in their homes, according to collaborators.

Those who resettled legally have been receiving financial assistance from the Israeli government that in some cases has reached hundreds of thousand of dollars, according to sources in the Shin Bet.

Billeh, meanwhile, has remained in Funduk, which is located in an area of the West Bank that remains under Israeli control.

Whether or not Funduk will ultimately be transferred to Palestinian rule is still to be decided in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

But while Billeh would like to leave, he charges that Israel has refused to grant his adult children residence permits.

"I will not leave my children behind," he says. "I am their security." □

Israeli soldier hurt seriously in Lebanon security zone blast*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli soldier was seriously wounded Wednesday by a Hezbollah roadside explosion in southern Lebanon.

The device — either a mine or a bomb — exploded when an Israeli patrol operating in the central sector of the security zone passed by.

The soldier, hit by shrapnel in the chest, was evacuated by helicopter to Israel. A bomb-sniffing dog working with the soldier was also wounded.

Israel Defense Force sources said the distance between other members of the unit and the explosion prevented further casualties.

Wednesday's explosion came a week after three IDF soldiers were killed and seven others wounded in clashes with Hezbollah in the security zone.

Israeli fighter planes carried out raids over the weekend on Hezbollah targets in Lebanon.

On Monday, Israeli forces thwarted an attack by an Islamic militant on a navy patrol near the Lebanese coast.

Israeli President Ezer Weizman, commenting on the hostilities north of Israel's border, called for a renewal of peace negotiations with Syria, which broke off in March 1996.

Speaking at a swearing-in ceremony for judges at his residence in Jerusalem, Weizman said the only way to bring an end to the hostilities in Lebanon is through a large-scale military operation, or serious talks with Damascus.

In the Knesset, Labor legislator Yossi Beilin reiterated his call for a new approach to dealing with the situation in Lebanon.

Beilin, a candidate for Labor Party chairman, said it is possible for the IDF to unilaterally withdraw from Lebanon and still defend the country's northern border. He said that senior officers in the IDF northern command support this view.

Knesset member Ephraim Sneh, who also is vying for the Labor leadership, said the proposal is flawed and does not represent the view of the party. □