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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Rabbinate decision attacked

The Reform and Conservative movements jointly denounced the rejection by Israel's Chief Rabbinate of a key recommendation that was meant to resolve the controversial issue of conversions in Israel.

The rabbis rejected the proposal of the Ne'eman Committee to establish a joint conversion training program that would include the participation of non-Orthodox rabbis. [Page 4]

Palestinians support Iraq

Thousands of Palestinians marched in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to express support for Saddam Hussein, with many demonstrators calling on the Iraqi leader to launch missiles on Tel Aviv.

The rallies enabled the Palestinians to let out their frustrations over the deadlocked peace process, according to an official with the Palestine Liberation Organization, which orchestrated the demonstrations.

U.S. won't impose proposal

The United States will not try to impose its proposals on Israel and the Palestinians, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told a conference call of Jewish officials from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

According to participants in the call, Albright also said American calls for a "timeout" on Israeli settlement construction would be accompanied by calls for a halt to those Palestinian actions that also prejudice the final-status talks.

AJCommittee opens Berlin office

The American Jewish Committee held a dedication ceremony for its Berlin office. The first branch in Germany of a major American Jewish defense organization is expected to facilitate contact between Germany and American Jewry, strengthen ties between American Jews and German Jews, and monitor anti-Semitism and racism in Germany. [Page 3]

D'Amato to seek art law

U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) announced he would introduce legislation calling on museums around the world to return to their owners artworks looted by the Nazis. Calling it a "very comprehensive" bill, the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee said it "will have international ramifications."

NEWS ANALYSIS

In Iraqi crisis, Washington facing lose-lose proposition

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Washington is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't.

If it launches a military strike against Iraq, it risks deepening the rift with those countries that oppose such action. If it does not, it risks appearing to lack resolve, which will significantly erode its diplomatic prestige and its role as the global superpower.

Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein, by contrast, has played a brilliant hand, timing his provocations — the denial of U. N. inspectors access to suspected weapons sites — with exquisite precision.

Saddam has succeeded in peeling off the Arab component of the 1991 Gulf War coalition, which provided an umbrella of legitimacy for a U.S.-led attack against an Arab state.

And he has neutralized three of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council — Russia, China and France — by raising the possibility of lucrative post-sanctions trade contracts and appealing to their economic self-interest.

Washington now must make do with a somewhat threadbare diplomatic cover: The wholehearted backing of Britain and the lukewarm support of Kuwait, the sole Arab state to back action against Iraq.

Syria has been the only Arab nation to flatly condemn any U.S. actions, but the rest have given mixed signals at best. Saudi Arabia this week denied the use of its bases for American attacks on Iraq, leaving the U.S. secretary of defense, William Cohen — who visited the Saudis to drum up their support — seeking to downplay the need for their bases.

The lack of a strong coalition against Iraq creates the prospect of a military action which carries diplomatic consequences for Washington that are entirely unpredictable and potentially catastrophic.

Saddam knows he cannot seriously resist, let alone defeat, America's overwhelming technological sophistication and firepower, and he will mount a mere token resistance — perhaps reserving his retaliation for Israel and Saudi Arabia.

More important, he knows that diplomatic gains will far outweigh the punishment that he — or, rather, the Iraqi people — will have to absorb. He has nowhere to go but up — if he survives. From Washington's perspective, the outlook is far more complex. An air strike on Iraq will, at best, devastate Saddam's command, control, communications and logistical facilities.

At worst, it could end in disaster and disgrace if it causes major civilian casualties, which could well lead to international demands for the operation to be aborted.

Either way, Saddam wins.

Purely physical damage, as he demonstrated after the 1991 Gulf War, can be swiftly and effectively repaired, while civilian casualties — which worry Western leaders far more than the Iraqi leader — will play into his hands by casting the United States in the role of imperialist hooligan and international pariah.

Either way, Saddam will be the besieged and battered underdog who faced down the mightiest power on earth.

Military action may also produce another significant gain for Baghdad if it serves to deepen the rift between Washington and Russia, China and France. They might well reciprocate to what they perceive as Washington's unilateral resort to the military option with a unilateral abandonment of sanctions against Iraq. Saddam's gamble will then

MIDEAST FOCUS

Annan cancels Mideast visit

The secretary-general of the United Nations canceled a scheduled visit to the Middle East, apparently because of the crisis in Iraq. Kofi Annan was due to visit Israel, the Palestinian self-rule areas, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. No new date was announced.

Likud names nominee

Israel's Likud caucus elected longtime Knesset member Shaul Amor to run against Ezer Weizman in the presidential elections slated for next month by the full Knesset. Weizman is seeking a second term.

Cabinet approves Shin Bet bill

Israel's Cabinet approved a plan to codify government oversight of the Shin Bet domestic security service into law. But the government will not address the agency's controversial interrogation practices.

Knesset suspends blood drive

The Israeli Knesset suspended a blood drive after an Ethiopian-born legislator charged discrimination, saying he had been the only member of parliament not asked to donate blood.

The discrimination stems from the belief that "our blood is filthy and we could transmit certain diseases," said Labor Knesset member Adisu Massala.

Jubilee slogan adopted

The committee planning Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations unveiled the slogan for the jubilee: "Together in Pride, Together in Hope." Israel has allocated \$1 million to publicize the slogan.

Remains found in Sinai

Bones found in the Sinai Desert could be the remains of an Israeli pilot shot down over Egypt during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, according to reports in the Israeli media. The remains were brought to Israel and then sent to Britain for genetic testing.



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have paid off in spades. The most serious flaw in Washington's threat of military action against Iraq is its failure to define clear and achievable military goals and objectives.

U.S. officials speak of their determination to prevent the Iraqi leader from acquiring the capacity to develop weapons of mass destruction and the missiles for delivering them.

But this is not a goal that can be achieved by air strikes.

Chemical and biological weapons are portable and relatively easy to hide — as are missiles and launchers.

Nor, for that matter, can air strikes destroy the knowledge of scientists and engineers who have the technical skills to develop the weapons and the missiles.

U.S. officials know which sites have been denied to the U.N. weapons inspectors, and they may well suspect where chemical and biological weapons are being manufactured and stored.

But it is beyond even the most optimistic expectations that all of these highly toxic, highly concentrated weapons will be found and destroyed by aerial bombardment.

Asking American pilots and missile-guidance crews to achieve such an amorphous goal amounts to a futile, needle-in-the-haystack exercise.

The goal of the 1991 Gulf War was both clear and achievable — to drive Iraq out of Kuwait and restore Kuwait's ruling family.

The military goal now — to deny Saddam the capacity to develop weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery — is almost certainly not achievable.

A military campaign with unclear and unattainable goals raises more questions than it answers:

At what point will the United States be able to credibly declare that it has achieved its objective?

And if it cannot be achieved, how will the United States justify the millions of dollars worth of smart bombs and the enormous losses — strategic and, quite possibly, human?

Will President Clinton be tempted to commit ground troops in a bid to force access to some of the forbidden sites?

And what if, as is widely discussed, Saddam decides to switch the focus by launching a missile attack on Israel?

Last week, Cohen said that Washington would "strongly urge" Israel not to retaliate if Iraq were to launch a missile assault. But that was not the prevailing view among other top American officials.

And indeed, after meeting in Germany over the weekend with the Israeli defense minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, Cohen reversed himself, saying, "Israel obviously has the right of self-defense."

At this point, two safe bets can be made: First, a U.S. military action which is not completely successful will carry a high price tag — a significant relaxation of sanctions, perhaps, or their complete abandonment.

Second, the United States will pay for the strike in Israeli currency; winning favor in the Arab world again will involve substantial gestures — recognition of a future Palestinian state, perhaps, and overt pressure on Jerusalem to make large concessions to the Palestinians.

Among the Arab world, particularly the Persian Gulf states, there would likely be much private cheering — despite the current posturing to the contrary — should American jets and cruise missiles start racing to their targets in Iraq.

Much of the reluctance of Arab leaders to publicly support a U.S. action comes because they do not trust the resolve of the international community to contain Saddam indefinitely.

Their abiding nightmare is that sanctions will, one way or another, come to an end and they will be left to face the wrath of Saddam, who is both willing and able to use non-conventional weapons against them.

The problem for the Arab states — and indeed for much of the rest of an uncomprehending world — is not Saddam's arsenal of non-conventional weapons, his Scud missiles or his technicians who produce the deadly toxins and design their means of delivery.

The problem, many believe, is Saddam. Period. □

JEWISH WORLD

Crowds greet opening of Jewish office in Berlin

By Deidre Berger

BERLIN (JTA) — Seldom has a mezuzah in Germany attracted as much attention as the one nailed this week to the door of the newly opened American Jewish Committee office here.

There was such a crowd of television journalists and photographers jostling for a good vantage point that few of the invited guests could even view Monday's dedication.

The office is the first branch in Germany of a major American Jewish defense organization. Its location in the heart of Berlin symbolizes the growing importance of German Jewish affairs both within Germany and among American Jewry.

David Harris, executive director of the AJCommittee, told reporters at the opening that the organization expects its new office to facilitate contact between Germany and American Jewry, strengthen ties between American Jews and German Jews and monitor anti-Semitism and racism in Germany.

"Our ultimate aim in Berlin is to ensure that nothing like the Holocaust will ever happen here or anywhere else, ever again. When memory fades, it strengthens those who want to repeat history," he said.

The AJCommittee's European director, Rabbi Andrew Baker, said the Berlin branch will help the organization expand its European outreach through conferences, exchange programs, research ventures and publications. The office will also help coordinate activities in Central and Eastern Europe.

The opening comes at a time of renewed focus on the Holocaust because of a debate in Germany about a planned national Holocaust monument in Berlin — and amid international controversy about the role of Swiss banks in accepting gold stolen by the Nazis from Jewish victims.

Other American Jewish groups with Berlin representatives are the Lubavitch movement and the Ronald Lauder Foundation, both of which do educational outreach.

The AJCommittee office is in on Leipziger Platz, near the Brandenburg Gate, on property that was returned to the Mosse family, a prominent Jewish publishing family in prewar Germany.

A printed statement from family representative George Mosse, a professor of history in the United States, said the presence of the AJCommittee in the building preserves a German Jewish tradition.

Before the war, he said, Jewish organizations frequently met at the site, then occupied by his grandparent's home. The new building is the first one since Germany's unification in 1990 to be completed on Leipziger Platz, a central plaza in Berlin that was destroyed during World War II.

The developer, Hans Roeder, donated space to the AJCommittee rent-free for 10 years. A 100-member delegation of the AJCommittee board of governors visited Germany for the inauguration of the office.

During their stay, they attended receptions sponsored in their honor by the president of Germany, Roman Herzog, and the mayor of Berlin, Eberhard Diepgen.

At a dinner Sunday sponsored by Berlin's Jewish community, Jewish and German officials exchanged views about Jewish community life in Germany and the future role both sides envision for the AJCommittee in Germany.

The office's opening was hailed by local Jewish leaders, with the head of Germany's Jewish community, Ignatz Bubis, calling the step "an enrichment of Jewish life in Germany." The leader of Berlin's Jewish community, Andreas Nachama, said the new office "signifies a rebirth of Berlin as the center of Jewish life, not just for Berlin but for Europe."

At a luncheon Monday, two ambassadors praised the AJCommittee for its decision to base an office in Germany.

The U.S. ambassador to Germany, John Kornblum, said he expects the organization to be a catalyst for discussion and debate, "helping with the continuous process of dealing with the wounds of history." Israel's ambassador to Germany, Avi Primor, called the opening "a breakthrough — something new. It represents a new spirit." □

Australia may bar Farrakhan

Australian officials said Louis Farrakhan had not yet submitted the papers necessary to enter the country.

Even if the Nation of Islam leader, who is on a world tour, were to submit such papers, there is mounting pressure for his exclusion on the grounds that he promotes racism.

A decision on whether the Nation of Islam leader will be permitted to enter Australia can only be made after his application to visit is received.

During the past week, Farrakhan's racist and anti-Semitic statements have received widespread publicity in the Australian media, which have dubbed him the "minister for hate."

Interest will boost accounts

Interest payments will substantially boost the size of dormant Holocaust-era bank accounts that survivors and their heirs are seeking from Swiss banks, according to Paul Volcker, who serves as head of a commission probing the whereabouts of the dormant accounts.

He told a conference on Holocaust issues in New York that his commission hoped to finish the process of locating and returning dormant accounts by the end of the year.

Bulgarian leader meets U.S. Jews

U.S. Jewish business leaders met with the president of Bulgaria, Peter Stoyanov, who had requested the meeting to solicit investments in the former communist country.

The luncheon took place at the home of Andrew Tisch, a member of the board of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The JDC presented an award to the Bulgarian leader in recognition of his country's success at saving its Jewish population from deportation to Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

Iraqnophobia strikes again

Washington was abuzz this week for all of five minutes amid a rumor that a prominent Jewish organizational official was visiting Iraq.

It turns out that Rabbi David Saperstein, the director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, was in I-RAC, the Israel Religious Action Center, which is located in Jerusalem.

A confused receptionist had wrongly tipped off a journalist who had called seeking an interview with Saperstein.

"We're going to have to petition Saddam Hussein to change the name of his country," joked Leonard Fein, director of the Reform movement's commission on social action.

Rabbis' rejection of proposal seen as a 'declaration of war'

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Reform and Conservative movement leaders are denouncing the Israeli Chief Rabbinate's rejection of a key component of a compromise aimed at resolving the controversial issue of conversions in Israel.

The Chief Rabbinate "declared war on the Reform and Conservative movements," the heads of those movements in Israel said in a joint statement Monday.

Rabbi Uri Regev and Ehud Bandel, the Reform and Conservative representatives of the committee that had worked seven months to hammer out a proposal, said that in taking this step, "the Chief Rabbinate endangers splitting the Jewish people."

The strong words came after Israel's Chief Rabbinate Council rejected the creation of a conversion-training institute in which non-Orthodox rabbis would participate. The institute, which would be overseen by the Jewish Agency for Israel, was a key component of the compromise reached by the Ne'eman Committee last month.

The proposal also included a provision that all conversions in Israel would continue to be performed only by Orthodox officials.

The Rabbinic Council, which met for several hours Monday, restricted its discussion to the Ne'eman Committee's recommendation that conversions be conducted in Israel in accordance with halachah, Jewish religious law.

It was not immediately clear what impact the decision would have on efforts to reach a compromise on the conversion issue. The Ne'eman Committee, chaired by Israel's finance minister, Ya'acov Ne'eman, has been meeting since last year in an effort to achieve a compromise acceptable to all of Judaism's religious streams.

The religious parties in the Knesset are now likely to press to resume action on a bill that would set into law the Orthodox establishment's sole authority over conversions in Israel. The bill already passed the first of three legislative hurdles last year.

At the same time, however, a majority of Knesset members recently said they would oppose such legislation. Court cases brought by the Reform and Conservative movements, which are seeking recognition of their authority in Israel, are now likely to move ahead after being put on hold while a compromise was sought.

Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Yisrael Meir Lau, said after Monday's meeting that the council had not been asked to address other proposals in the Ne'eman Committee's report, including the call for the conversion institute.

Asked whether a rabbinical court would confirm a conversion candidate who had been trained by the non-Orthodox movements, Lau told Israel Radio, "Each person will be judged as an individual, according to personality, thoughts and knowledge."

"We will not ask where did you learn," he added. "If this milestone is handled according to the halachah, we will embrace it, and say, 'Welcome brother.'"

Just the same, it appeared that the Chief Rabbinate Council would not accept the creation of the joint conversion institute.

In a statement released after its meeting, the council lashed out at those "who are trying to shake the foundations of the Jewish religion, causing rifts among the people and causing them to stray from the generations-old heritage."

The statement did not actually name the Reform and Conservative movements, but it seemed clear they were the intended targets.

Such efforts "have already had a disastrous effect and caused confusion among Diaspora Jewry," the statement added. "The sages of Israel have barred any cooperation with them and their methods, and no one should consider establishing joint institutions with them." In New York, meanwhile, Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, president of the Orthodox Union, welcomed the Chief Rabbinate's decision, calling it "courageous."

The Chief Rabbinate's decision was not unexpected.

Anticipating such a rejection, Reform and Conservative movement officials had moved forward to approve a technical solution that would address the conversion issue.

Now, an American leader of the Reform movement predicted that the technical solution — first proposed seven months ago, at the start of the Ne'eman Committee's negotiations — would be worked out in a manner acceptable to both the Chief Rabbinate and the liberal movements in Israel.

If one is implemented, the State of Israel would recognize as legitimate the conversions to Judaism performed by non-Orthodox rabbis for the first time.

"We don't expect the ultra-Orthodox to accept us," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists of America. "But they're not entitled to have a monopoly over religious life," he said.

But Ganchrow said he did not anticipate that a technical solution would be worked out. It would be "a tragedy" if one were, he said, because then there would be multiple standards for conversion, rather than the one "which preserves Jewish unity." □

(JTA staff writer Debra Nussbaum Cohen in New York contributed to this story.)

Arson victim blames attack on rival community members

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A fire that damaged the apartment of a prominent member of the Jewish community in Lithuania has thrown the spotlight on a property conflict that has been tearing the community apart since 1993.

Last week, the apartment of the chairman of the Choral Synagogue in Kaunas, Lithuania's second-largest city, was burned by what fire officials are calling an act of arson.

Hatzkelis Zakas, 70, and his wife were not injured, but their property suffered \$7,500 worth of damage.

A few days before the attack, Zakas, a Holocaust survivor, informed police that he has been repeatedly threatened over the phone. One night caller advised him to "buy a coffin," Zakas said in an interview. Zakas charged the Kaunas Jewish community with responsibility for the attack, a charge denied by the chairman of the 500-member Jewish community, Simonas Davidavicius.

The story began in 1992, when local authorities returned two buildings to the Kaunas Jewish community, angering a small group of elderly Jews, mostly Holocaust survivors, who run the Choral Synagogue and see themselves as successors to the prewar Jewish community. The Choral Synagogue was Kaunas' one functioning synagogue during the Soviet years.

The group of elderly Jews filed suit against the city's Jewish community, but a court has yet to make a decision on the dispute. The community is leasing out the recently recovered synagogues and is using the income to fund activities for the city's Jews. □