



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Adversaries in the battle over conversion legislation appeared to be stepping back from the brink.** Reform and Conservative leaders announced that they were willing to withdraw petitions to Israel's High Court of Justice, which was the government's condition for freezing action on the controversial bill. [Page 1]

■ **The Clinton administration announced a \$100 million increase in U.S. foreign aid to Jordan during meetings with Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan.** [Page 3]

■ **Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert and Jewish Agency Chairman Avraham Burg condemned the haredi attacks on Reform and Conservative worshippers at the Western Wall on Shavuot as "barbaric and destructive."** [Page 1]

■ **President Clinton raised more than \$400,000 from about 40 Jewish Democratic Party faithful at a Washington fund-raising dinner.** The pledges, aimed at erasing the Democratic National Committee's multimillion dollar debt, come one week after the party's biggest donors, including many Jewish Americans, raised more than \$4 million.

■ **Israeli soldiers shot and wounded approximately 20 Palestinians, two seriously, in the fourth straight day of clashes with stone-throwing Arabs in Hebron.** Israel accused the Palestinian police of failing to intervene.

■ **A Palestinian man jailed for life by a Palestine Liberation Organization court for killing a Jewish settler and her son escaped from a hospital in the West Bank town of Jericho.** Palestinian forces were searching for the man inside the enclave, while Israeli soldiers looked for him elsewhere.

■ **Two Chasidic rabbis were charged with funneling \$1.75 million in Colombian drug profits through the bank accounts of a Brooklyn yeshiva and synagogue.** The rabbis, who were among 12 men charged in the money-laundering scheme, allegedly deposited, and then withdrew, \$1 million, through the accounts. The two are being held without bail.

## Conversion adversaries near accord on delaying legislation

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Adversaries in the battle over conversion legislation appear to be stepping back from the abyss.

Reform and Conservative leaders said Tuesday night that they were willing to withdraw petitions to Israel's High Court of Justice that potentially would secure recognition for their conversions.

"We've agreed to the compromise," the director general of the Reform movement's World Union of Progressive Judaism, Rabbi Richard Hirsch, told reporters. "We've agreed to a request to make an effort to delay the court cases."

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

The bill, which would cement in law exclusive Orthodox authority over conversions performed in Israel, has threatened to drive a wedge between Israel and U.S. Jewry.

Hirsch made the announcement after a delegation of U.S. and Israeli Reform and Conservative leaders met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the end of a third day of marathon talks with government officials aimed at reaching a compromise.

After making the statement, Hirsch returned to the premier's office to continue talks that included the American leaders, Bobby Brown, the prime minister's adviser on Diaspora affairs; Trade Minister Natan Sharansky of the immigrant-rights party Yisrael Ba'Aliyah; and Knesset member Alexander Lubotsky, who has spearheaded compromise efforts on behalf of the government.

The emerging compromise on the conversion bill would call for the Orthodox parties in Israel to freeze any further movement of the legislation through the Knesset and for the non-Orthodox movements to withdraw their court petitions.

These two moves would be accompanied by the creation of a committee, comprised of representatives from the three main streams of Judaism, that would seek in the coming months to reach a resolution satisfactory to all parties.

### Atmosphere of goodwill

Rabbi Einat Ramon, spokeswoman of the Conservative/Masorti movement, said Tuesday night that the court actions would be suspended.

"We want to give us all a chance to find a solution, particularly when the government shows goodwill."

During the first round of discussions with Israeli officials Sunday, the delegation of American Jewish leaders referred to an atmosphere of goodwill, saying that the reception they had received from government officials exceeded their expectations.

The leaders were particularly concerned that the committee that would be created under the compromise would be committed to real negotiations rather than try to bury the issue.

"I was impressed with the prime minister's understanding that a short-term solution isn't what we're looking for," said Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. "The prime minister appears committed to working personally on the problem."

Rabbi Joel Meyers referred to an incident last week, when a group of fervently Orthodox men threw stones, trash and excrement at a mixed group of male and female worshippers at the Western Wall.

Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly of America, said, "We told the prime minister that the American Jewish community is watching what is going on in Israel, especially after the incident at the kotel."

"This past Shabbat, there was hardly a synagogue in the United States that didn't discuss what happened. The prime minister acknowledged that it was a terrible incident."

The incident during Shavuot at the Western Wall was the topic of

heated discussion in Jewish sites of the leading American online services.

In Compuserve's Israel Forum, one member said that the incident represented a "line in the sand" for non-Orthodox Jews.

In Jerusalem, Mayor Ehud Olmert expressed "deep frustration" at the "barbaric, brutal attack by a small group of violent hooligans."

"We have legitimate differences which can be discussed, but it is inconceivable to turn these differences into violent acts," Olmert said Tuesday at the opening session of the Zionist General Council, the governing body of the World Zionist Organization.

Efforts to seek a compromise on the conversion bill began after the Knesset passed the draft measure April 1, in the first of three Knesset votes, known as readings.

During a Knesset Law Committee session Tuesday, the non-Orthodox rabbis described the plight of secular Israeli parents who have adopted foreign children.

Several of the Reform and Conservative petitions now before the high court deal with the fact that the Interior Ministry refuses to recognize these children as Jews after they undergo a Reform or Conservative conversion.

Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists of America, expressed the hurt felt by Reform and Conservative Jews.

Orthodox Jews in Israel "say our rabbis aren't rabbis, our synagogues aren't synagogues, our prayers aren't prayers," Hirsch said.

"We are one people and the Jewish state is the center of the Jewish people. The state must not pass a law that delegitimizes a million Jews."

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, who emigrated from New York to become the chief rabbi of Efrat, pleaded with his fellow Orthodox rabbis to consider a compromise conversion procedure that would be acceptable to all streams of Judaism.

"I think there has to be a compromise for the unity of the Jewish people. On the one hand, to bring Reform conversions to Israel would be very problematic. At the same time, we dare not establish a law that will make 85 percent of American Jews feel delegitimized." □

#### NEWS ANALYSIS

### **Congress' moves on Jerusalem prompt an international furor**

*By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — On May 20, the U.S. Senate celebrated the 30th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem by calling on the president and secretary of state to declare publicly that Jerusalem must remain the undivided capital of the State of Israel.

No senior Palestinian officials marched on the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem to protest the Senate vote on the symbolic resolution. Palestinian police did not allow Arab youths in Hebron to throw stones at Israeli troops to signal discontent with the American government.

The measure, like scores of other "Sense of the Congress" resolutions passed each year, drew virtually no international attention and was essentially ignored by the Clinton administration and national media. But when the House passed the identical resolution exactly three weeks later, on June 10, marchers rallied and stones flew.

"If this will be a decision adopted by the United States, it is the end of this peace process," Faisal Husseini, the top Palestinian official in Jerusalem, told demonstrators outside the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem.

The mufti of Jerusalem, Ikrima Sabri, who was appointed by the Palestinian Authority, said: "We reject

America as a co-sponsor of the so-called negotiations because America has unveiled its ugly face."

What happened in the days that separated the Senate and House votes highlights the intensifying crisis in the peace process and the methods Palestinian leaders employ in their battle to win concessions from Israel.

Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have been frozen since March, when Israel began construction of a Jewish housing site in southeastern Jerusalem and a Palestinian suicide bomber attacked a Tel Aviv cafe, killing three Israeli women.

Tensions continued to escalate. After the Senate vote last month, an Egyptian mediation effort failed and the United States backed off its own unsuccessful attempts to restart peace talks.

Then the House entered the fray to reiterate its support for Israel's policy of an undivided Jerusalem, passing a package of amendments on the holy city, which included \$100 million designated for moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

In fact, it is unlikely that the money will ever be spent because the House only "authorized" the funding. A separate law and President Clinton's approval, which is unlikely, would be required for it to happen.

None of the senior congressional aides who wrote and helped shepherd the measures through the House and Senate thought they would evoke such passions. In fact, Congress has expressed such sentiments at least 10 times since 1990. But Palestinians saw the move differently. And international condemnation came swiftly.

#### **Cohen peppered with questions**

On a swing through Persian Gulf states this week, Secretary of Defense William Cohen was peppered with questions and criticism in virtually every capital he visited.

"The resolution that was passed by the House would not contribute to getting the peace process back on track," a Pentagon official quoted Cohen as saying in Bahrain. "The resolution does not reflect the administration's policy."

The administration holds the position that Jerusalem should remain as is until Israel and the Palestinians negotiate its future in final-status talks as they agreed to do in the Oslo accords.

Like most countries, the United States has never recognized Israel's annexation of Jerusalem. The U.S. Embassy remains in Tel Aviv and the State Department maintains a consulate in eastern Jerusalem to handle matters in the city as well as in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But Congress has tried, so far in vain, to push Clinton to recognize a united Jerusalem under Israel's rule.

In addition to the resolution and the measure calling for the embassy to move, the House passed a State Department authorization bill requiring that:

- The U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem serve under the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv;
- U.S. government documents list Jerusalem as the capital of Israel;
- The U.S. State Department list "Jerusalem, Israel" as a place of birth in a passport, replacing the current policy of only identifying "Jerusalem."

These measures were accompanied by a fiery speech by Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), who equated the Palestinian murder of land dealers who sold real estate to Jews with the actions of the Nazis.

But the efforts on Capitol Hill are non-binding. Given the mounting White House opposition to the bill that contains these provisions, passage is uncertain. For now, attention is focused on what Clinton meant when he pledged to a group of Democratic Jewish donors that "over the next several days, we'll be seeing some progress." □

## Announcement on Ethiopians raises hopes for potential emigres

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — For 3,500 Ethiopians desperate to resettle in Israel, new hopes have been sparked that the wait may soon be over.

A decision by an Israeli ministerial committee last week could lead to the closure of the Falash Mura transit compound in Addis Ababa and the speeded-up immigration to Israel of the people based there. Many have languished for years waiting to join the 14,000 Ethiopian Jews who were airlifted to Israel in 1991 in Operation Solomon.

The Committee on Diaspora and Absorption, headed by Trade Minister Natan Sharansky, declared last week that the camp should be closed and the 3,500 people there should be brought to Israel.

But the declaration had no timetable or funding mechanism attached to it and its practical impact is clouded in ambiguity.

A spokesman for Sharansky said the rate of immigration will depend upon the cooperation of the Ethiopian government and the resources that can be allocated for the effort.

In a sign that the decision could mark a breakthrough, however, the Jewish Agency for Israel has already begun consultations with the Israeli government to determine what its role should be.

The agency, which is responsible for bringing immigrants to Israel and for their initial absorption, transported the Ethiopians in historic airlifts.

The United Israel Appeal, which funnels money from the United Jewish Appeal and local federations to the Jewish Agency, last week sent a confidential memo to federation leaders alerting them to developments.

"If there is going to be a change in the status" of the Falash Mura in Addis Ababa, "we know it will probably require monies for non-planned, non-budgeted activities," Shoshana Cardin, UIA chair, said, explaining the memo.

### Disputes over Israel's responsibility

For their part, the Falash Mura have been sustained at the Addis compound by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry.

But their immigration of the Falash Mura has been slowed by Israeli government efforts to determine the Jewish status of each of them, who converted to Christianity but never integrated into the rest of society. By many accounts, they lead observant Jewish lives at the compound.

Still, there have been disputes over Israel's responsibility for them and for tens of thousands of others living elsewhere in the country who say they are Falash Mura.

Roughly 100 Ethiopians a month have been streaming into Israel in recent months, with about half from the compound and the other half from elsewhere, according to the North American Conference.

In compliance with the policies of the previous government, those who could prove their Jewish origin have been brought to Israel under the Law of Return, and, in fewer instances, under the Law of Entry in cases of family reunification.

The recent declaration by the Sharansky committee does not make clear how that policy will be changed.

"There is some ambiguity" regarding the decision, said a spokesman for the North American Conference, who asked not to be named.

But what is clear, he said, is "nobody's talking about a massive airlift. The Ethiopian government wouldn't

allow it."

"The decision is not clear," echoed Avraham Neguise, the director of South Wing to Zion, an Ethiopian advocacy group in Jerusalem.

He said the decision appeared to indicate a new willingness to determine that the community was eligible en masse to come to Israel, rather than determining their eligibility on a painstaking, individual basis.

"But it is one thing in principle," he said. "It has not been tested in practice."

The measure, he said, has to be approved by the full Cabinet. And if it is, he said, he worried it would get bogged down by the bureaucracy and politics of the Interior Ministry, which is responsible for the processing. Indeed, Sharansky's spokesman appeared to contradict Neguise's understanding of a blanket acceptance by saying that a committee would review the immigrants' eligibility.

Michael Schneider, JDC executive vice president, put the announcement into perspective by saying it is not the first time that hope loomed for those waiting in Addis.

"These things have been said before," he said. Nonetheless, "we are more optimistic than before that action will be taken soon." □

## Israel formally agrees to return \$50 million in U.S. aid for Jordan

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Israel has formally agreed to return \$50 million in U.S. foreign aid so that the Clinton administration can reward Jordan for its support of the peace process.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced Tuesday that Israel and Egypt each would contribute \$50 million to a new Middle East Peace and Stability Fund.

Jordan will receive the full \$100 million this year, adding to the \$47 million it already received this year from the United States. The Clinton administration has asked for \$75.6 million for Jordan for next year.

The one-time only deal marks the first time that Israel has returned foreign aid to the United States for the benefit of another country.

In the late 1980s, Israel returned a very small portion of its economic assistance to the United States Treasury when Congress was trying to balance the books.

Under the current agreement, Israel will send \$50 million to the United States from its current U.S. aid package. The Clinton administration plans to ask Congress, not Israel and Egypt, to contribute to the fund in the future.

Israel receives \$1.8 billion in annual military aid from the United States and \$1.2 billion in economic aid. Other funding, including aid for refugee resettlement, brings the total to more than \$3 billion annually. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has emphasized that he supports the plan, and both Israeli and American officials have stressed that the U.S. request is not tied to the current impasse in the peace process or any tensions between Jerusalem and Washington.

The plan, in the works for two months, was announced after President Clinton met with Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan here Tuesday. "Jordan has become a model for the Middle East, and for the world, of a nation truly committed to peace and to building a new and better future for all peoples," Albright said before meeting with Hassan.

For his part, Hassan thanked Albright, expressing "our deepest appreciation for the efforts," he said.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, applauded the move, saying, "Israel's action is one more indication of its commitment to the peace process, and its recognition of the importance of supporting neighbors to go the extra mile for peace." □

**Graduation off-limits to students who snuck Nazi references in poem***By Faygie Levy*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Two Georgia high school students have been barred from graduation ceremonies after school officials learned that a poem they wrote for a school magazine contained hidden references to Hitler and Nazis.

A student who was reading Pegasus, the literary magazine of Brookwood High School in Snellville, Ga., east of Atlanta, realized that the first letter of each word in a poem spelled out the words "Hitler" and "Nazi."

The school, which has not released the names of the individuals involved, immediately began to investigate how the poem ended up in the magazine.

Connie Corley, the school's principal, said in a telephone interview that the offensive words were not originally noticed because they did not begin with capital letters. "Once you look carefully," you can see it, she said. The words "Hitler" and "Nazi" were also spelled out inside a sketch of a flower that accompanied the poem.

The poem and drawing were apparently snuck into the magazine before it was sent to the printer.

The hidden messages were discovered last week, just two days before school ended for the year.

"The students, faculty and community are outraged over this," Corley said. "It's horrible."

Corley insisted that the incident is not an accurate reflection of the views of the school.

But since this incident came to light, some have called the Anti-Defamation League to voice their concern over other problems at the school. Of 2,500 students at the school, some 20 are Jewish, according to local news reports. According to the local office of the ADL, parents have complained that the school scheduled homecoming on Yom Kippur, refused to excuse absences for important Jewish holidays and held freshman orientation on Passover.

Corley said the calendar the school used did not list April 22 as Passover. As for excused absences, she said, "We have always given excused absences to any religious holiday."

One other complaint alleged that the school took longer than necessary to remove a swastika from the ceiling of a history classroom. Corley denied the charge.

Jay Kaiman, southeast director for the ADL, said his organization looked into the complaints and found that "these are separate incidents which came to light in the wake of this incident.

"There is no gross negligence on the part of the school," Kaiman added.

Corley agreed and said that by lumping isolated incidents together, people reach the wrong conclusions.

"We must redouble our efforts in reaching out to students regarding the lessons of history," Kaiman said.

The students who wrote the poem did not have a history of anti-Semitic views. Since they had already completed all the requirements needed to graduate, the students will receive their diplomas.

The school has asked students to destroy their copies of the magazine. It will be redistributed in the fall without the poem and the sketch. □

**Palestinian lawmakers debate law banning land sales to Jews***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian legislators began debate this week on a bill that would ban the sale of land to Jews.

The Palestinian Legislative Council's legal committee drafted the law after the United States and Israel

sharply criticized the Palestinian Authority for implementing a pre-1967 Jordanian regulation banning such land sales.

Three Arabs suspected of selling land to Jews were killed after Palestinian officials announced last month that under the Jordanian law such sales were punishable by death. The kidnapping of a fourth dealer was foiled by Israeli security forces.

The Palestinian Authority has denied involvement in the slayings and kidnapping.

Meanwhile, the wife of another Palestinian land dealer who died after being detained in a Jericho prison said her husband was beaten by interrogators.

She rejected a Palestinian security official's claim that Hakam Kamhawi, 57, killed himself. Kamhawi's wife, Ansaf, said her husband had no reason to take his life, and that his body had shown signs of torture.

The Palestinian legislation would bar non-Palestinian Arabs from owning property "in Palestine for any reasons whatsoever with the exception of inheritance."

Arabs would be allowed to buy Palestinian land by special permission from the self-rule authority. Other foreigners, but not Israelis, could also obtain exemptions from the ban.

Israeli Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh said the Israeli-Palestinian accords require that Israel review any legislation that comes before the council.

He added that any legislation that violates the accords, such as a ban on selling land to Jews, would be automatically invalidated. □

**Sinead O'Connor cancels concert in Jerusalem after death threats***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Irish pop star Sinead O'Connor this week canceled a concert here after receiving death threats.

Saturday's concert was to have closed a four-day festival sponsored by Israeli and Palestinian women's peace groups.

The festival, called "Sharing Jerusalem: Two Capitals for Two States," became a hot-button issue among some right-wing Israelis, who vow never to give any portion of the capital to the Palestinians.

Concert organizers said O'Connor canceled after death threats were phoned in to the British Embassy in Tel Aviv.

They would not say who was behind the threats.

One extreme right-wing activist, while not claiming to have issued the threats, told Israel Radio that he and his supporters had succeeded in getting the concert called off.

Itamar Ben-Gvir referred to O'Connor as a "singer who preaches and calls for the division of Jerusalem and who spreads gentile culture," adding that she "has no place in Israel."

"We certainly view the pressure we exerted so she wouldn't come to Israel as successful," he told Israel Radio.

Ben-Gvir is affiliated with an offshoot of the outlawed Kach movement, which is militantly anti-Arab.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert said the festival was a "provocation," adding that poor ticket sales were the cause of the concert's cancellation.

"It appears the people of Israel are smarter and more responsible," said Olmert. "They simply didn't buy tickets."

O'Connor, now a Buddhist, once ripped up a picture of the pope during a live televised appearance. In a statement, O'Connor said she canceled the concert date because she wanted to protect herself and her family. □