



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ American Jewish community leaders expressed outrage that House Republicans backed away from a commitment to restore federal aid to disabled legal immigrants, who are slated to lose their benefits in August as a result of last year's welfare reform legislation.

■ The U.S. House of Representatives dropped from its foreign operations authorization bill the Lautenberg Amendment, which enabled Jews and other persecuted groups to immigrate under eased criteria.

■ The Jewish Agency for Israel will be spending an additional \$1 million this year on programs promoting Jewish unity and pluralism. The increase was authorized by the United Israel Appeal.

■ A U.N. committee proposed a resolution requiring Israel to pay more than \$1.7 million for damage resulting from the 1996 shelling of a U.N. base in Lebanon. About 100 Lebanese refugees were killed in the Israeli attack at Kana.

■ The United States rescinded approval for three El Al routes to Washington, Orlando and Dallas. The move followed the decision of Israel's civil aviation authority to reject a New York-Athens-Tel Aviv route by the U.S.-based Tower Air.

■ Israel's defense minister ordered an investigation into the behavior of a group of army officers who gambled in Polish casinos during an official trip to Nazi death camps. [Page 2]

■ A controversy has erupted over a Slovakian history book that glamorizes the treatment of the country's Jews during World War II. The book claims that dentists offered gold teeth to Jews in internment camps and that Jewish children were able to leave the camps during school holidays. [Page 2]

Because of Shavuot, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published June 12 and June 13.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Forces opposing conversion bill split over negotiating strategy

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A split has emerged between the Reform and Conservative movements over how to resolve the crisis swirling around impending conversion legislation.

The Reform movement said this week that it would freeze all of its legal motions seeking recognition of its Israeli conversions, provided the government stops its efforts to pass a bill and agrees to enter into formal negotiations to find a solution.

But the Conservative movement, which expressed surprise at the Reform proposal, maintained that the pressure of continued litigation was the only way to force the religious parties to the negotiating table.

The bill, which would cement in law exclusive Orthodox authority over conversions performed in Israel, is expected to be brought before the Knesset for final action by the end of this month if no compromise is reached.

The religious parties have threatened to bring down the Netanyahu government by leaving the coalition if the bill does not become law.

Members of the non-Orthodox streams in Israel and in the United States have protested that the legislation would not only delegitimize Reform and Conservative conversions performed in Israel, but would also negate their practice of Judaism.

Indeed, champions of pluralism this week delivered 5,000 petitions signed by North American Jews to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calling on him to reject the legislation.

"Even though such a law would be limited to conversions performed in Israel, it declares that in the eyes of the State of Israel, the beliefs and practices of the vast majority of the world's Jews are not authentically Jewish," the petition said.

The petition, organized by the New Israel Fund, was presented as the Knesset Law Committee met Wednesday to prepare the legislation for further action. The controversial measure was passed by the Knesset April 1 in the first of three Knesset votes, known as readings.

The Reform and Conservative movements in Israel have both brought cases over the past several years to Israel's High Court of Justice to secure recognition for their conversions. Indeed, Netanyahu has blamed these initiatives for sparking Orthodox anger and a call for conversion legislation. The movements have rejected that notion.

The Reform movement's offer to freeze litigation appeared to be an effort to postpone further the second and third readings.

Netanyahu has in recent weeks urged the Reform and Conservative movements to halt their litigation in order to stop the legislation.

### 'J' instead of 'Jewish'

Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center, said in an interview Wednesday that the movement "is willing to consider" four of the five compromise measures that have been suggested in an effort to "find a negotiated solution" to the conversion question.

Those four proposals are:

• A suggestion by Rabbi Yisrael Rosenne, head of the Chief Rabbinate's conversion authority, that the registration of national identity, such as Jewish, on Israeli identity cards would remain for converts, while the Interior Ministry would record in its registry the type of conversion. This list would not be accessible to the general public.

• Knesset member Avraham Ravitz, of United Torah Judaism, an Orthodox party, has proposed that identity cards only list the first letter of a person's religion, such as the letter "J," instead of the word "Jewish." Again, the Interior Ministry would record the conversion and its denomination.

• Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, chief rabbi of Efrat, has recommended the establishment of a joint religious court related to conversions that would include all religious streams of Judaism.

• A suggestion proffered by Knesset member Yuri Stern, of the

Yisrael Ba'Aliyah immigrant-rights party, would eliminate the nationality/religious listing from identity cards.

A fifth proposal, which the Reform movement said it is not prepared to consider, would encode the type of conversion in the second digit of the identity card number, making it possible for others to determine what type of conversion the card holder had undergone.

Regev said this proposal, introduced by Rosenne within the past few days, was "unacceptable."

"It would indicate this is a convert, and specify what kind of conversion to the general public."

Asked why the Reform movement, which had earlier resisted a freeze on its legal petitions, had decided to change its stance, Regev said, "We have said more than once that we would be willing to negotiate on these and other compromise suggestions.

"We are extending our hand to the Orthodox parties and to the coalition in the hopes that we can sit down and find a solution to this problem."

Rabbi Einat Ramon, spokeswoman for the Conservative/Masorti movement, said she was "surprised" by the Reform movement's decision to accept a freeze.

"After all, it's our court case that is putting pressure on the government. It's not up to the Reform movement to postpone our court case. It's really our decision."

The High Court of Justice has given the government until June 30 to explain why it failed to register as Jewish children who were adopted abroad and converted in Israel by the Conservative/Masorti movement.

If the government does not respond, the court is slated to hold a hearing July 9 on the two-year-old Masorti petition.

Masorti movement leaders believe that the court will rule in their favor and legalize the conversions.

"For two and a half years, we've been waiting for a court hearing on this issue. The government has had time to discuss. Now they feel pressured because the court has declared they cannot extend it endlessly," Ramon said.

Ramon said the Masorti movement is open to compromises, but "we feel there would be no solution without the pressure of the court date."

While Israeli government officials have held meetings in recent weeks with leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements in the United States, "no one has sat with us and negotiated," Ramon said. □

### Israeli army officers combine visits to casinos, Auschwitz

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai has ordered an investigation into the behavior of army officers who gambled at Polish casinos during an official visit to Nazi death camps.

Mordechai called for the investigation after army officials admitted that several officers had visited the casinos two or three times during the eight-day trip to Poland.

Israel Radio reported Thursday that most of the 60 officers, who were on a leadership course conducted by the Israel Defense Force's School of High Command, had gone to the casinos.

Some of the officers also played cards during a bus ride to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, the report said.

Brig. Gen. Yossi Raveh, head of the school, said that only seven or eight officers in the group had gone to the casinos.

He expressed regret for their acts, which he said showed poor judgment and insensitivity. But he stressed that they did not characterize the majority of the group.

The report touched off emotional and angry reactions. On an Israel Radio call-in show Thursday, some callers argued that the incident was a disgrace. Others said the soldiers had been thoughtful and serious during official activities and should be allowed to relax in the evening. □

### European funded schoolbook distorts lives of Slovak Jews

By Randi Druzin

PRAGUE (JTA) — A controversy has erupted over the distribution in Slovak elementary schools of a teacher's manual that romanticizes the lot of the country's Jews during World War II.

The Slovak Education Ministry, which published and distributed 90,000 copies of the manual earlier this year, and the European Union, which financed the project, have accused each other of being responsible for the undertaking.

The manual has raised howls of protest from the Slovak Jewish community, the Slovak Academy of Sciences and other groups.

In his manual, "History of Slovakia for Slovaks," Padua University Professor Milan Durica writes that during school holidays, children detained in an internment camp near Bratislava "could spend a period outside with Jewish families living in freedom" and "Jewish doctors cared for the health of the camp's residents."

"Dentists were even able to offer gold teeth," the text states, "which the great majority of the Slovak population could not afford."

Frantisek Alexander, executive director of the Association of Slovak Jewish Communities, called the manual "offensive."

He added that it "contains a completely outrageous proposition — that the Jews actually enjoyed themselves during World War II."

Dusan Kovac, director of the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Science, said the manual represents a "dangerous falsification of history."

Slovak Minister of Education Eva Slavkowska responded that responsibility lies with PHARE, the European Union's assistance program for Central Europe, which contributed to the project.

"I cannot imagine why there is so much agitation over one book," she said. "It has been financed by PHARE, and I believe that PHARE programs are watched so carefully that something unsuitable could not be published."

She added that PHARE, not the Slovak Education Ministry, approves such publications.

The European Union, in turn, said responsibility lies with the Slovak government.

Sven Kuehn von Burgsdorff, first secretary of the E.U. delegation in Slovakia, said the Slovak Education Ministry added the manual to a list of books for which it sought funding only three days before the Sept. 30, 1996, deadline.

This gave PHARE officials little time to review the controversial publication, he said, and made it "impossible" to determine whether its text "corresponded to the reality." He added that Slavkowska had personally requested that PHARE finance the manual.

Burgsdorff said Monday that the European Union and the Slovak government have asked "independent experts" to review the publication.

Burgsdorff added that if the panel of experts decides that the manual distorts facts, PHARE would request that the money it allocated for the manual's publication and distribution be returned and that the handbook be withdrawn from Slovak schools. □

**FOCUS ON ISSUES**

**Learning the ways of Diaspora:  
Tibetans visit Jewish schools**

*By Debra Nussbaum Cohen*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Perpetuating a strong sense of religious and national identity in the Diaspora is a challenge for the contemporary American Jewish community, but some folks — including the Dalai Lama — admire how Jews are faring.

The spiritual and national leader of Tibet's 130,000 dispersed souls sent the two top educators in his government-in-exile to the United States this month to learn from Jews how they do it.

The officials, who oversee 86 schools for the population's 27,000 children, traveled to New York and Chicago to visit Jewish day schools of every affiliation.

Their goal was to learn how Jewish educators inculcate in their students religious and cultural values and wisdom in a way that will enable them to remain Jewish, generations into Diaspora.

"It is good for us to know that others have lived through this struggle and been successful," Rinchen Khando Choegyial, Tibet's minister of education, said while touring the Abraham Joshua Heschel School, on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

"His Holiness often says how the Jewish people and Tibetans have so much in similarity through their histories," said Choegyial, who is the Dalai Lama's sister-in-law.

Ngodup Tsering, Tibet's secretary of education, said, "Our biggest problem is assimilation, at the moment."

Tibetan children are more interested in things Western — such as clothing and music — than in their own cultural heritage, he said.

During their visit to the Heschel School, an independent, pluralistic day school, Choegyial and Tsering listened in on third graders being coaxed through Hebrew grammar in one classroom. In another, eighth graders deconstructed a page of Gemarah to understand the way Talmudic rabbis deemed that different types of murder should be judged.

The Tibetans said they were impressed by the integration at the heart of Heschel's elementary school curriculum, in which each classroom is divided in half. While one half studies Hebrew grammar, the others are reading and analyzing English literature.

**Looking, listening, learning**

Their trip, which was funded by the New York-based Nathan Cummings Foundation, included visits to Orthodox day schools, including Ramaz in Manhattan, as well as Reform institutions.

They were here to look, listen and learn, but also to try to raise awareness of their needs among American Jews.

Their biggest challenge, and perhaps the way in which they are most obviously different from the Jews they were meeting, is the level of poverty of their people.

"The moral support from the parents is very much there, but they are very poor," said Choegyial, walking through the halls of a school festively decorated with craft projects made by students obviously blessed with a surfeit of art supplies.

"I saw a teacher have his students paint on paper, hung on the wall, big pictures of Jerusalem," she said. "There was no problem with enough paint, and the children very much enjoyed themselves.

"Our teachers cannot do such a thing, because they must worry about enough paint for the next day and the

next," said Choegyial, garbed in the traditional Tibetan chuba, which looks similar to a Western dress on top and flows into very loose pant legs.

Tsering wore a suit, white shirt and tie.

The educators said about 40 percent of the Tibetan government's budget is devoted to education. That money comes from the Indian government, charities and individuals.

Their Department of Education supports both day and boarding schools in the three principal countries where Tibetans reside.

Most Tibetans — some 100,000 — live in India. About 15,000 reside in Nepal and 1,500 more are in Bhutan, with the rest dispersed throughout the world.

It costs \$20 per month to educate, feed and provide medical care to each of their students through high school age, and twice that to support Tibetan youth in colleges and vocational training centers.

The director of Heschel's middle school, Judith Tumin, explained to the visitors how her students integrate into their daily lives the Jewish concept, "tikkun olam," or repairing the world, through doing good deeds like giving charity.

She told them that her students donate kosher food to Jews who are hungry and impoverished, and they run a book drive for the poorest of New York City's public schools.

"His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, is always talking about universal responsibility and the notion of interdependency," Choegyial said, commending her American colleague.

She asked Tumin and a colleague if they would consider allowing Tibetan students to receive donations collected as tzedakah by the Jewish students, a concept Tumin said she was interested in investigating.

Tumin said she would like her students to study Tibet in depth, the nation's oppression by the Chinese government and its dispersion.

Despite dispersion in Jewish history, "our children have never lived through this experience" of being dispossessed from their national homeland, she said.

The visiting Tibetans promised to send the writings of the Dalai Lama to share with her students.

Tumin stepped back into her office for a moment, and when she returned, handed her visitors a small gift-wrapped package.

Inside were books written by the school's namesake because Heschel, she said, had much to say about integrating one's Jewish and American identities.

The school gives the same books to each student who becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah, Tumin said, when it is time for them to take responsibility for their identities as Jews living in the contemporary world. □

**Palestinian attorney general resigns**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian Authority Attorney General Khaled Al-Kidra resigned this week, citing health reasons.

Kidra, who was appointed to the post three years ago, submitted his resignation Wednesday night to Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, who did not seek to dissuade him.

Kidra, 65, denied an Israel Radio report that Arafat had asked him to step down because of involvement in corruption, or that his resignation was linked to a recent report by a Palestinian auditing office that found grave mismanagement of public funds.

"The auditing report has nothing to do at all with the legal apparatus," Kidra said. □

**Split vote in Canada creates 'almost a replica' of Knesset***By Bill Gladstone*

TORONTO (JTA) — Canadian Jewish officials have expressed satisfaction with the results of this week's national election that saw a slight weakening of the separatist Quebec party.

Prime Minister Jean Chretien's Liberal Party will remain the governing party with a slim majority.

The Bloc Quebecois, the Quebec-based party that seeks to remove the French-speaking province from Canada, won 44 seats, a loss of six from the last Parliament.

Any perceived weakening of the separatists will serve to bolster the spirits of Montreal's 101,000-strong, largely anglophone Jewish community, and perhaps slow the steady exodus of young Montreal Jews to Toronto, Vancouver and other cities.

However, the Reform Party's new status as official opposition may hinder national unity, some observers say, because its "tough-love" attitude toward Quebec probably pushed many of that province's voters into the separatist fold.

"The Reform Party will be a millstone around the federalists' neck for the next few years because they will issue statements that will be seen as anti-Quebec, and those statements will be used to drag down the federalist side," said Irving Abella, past chair of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

Abella characterized the new Parliament as a "multi-party quilt," with each of the five parties — the New Democratic Party and the Progressive Conservatives are the other two — representing different points of view and visions.

Frank Dimant, executive director of B'nai Brith Canada, sees similarities between the composition of Canada's new Parliament and another legislative body familiar to many in the Jewish world.

"We're going to have almost a replica of the Knesset," said Dimant. "We have a Parliament that is divided, with a governing party that has a very slim majority.

"It will mean that we'll have to do a lot more work and a lot more lobbying to make sure that each of the five parties is aware of the issues on the Jewish agenda."

**'Regional fault lines'**

During the campaign, the CJC raised a variety of domestic and international issues with the candidates, including the presence of alleged Nazi war criminals in Canada, national unity, the fight against racism, and refugee and immigration policies.

To some, the country now seems politically divided along "regional fault lines."

The Liberal Party lost 28 seats in the 301-seat Parliament but still managed to maintain a majority of 156 seats, two-thirds of which came from the central province of Ontario.

Meanwhile the Reform Party failed to win a single district east of Manitoba, while the Bloc Quebecois, by self-definition, only won seats within Quebec.

Thanks largely to the personal charisma of leader Jean Charest, the once-powerful Progressive Conservatives made a dramatic comeback from 2 to 21 seats, all situated in Quebec and provinces along the Atlantic Ocean.

The New Democratic Party also made gains at the Liberals' expense in the eastern provinces, increasing from 9 to 20 seats.

"I think it's disturbing that the country is so fragmented and that there's only one party that can make

a reasonable claim to being a national party," said Harold Waller, a professor of political science at McGill University in Montreal.

"No party is positioned to be an alternative to the Liberals in the next election. That's not good for the country."

Recognizing the narrowness of his majority, Chretien reached out to Reform and Conservative leaders during his victory speech, and promised to continue to promote "the longstanding Canadian values of tolerance, openness, generosity and inclusion." □

**Pope recalls Jewish victims of Holocaust on Poland visit***By Ruth E. Gruber*

VIENNA (JTA) — Pope John Paul II paid tribute this week to the millions of Jews who were killed in the Holocaust and urged past tragedy and common heritage to spur reconciliation between Poles and Jews.

The pope, 77, made his impromptu remarks in the central Polish city of Kalisz, during a visit to a sanctuary dedicated to members of the Polish clergy who survived the Dachau death camp.

He referred to Jews, saying, "A people who lived with us for many generations remained with us after this terrible death of millions of daughters and sons. Jewish cemeteries scattered around Poland testify to this common past."

These cemeteries had "deep spiritual significance," he said.

"Let these places join Jews and Poles, because together we await the day of judgment and resurrection."

He referred to the death camps set up by the Nazis in Poland as "places of execution which fill us with terror."

Both Church and Polish Jewish sources said the pope may have made his remarks, which were not prepared in advance, because no meeting with members of Poland's Jewish community was scheduled during the 11-day trip to his native Poland.

Some observers were not impressed with the pope's comments in Kalisz.

"His remarks add nothing to the Pope's well-known position on Jewish issues," Konstanty Gebert, editor of the new monthly Polish Jewish magazine *Midrasz*, said in an interview from Warsaw.

He said the Jewish community would have liked to see the pope go further.

"An outright condemnation of use of anti-Semitic innuendo in Catholic media, such as *Radio Maryja*, would be welcome, but wasn't really expected," he said.

The pope has made the fostering of better Jewish-Catholic relations and recognition of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust a goal of his papacy. □

**Former Palestinian collaborator jailed***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel sentenced a former Palestinian collaborator to just under three years in prison for spying for the self-rule authority's security services.

The man, whose name the court barred from publication, was also convicted of contact with a foreign agent and being an accomplice to a crime.

According to the charge sheet, the man received an Israeli identity card three years ago and moved to Israel. Last year, he met with Palestinian security officials and passed on information.

The sentence of two years and nine months was relatively light because of a plea bargain. □