

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The U.S. Supreme Court announced it would hear an appeal by the Federal Election Commission of a lower court ruling that would make the American Israel Public Affairs Committee subject to campaign finance restrictions. AIPAC officials expressed confidence that its legal status would remain intact no matter how the high court rules. [Page 3]

■ Reform and Conservative leaders held a second day of consultations with Israeli governmental and religious leaders. The leadership of the governing coalition announced that it was willing to freeze legislative work on a bill on conversions if the non-Orthodox froze its court proceedings. The talks come in the wake of last week's events, when fervently Orthodox Jews stoned non-Orthodox Jews near Jerusalem's Western Wall. [Page 2]

■ Israeli soldiers shot and wounded 21 Palestinians in the third straight day of clashes with stone-throwing Arabs in Hebron. Meanwhile, one Israeli soldier was wounded and three lightly wounded when Hezbollah guerrillas set off a bomb in southern Lebanon. [Page 4]

■ A Jewish settler screaming in broken Arabic fired on Palestinians in a land dispute and tried to run them down with his tractor in Gaza.

■ Palestinian legislators are debating a draft law banning the sale of land to Israelis. Three Palestinians have been killed for selling land to Israelis and a fourth suspected land dealer died under mysterious circumstances.

■ The National Yiddish Book Center held its dedication ceremony Sunday. The center, located in Amherst, Mass., will house more than 1 million volumes that have been collected by its founder, Aaron Lansky, during the past several years.

■ Sinead O'Connor withdrew from a Jerusalem peace concert after receiving death threats. The concert by the Irish pop star, now a Buddhist, was slated to culminate a four-day festival sponsored by Israeli and Palestinian women titled "Sharing Capitals: Two Capitals for Two States."

NEWS ANALYSIS**Palestinian violence in Hebron erupts amid peace process void**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With the peace process at a standstill, Palestinians have brought their anger to the streets.

After several months of quiet in the West Bank town of Hebron, Palestinian youths threw rocks and gasoline bombs at Israeli soldiers and settlers for several days this week.

The violence in the City of the Patriarchs was regarded by Israeli security experts as a clear message from the Palestinians that they were losing patience with the current deadlock in the peace negotiations.

But what specifically provoked the Palestinian violence in Hebron was not clear. The unrest began just days after the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution calling on President Clinton to reaffirm that Jerusalem must remain the undivided capital of Israel.

In a separate measure, the House authorized \$100 million to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a move President Clinton has vowed to delay until Israel and the Palestinians reach an agreement on the city's final status.

Palestinian officials said the House actions harmed U.S. credibility as a mediator in the region. The Palestinians want the eastern portion of Jerusalem, which Israel captured in 1967, as the capital of a future independent state.

A week before the House actions, Israeli media reported that Netanyahu was envisioning a permanent settlement with the Palestinians in which Israel would retain control over 40 percent of the West Bank, a move that also prompted sharp Palestinian criticism.

This week's unrest in Hebron also came as a mediation effort launched recently by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's top political aide, Osama Al-Baz, showed no signs of progress.

After the two sides met last week in Cairo for the first time in three months, his efforts to arrange a follow-up meeting of Israeli and Palestinian negotiators proved futile. American officials, for the time being at least, have stepped back from the two parties, urging them to find common ground.

But with the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in a state of suspension, that common ground appeared elusive indeed.

Palestinian officials accused of igniting violence

The peace talks, along with most security cooperation between the two sides, came to a halt after Israel broke ground in mid-March for Jewish housing at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem and after a Palestinian suicide bomber killed three Israelis at a Tel Aviv cafe.

Israel accused the Palestinian Authority of fueling this week's violence as an attempt to gain political concessions from the Jewish state.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quoted Sunday as saying it was clear that the unrest was organized by Palestinian officials and was not spontaneous. He added that violence against Israel would not lead to any concessions, and he called on the Palestinians to work issues out through dialogue.

In Hebron, Israeli commanders ordered their soldiers to show restraint to prevent Palestinian fatalities. Several dozen Palestinians were wounded in the confrontations.

It was clear to both sides that if blood were spilled in Hebron, the entire situation in the territories could get out of hand.

But as Israeli soldiers fought back the youthful demonstrators with rubber bullets, the Palestinian police were doing little to quell passions.

After several days of violence, it appeared likely that there was no Palestinian interest in stopping the confrontations. On the contrary, Israeli policy makers were convinced that the Palestinian leadership was behind the latest unrest, making good on its threat that the deadlocked negotiations could only lead to bloodshed.

Following similar clashes last week between Palestinians and the Israeli army near the Gush Katif settlement bloc in the Gaza Strip, Ahmed Karia, the chairman of the Palestinian Legislative Council, warned that "an

explosion is soon likely to take place, and not only in Gaza."

Indeed, the violence near Gush Katif, which began after residents of the Jewish settlement of Morag fenced off territory that local Palestinians claimed as their own, soon spread.

An Israeli woman was wounded over the weekend when her car was fired on as she was driving near Jerusalem. Israeli security forces arrested six Palestinians from the nearby village of Bidu in connection with the shooting.

Then came the rioting in Hebron. The situation there was considered particularly delicate, given the fact that Palestinians and Jewish settlers live in close proximity to each other. Palestinian youths repeatedly ventured out of the part of the city that is under the control of the Palestinian Authority to confront the Jewish residents of Hebron and the soldiers guarding them.

The soldiers chased the youths back to the border separating Jewish and Arab Hebron, but could go no farther. The Palestinian youths, well aware of this, repeatedly escaped back behind the border. Unlike during past confrontations, there was no cooperation between Israeli units in Hebron and Palestinian police commanders.

"The riots are not incidental," a senior Israeli army officer said in an interview. "Someone is organizing the unrest."

Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat denied at a meeting with former Prime Minister Shimon Peres in the West Bank town of Ramallah that the Palestinian Authority had anything to do with the violence.

Despite Arafat's assurances, political observers believe that he is maneuvering between grassroots pressures and the need not to alienate international public opinion.

While attempting to respond to Palestinian anger over the deadlocked negotiations, Arafat is also aware that world opinion has recently been running against the Palestinian Authority in the wake of the murders of Arab land dealers and the disclosures of widespread financial irregularities in the self-rule government.

Meanwhile, the Israeli commander in Hebron, known only as Col. Gadi, said that the riots in Hebron were under control.

"Undoubtedly, events in Hebron could escalate," he added. "But we hope that spirits cool off."

Some Israeli security experts believed that the violent confrontations would continue as long as there was no breakthrough in the negotiations.

Karia's warnings of spreading violence were echoed this week by an Israeli military expert, Res. Col. Oren Shahor, who served until recently as coordinator of government activities in the territories.

Shahor warned in his first television interview as a civilian that a general flareup would not be limited to the territories, saying that the "winds of war" could spread to Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

"Israel will then have to face the Palestinians from a much weaker position than today," he said. □

U.S. Jewish leaders in Israel to forestall bill on conversion

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Efforts to negotiate a compromise on controversial conversion legislation have moved into high gear.

On Monday, a delegation of Reform and Conservative Jewish leaders from the United States and Israel held a second day of consultations with government and religious leaders to find a compromise on an issue that threatens to drive a wedge between Israel and U.S. Jewry.

The pending conversion bill would cement into law

exclusive Orthodox authority over conversions performed in Israel.

The religious parties have threatened to bring down the Netanyahu government by leaving the coalition if the bill does not become law and have been pressing for final Knesset action by the end of the month.

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

American Jews, most of whom are non-Orthodox, have been cautiously eyeing the progress of the conversion bill, with some saying they would withhold their donations to Israel if the measure passed the Knesset.

In Israel, some Orthodox Jews have vowed to fight the non-Orthodox movements' efforts to seek greater recognition within the Jewish state.

Simmering resentments against the non-Orthodox streams boiled to the surface last week, when hundreds of fervently Orthodox Jews attacked a group of Conservative Jews who were holding a mixed prayer service at the Western Wall during Shavuot.

Attempts by a female member of the Conservative congregation to read from a Torah scroll reportedly prompted angry shouts of "Nazis," "murderers," "reformers" and "whores" from a crowd of fervently Orthodox Jews pressing in around the worshippers. When the Conservative Jews were escorted from the Western Wall Plaza by security units, students at a nearby yeshiva pelted them with rocks and bags of excrement.

The acting mayor of Jerusalem later reserved his criticism for the Conservative congregation.

Conservative prayers termed a 'provocation'

"The very fact that the Conservative Jews, who symbolize the destruction of the Jewish people, came to the place that is holiest to the Jewish people is a provocation," Haim Miller of the fervently Orthodox Agudat Yisrael Party told the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. "They have no reason to be in this place."

This week, the leaders from the two non-Orthodox streams of Judaism emerged from meetings with the prime minister and other government officials encouraged that the political leaders appeared to be interested in finding a compromise aimed at preventing the conversion bill from reaching the Knesset floor.

But they said a meeting Monday with former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira seemed to reinforce the sentiment that the Orthodox establishment "is not interested in reaching a compromise."

Efforts to seek a compromise began after the Knesset passed the conversion bill 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.

The coalition leadership announced Monday that it was willing to freeze legislative work on the conversion bill if the Reform and Conservative movements withdrew their court petitions.

Numerous proposals on how converts would be registered in Israel's population registry and on identity cards have been raised and rejected in recent weeks.

One of the latest proposals, initiated by Cabinet ministers Yitzhak Levy of the National Religious Party and Natan Sharansky of Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, calls for the formation of a committee comprised of representatives from the three main streams of Judaism.

The committee would then try to find the best compromise among the competing proposals. □

Supreme Court to hear appeal in challenge over AIPAC's status*By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Supreme Court will have the next word in an eight-year battle over the legal status of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

The high court this week agreed to hear arguments in a case whose outcome could profoundly affect AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobby.

A group of former government officials — all known as staunch opponents of Israel — have battled in vain since 1989 to convince the Federal Election Commission to regulate AIPAC as a political action committee and thereby subject it to restrictive federal campaign finance laws.

Such a designation would limit contributions to — and expenditures by — AIPAC, which in spite of its name is not currently classified as a political action committee.

Political action committees, commonly known as PACs, raise funds to distribute to political candidates.

For its part, AIPAC, which defines itself as a registered lobby on behalf of legislation affecting U.S.-Israel relations, says it does not contribute to political campaigns.

Any decision on AIPAC's status will now wait until after the Supreme Court rules in the case.

The court announced this week that it would hear oral arguments during its next term, which begins in October.

A decision is expected by July 1998.

Responding to the Supreme Court's announcement Monday, AIPAC President Melvin Dow said, "We are pleased with the fact that the Supreme Court" will hear an appeal of a lower court's ruling that the FEC misapplied the law when it ruled in AIPAC's favor.

The case stems from the campaign of six former government officials to classify AIPAC as a PAC in order to restrict the lobby's activities and force public disclosure of its finances.

The six officials include James Akins, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, former U.S. Rep. Paul Findley (R-Ill.) and Richard Curtiss, a former official at the U.S. Information Agency and the current editor of the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs.

Staunch opponents of Israel

All of these officials are known as staunch opponents of Israel and of AIPAC's work on behalf of strong U.S.-Israel ties.

Indeed, Findley blames AIPAC for his 1982 failed re-election bid.

Curtiss called the court decision "good news, bad news," because it "postpones a final decision on what we had considered a victory."

In 1992, the FEC, in response to a complaint filed by Akins and the others, found that AIPAC spent money in an effort to influence congressional elections.

But the FEC, which monitors compliance with campaign laws, also ruled that this was not AIPAC's "major purpose" and decided that the pro-Israel lobby did not have to register as a PAC.

A lower court and a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia initially upheld the FEC's decision.

At that point, AIPAC and legal observers thought the battle was over.

But last December, the full U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that the FEC misapplied the law.

The court said that the percentage of an organiza-

tion's work that is campaign-related should not determine the definition of a PAC.

Ruling 9-2, the justices said an organization with a \$100 million budget that spends \$1 million on campaigns should face the same rules as a \$1 million organization that spends all of its money on campaigns.

When the court hears the case in the fall, the Justice Department, on behalf of the FEC, plans to argue that the appeals court decision would unduly impact free speech.

Dow, the AIPAC president, said that with the case in the hands of the Supreme Court, "now there are two bases to win on."

If the Supreme Court overturns the lower court's ruling and allows a group's "major purpose" to determine if it is a PAC, the case against AIPAC would end.

But if the court upholds the appeals court and strikes down the major purpose test, AIPAC's fate would once again lie with the FEC. □

Italian Jewish leader named to probe of abuse in Somalia*By Ruth E. Gruber*

ROME — The Italian government has named Jewish leader Tullia Zevi to a high-level commission charged with probing allegations that Italian troops in Somalia carried out brutal human rights abuses.

Zevi, who is one of Italy's most prominent women, is regarded as a moral voice in Italy because of her position as president of the Italian Jewish community and her outspoken condemnation of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

Prime Minister Romano Prodi set up the body last Friday to investigate charges made in the weekly news magazine Panorama that Italian peacekeeping troops in Somalia had engaged in the rape, torture and murder of Somalis.

Allegations, photographs and graphic descriptions of sadistic behavior on the part of Italian peacekeepers stationed in Somalia from late 1992 to 1994 have produced shock waves in Italy.

"With our commission, we want to identify who was responsible, but we also want to safeguard the honor and good name of those who have served their country," Prodi said.

Panorama published photographs that appeared to show a naked Somali man being tortured and a Somali woman tied to an armored car and being raped by soldiers. It also quoted eyewitness reports and interviews with soldiers detailing such abuses.

The two army generals who commanded the Italian forces in Somalia resigned their posts Saturday in the wake of the scandal.

"This is the first time that women are called to evaluate a military case," Zevi said in an interview, admitting that the commission's work "will be a tough job."

"The government expects us to have the courage to ascertain the facts — what really happened and how — and also to advise how to prevent this mechanism of dehumanizing human beings," she said.

"The Jewish experience should allow one to see such mechanisms with greater clarity in their perfidy. We well know about the dehumanization of people from our experience in the Shoah."

Zevi is one of two women on the five-member commission.

The commission is headed by a former president of Italy's Constitutional Court and also includes two military generals. □

Head of Swiss wartime probe to relinquish position with bank

By Fredy Rom

BERN (JTA) — A controversy has erupted over the disclosure that the head of an international panel of historians probing Switzerland's wartime past is on the payroll of one of the banks it is expected to investigate.

Jean-Francois Bergier is chairman of the Independent Commission of Experts, the international panel of historians created by federal decree last December to study the extent of Switzerland's financial dealings with the Nazis.

But the recent revelation that he also sits on the board of a foundation run by the Union Bank of Switzerland has led to charges of a potential conflict of interest.

The foundation, created in 1962 to celebrate the bank's 100th year in business, gives grants to artists and scientists.

Bergier has served since 1991 on the foundation's board.

The board meets three or four times each year.

UBS officials were quick to downplay the significance of Bergier's ties to the bank.

"Bergier is not involved in the bank's business, and he gets only a symbolic payment of \$3,300 a year," a UBS spokesman said.

Bergier has decided not to accept further work with the foundation after his current term expires in November, according to Linus von Castelmur. Castelmur is a historian who serves as secretary-general of the Independent Commission of Experts, also known as the Bergier Commission.

Other members of the commission were reportedly unaware of Bergier's work with the foundation.

Swiss officials said they were aware of Bergier's UBS connection when he was appointed last December to head the commission, but they felt it would not undermine his strong credentials as a historian.

The Swiss government has repeatedly stated that it will wait for the findings of the Bergier Commission before taking steps to address some of the alleged wrongs from the country's wartime past.

Swiss banks under fire

Given the importance the Swiss government plans to attach to the commission's findings, observers feel it is crucial that there be no conflict of interest associated with any of the commission's members, particularly its chairman.

UBS, along with Credit Suisse and the Swiss Bank Corporation, has come under fire during the past year for allegedly refusing to return the assets of Holocaust victims after World War II.

The three banks, Switzerland's largest, sought to deflect some of the criticism by establishing a multimillion dollar Holocaust Memorial Fund that would provide payments to needy Holocaust survivors, while continuing to investigate the whereabouts of dormant accounts opened by Jews during the war years.

UBS was also in the headlines this year after a night watchman at the bank, Christoph Meili, was fired after he turned Holocaust-era documents at the bank that were awaiting the shredder to Jewish groups.

Swiss prosecutors are now studying whether to charge Meili for breaching the country's bank secrecy laws.

Bergier's connection to UBS came to light when the prosecutor in Zurich handling the Meili case, Peter Cossanday, said that because of his involvement with UBS, Bergier could not be accepted as an expert in determining whether Meili broke the law.

Last week, Cossanday handed over some of the

documents rescued by Meili to the Independent Commission of Experts, who were to determine if any of the documents contained information relevant to Switzerland's wartime past.

Bergier will not examine any of the documents turned over by the prosecutor, according to Castelmur, the commission's secretary-general.

Instead, other members of the commission will study the documents.

Despite Bergier's decision to step down from the foundation, Jewish leaders question whether he should continue to chair the historical commission.

Said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress:

"If Bergier is not acceptable as an expert [in the Meili case], why he should be accepted by the Jewish people" in connection with the work of the historical commission? □

(Foreign editor Mitchell Danow contributed to this report.)

Italian fascists mourn Mussolini's son

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Italy's right wing — including black-shirted neo-fascists — turned out in Rome last weekend for the funeral of Vittorio Mussolini, the second child of Italy's fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

Vittorio Mussolini, who was 80, died June 12 of kidney failure.

About 60 extremists gave the stiff-armed salute as Mussolini's coffin was carried from a Rome church after the funeral service.

They were dressed in black shirts that recalled the fascist garb of a half-century ago.

They waved a fascist-era flag, and a wreath bore the image of Benito Mussolini.

The service was attended by family members, including Vittorio Mussolini's niece, Parliament member Alessandra Mussolini.

Other right-wing politicians also attended.

Vittorio Mussolini was a dedicated fascist, but he also had a career in the film business.

He emigrated to South America after World War II, but returned to Italy in the 1960s.

He produced a documentary about his father in 1983.

Vittorio Mussolini was buried in the family tomb in Predappio, in north-central Italy. □

Israeli soldier killed in Lebanon

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — One Israeli soldier was killed and three others lightly wounded this week in southern Lebanon.

Staff Sgt. Yaacov Elgamiss, 20, of Jerusalem, was buried Monday evening at the Mount Herzl military cemetery in Jerusalem.

The attack took place Sunday night near the village of Beit Yahoun, in the western sector of the security zone.

Israel Defense Force officials said two roadside charges laid by Hezbollah went off as an Israeli tank passed.

The explosion jammed the tank's doors.

Efforts to rescue the four soldiers trapped inside took about two hours.

Israeli troops responded with heavy artillery attacks at suspected terrorist targets.

Two of the three wounded soldiers were released from the hospital Monday. □