



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 81

Wednesday, May 6, 1998

81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Conditional invitation issued

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright invited Israeli and Palestinian leaders to come to Washington on May 11 if they could reach an agreement for advancing the peace process before then.

The "if" is key here, and the future of the peace process now depends on what transpires during the next week. [Page 1]

### Institute may soon open

Israel's first joint conversion institute could be established within two months in Beersheba, where many new immigrants live, according to the chairman of the institute's seven-member board.

A government-appointed commission earlier this year suggested the creation of these kinds of institutes as part of a compromise to avert a crisis over who would perform conversions in Israel. [Page 4]

### Austria remembers Nazi victims

Austria held its first annual national remembrance day for Holocaust victims. The government chose May 5 because the Mauthausen concentration camp in central Austria was liberated by Allied troops on that date in 1945.

A nationally televised session of both houses of Parliament was one of the day's commemorative events.

### Iranian linked to AMIA blast

An Argentine prosecutor linked Iran's former cultural attache to Buenos Aires to the 1994 bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association, also known as AMIA.

The prosecutor accused Mahsen Rabbani of complicity in the attack after the judge investigating the still-unsolved bombing — which left 86 dead and more than 300 wounded — recently interrogated an unnamed former Iranian official who had sought asylum in Germany.

### Comptroller issues critical report

Israel's state comptroller released a report critical of the country's government and the army. The report charged the government with giving too much money to the fervently Orthodox community, and the Israel Defense Force with failing to take effective action against terrorists and criminals. [Page 4]

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Tiny window of opportunity emerges from London talks

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — The London talks may not be the failure they appear to be.

As the parties packed their bags Tuesday afternoon, both Israeli and Palestinian officials stressed that although the talks had not produced a breakthrough, neither had they broken down.

"Significant differences remain," said one Israeli official, "but although the gaps have not been bridged, we will continue. The procedures are still intact and the contacts will go on."

The talks involved a dizzying bout of separate meetings at three central London hotels involving U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

And when they were over, Albright invited the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to come to Washington next week — if they could reach an agreement for advancing the peace process before then.

The "if" is key here, and the future of the peace process now depends on what transpires during the next week.

Before the Israelis and Palestinians travel to the U.S. capital, they must first resolve their differences regarding a widely reported American proposal under which Israel would redeploy from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank in exchange for specific Palestinian steps to live up to their part of already-signed agreements.

But can the two sides resolve those differences in a matter of days after having failed to do so in London?

According to Israeli officials who spoke on condition of anonymity, the answer is a ringing yes.

These officials say that Israel will accept the American proposals in some form, even though Netanyahu has staunchly opposed the 13 percent figure from the start.

"In some form" will likely mean that Israel will present some modifications to the American plan — but just the same, the officials are confident that there will be an agreement soon.

Analysts suggest that Netanyahu may be willing to bend somewhat because Albright has said that if the two sides come to Washington on May 11, as invited, the meeting would set the stage for launching the final-status talks — something that Israel has long been seeking. Indeed, Albright herself hinted of flexibility on the part of the Israeli government when she told a news conference just before leaving London on Tuesday afternoon that Netanyahu had been "helpful and constructive in his thinking across a whole range of issues."

To some extent, the optimism that the process will resume after more than a year of deadlock rests on the political wisdom which dictates that success or failure in peacemaking depends not so much on matters of ideology, but rather on hard-headed pragmatism and a fine calculation of self-interest.

The encouraging signs from London this week are that, whatever intermediate hurdles must be overcome, Israeli and Palestinian leaders appear to regard the success of the process as vital to their personal and national interests and neither side appears willing to take the fateful step of torpedoing the process.

Netanyahu might well feel constrained by right-wing elements in his Cabinet. Indeed, he told Albright that he did not have this body's authorization to make a final

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Politicians back off from Milo

A number of leading Israeli figures distanced themselves from Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo's plans to form an independent party and run for prime minister in the next national elections.

Among those who said they would not team up with Milo were former Foreign Minister David Levy, former Prime Minister Shimon Peres and several members of Likud who have spoken out against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

### Shahak successor mulled

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is considering two candidates to succeed Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak as the Israel Defense Force's chief of staff.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai reportedly backs the current deputy chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Shaul Mofaz. Some Knesset members and IDF officers have placed a series of calls to Netanyahu to press for the other candidate, Maj. Gen. Matan Vilnai. Meanwhile, Shahak told a Knesset committee that the delay in naming his successor was harmful to the IDF.

### Palestinian official resigns

The attorney general of the Palestinian Authority said he has resigned after serving less than a year in office.

Fayez Abu Rahma was quoted as saying that he quit because of "interference and obstacles" preventing him from doing his job properly. The Palestinian justice minister, Freih Abu Medein, said Rahma quit for health reasons.

### Viagra sales investigated

Israel is investigating black-market sales of a U.S. treatment for impotence. Viagra, whose sales are rising quickly in the United States, cannot be sold legally in the Jewish state. A recent edition of the newspaper Yediot Achronot advertised the "new erection pill from the United States."



## Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, President

Mark J. Joffe, Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein, Editor

Kenneth Bandler, Managing Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein, Business Manager

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).

© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

decision in London. But just the same, he is a consummate political operator who keeps one eye on winning the next election and the other on the polls — which consistently show that the overwhelming majority of Israelis support progress in the peace process.

Netanyahu, who successfully ran on a platform of "Peace With Security" in 1996, is likely to win a second term in 2000 if he can deliver on this cautiously pragmatic approach.

A breakdown in the peace process is not in his interests — nor in those of Arafat, who, confronted by a burgeoning challenge from Islamic militants, faces potentially perilous domestic questions about his credibility.

Despite the lack of tangible progress in London, both leaders will need to show some progress — and soon.

While Netanyahu's longer-term strategic interest may be focused on winning the next election, Arafat wants to realize his dream of declaring an independent Palestinian state on May 4, 1999, the scheduled date for the conclusion of the final-status talks.

This dream has complicated already-difficult negotiations: Arafat's repeated assertion that he will declare an independent state next May with or without a final-status agreement has made Netanyahu particularly distrustful.

Netanyahu, deeply suspicious of his Palestinian partner, does not trust Arafat to deliver on the security agreements to which he is already committed.

And now, confronted with the issue of further redeployments from the West Bank, he is reluctant to take a step that will help the Palestinian leader make a unilateral declaration of independence.

As Netanyahu flew back to Jerusalem, he might have reflected that the London meetings represented a net gain.

For the talks to proceed, he will have to come up with something akin to the 13 percent further redeployment envisioned in the U.S. proposal.

But, Israeli sources said, he used the London meetings to nail down a watertight, verifiable timetable of Palestinian compliance on security matters.

His initial five-hour meeting with Albright on Monday did indeed focus on the core issue of redeployment, the sources said. But more important from his perspective, he had the opportunity to attempt to change the terms of the debate by proposing what they called a "new conceptual framework" for negotiations.

The question of redeployment would, of course, continue to be a feature of the talks, the sources said.

But according to the new script, it would no longer attract top billing. Rather, redeployment would be just one item on what a senior Israeli government official described as a "comprehensive menu of negotiating topics."

Redeployment would thus be locked into a slew of other issues, which include the Palestinian Authority's amending the Palestinian Covenant, extraditing terrorist suspects to Israel, confiscating unauthorized weapons and destroying the terrorist infrastructures of Islamic radicals in the self-rule areas.

The new concept would have the effect of diluting the territorial dimension of the negotiations, increasing the focus on security issues and reducing what the Israeli officials perceive as "the unequal pressure on Israel."

Israeli officials complain that while they are negotiating on the basis of the land-for-peace formula, the reality is that almost all the attention is on the land that Israel would hand over, with comparatively little attention on the peace that the Palestinians would offer in return.

As a result, a senior Israeli official said, Netanyahu offered a proposal to make each of the Palestinian steps as concrete and tangible as the land Israel would transfer.

According to the official, Albright found enough merit in Netanyahu's proposal to carry it directly to Arafat.

Indeed, the talks extended one day beyond the intended timetable, and U.S. State Department officials are expected to continue working with the parties through the week.

Thus the London talks, earlier billed as make-or-break by the Palestinians, have instead created a new, albeit tiny, window of opportunity.

And the Israelis, at least, contend they will be coming to Washington. Only time will tell. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Australia drops Kalejs probe

Australia said it was dropping an investigation of a suspected Latvian war criminal who has held Australian citizenship since World War II. Police officials cited insufficient evidence against Konrad Kalejs, 84, who is accused of having participated in the killing of 20,000 Jews in Latvia during the war.

The Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center recently said it believes that 64 suspected Latvian war criminals are living in Australia and called on the Australian government to take action against them.

### Students mark Arad's birthday

Jewish college students in New York are planning a demonstration to mark the 40th birthday of an Israeli airman who has been missing for 12 years.

Similar demonstrations were held Tuesday in Israel, Europe and Latin America to call for the release of Ron Arad. Arad's fighter plane was shot down over Lebanon in 1986. Israel officials have repeatedly maintained that Iran is holding him.

### Bormann remains confirmed

German scientists confirmed that the remains of a body found at a Berlin construction site were those of Hitler deputy Martin Bormann.

The head of Munich University's Institute for Forensic Medicine said DNA provided conclusive evidence to quash rumors that Bormann had fled to South America after the collapse of the Third Reich.

### Former SS member plans run

A former member of the Nazi SS announced plans to run on the ticket of an extreme-right German political party in elections next year for the European Parliament. Franz Schonhuber, the former leader of the far-right Republican Party, announced his candidacy on the slate of the German People's Union, which scored a strong showing in recent state elections.

### Offensive words to be cited

A Massachusetts-based dictionary publisher agreed to describe as offensive some 200 words appearing in a forthcoming dictionary. But a spokesman for Merriam-Webster said the company was refusing to bow to pressures to have words such as "nigger," "kike" and "queer" removed from its 1999 Collegiate Dictionary.

### Jewish museum names architect

The Jewish museum of San Francisco selected a new architect to design a new center for Jewish arts and culture in the Golden Gate City. Daniel Libeskind, the architect of the new Jewish museum in Berlin, will now oversee the design of a 70,000-square-foot building in downtown San Francisco.

## Reform rabbis table vote on blessing gay marriage

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Leaders of the Reform rabbinate have shelved a scheduled vote on the validity of Jewish same-sex marriages after more than two years of effort to come up with an official position on the matter.

An open discussion and vote were planned for the upcoming annual meeting of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis, scheduled to take place June 21-25 in Anaheim, Calif.

But even without such a vote, more than 200 Reform rabbis signed on to a list — in its first week of circulation alone — of those who say they have performed such a ceremony, or would if asked. Rabbi Richard Levy of Los Angeles, currently the CCAR president, has added his name to the list.

Instead, the two CCAR committees that have spent thousands of working hours trying to develop a position on the matter will present their mutually exclusive conclusions and then have participants break into small group discussions.

A full-throttle effort by opponents of a vote, led in part by the head of the Association of Reform Zionists of America, Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, is largely responsible for the 11th-hour reversal, said those behind the scenes.

Hirsch circulated a six-page memo to his colleagues in the Reform rabbinate last month strongly urging them not to allow the matter to come up for a vote, and if it did, to vote it down. He was concerned, he said in the memo, about harming Reform interests in Israel by taking steps that would distance them from the Conservative and Orthodox movements, which don't condone gay unions.

The divergent positions within the Reform rabbinate are most visible in the conclusions reached by the CCAR's Ad Hoc Committee on Human Sexuality — which is soon to be renamed the Committee on Jewish Sexual Values, according to one member — and its Responsa Committee.

The committee on sexuality arrived at the position that there can be kedushah, or holiness, in committed same-gender relationships, according to a draft of its original resolution. Members of that group concluded "that these relationships can be affirmed by Jewish ritual, and that each rabbi should decide about officiation according to his/her informed rabbinic conscience." The Responsa Committee, on the other hand, concluded that there is no basis in Jewish tradition for the religious sanctification of same-sex couples and that it is not possible to find a way to consider such unions within the category of those with "kedushah."

The latter committee's full report, published in the Winter 1998 issue of the CCAR Journal, emphasized that committee members were even unable to arrive at a shared vocabulary with which to debate this issue, a problem that has been playing out on a larger scale throughout the Reform rabbinate.

"In our discussion there is a spectrum of opinion," Rabbi Selig Salkowitz of Highland Park, Ill., chairman of the sexuality committee, said in an interview. "We're prepared to look at that and share the opportunity of having people help us formulate a final position."

But those who had favored a vote are concerned that the discussions at the upcoming convention won't further the debate any more than those that took place at the conference two years ago, in Philadelphia, where it was a prominent issue.

"It would be much more productive and in the tradition of Reform Judaism to be more open and democratic" with a full-fledged discussion, said Rabbi Jerome Davidson of Great Neck, N.Y.

"We have to do what's right for the large number of gay and lesbian Jews, and the time is now," said Davidson, who is also on the sexuality committee and is a vocal advocate for the adoption of an official policy approving same-sex commitment ceremonies. "Postponing it is really failing to meet a Jewish need, and we ought to be on the cutting edge," he said.

Also being considered for the convention is a session at which Reform rabbis who have officiated at same-sex commitment ceremonies will describe the rites they have led, said one of the rabbis involved with the planning. □

## Controversy still swirling around conversion institute

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A joint institute aimed at resolving the conversion crisis is moving forward despite protests by Israel's Reform and Conservative movements and an impending renewal of the pluralism battle in court.

The seven-member board of the Institute for Jewish Studies, set up by the Jewish Agency for Israel, includes five Orthodox representatives, and one each from the Conservative and Reform movements. It held its first meeting late last month, and will meet again on May 17.

Benjamin Ish-Shalom, the committee's chairman, said the first institute, planned for the southern town of Beersheba, where many new immigrants live, could be established "within two months."

Conservative and Reform leaders say they will continue to send representatives to the meetings. They say, however, that they are only participating in a dialogue to advance mutual understanding and stress that the institute is not the solution proposed by the Ne'eman commission.

That committee, headed by Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, worked for months to find a compromise between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox in Israel over the right to perform conversions in Israel, where the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate currently has sole authority.

Under the compromise proposed by the Ne'eman Committee, rabbis from Judaism's three leading streams would participate in training potential converts, while the Orthodox clergy would perform the conversions. But the Chief Rabbinate refused to sign on to the plan, so the committee's proposal was never formally implemented. The government decided to establish and allocate a budget for the institute anyway.

But Reform and Conservative leaders have expressed dismay that the rabbinate has rejected working with them and have vowed to return to court.

"This is not the institute discussed in the Ne'eman commission," said Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of Israel's Masorti, or Conservative, movement. "We conditioned our acceptance of the Ne'eman commission recommendations on the Chief Rabbinate accepting the conclusions in their entirety. The Chief Rabbinate has not done this."

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, wrote in an op-ed in the Jerusalem Post that "the mutual recognition, dialogue and cooperation that would have resulted from the original proposals" have been "entirely eliminated, leaving the status quo essentially intact."

Bobby Brown, the prime minister's adviser on Diaspora affairs who has been a central player in compromise efforts, rejected the liberal movements' complaints and said the conversion institute can become a viable solution.

"I don't know why they are complaining," he said. "A year ago, all of the achievements we've made were undreamed of. The government has taken a position that is different from the rabbinate, and turned the Reform and Conservative movements from small, marginal groups into full-fledged partners."

The institute's chairman, Ish-Shalom, said his interpretation of the Ne'eman Committee was that the Orthodox rabbinate did not

have to be a party to the agreement.

In any case, he added, "the rabbinate has said it would consider any candidate for conversion from any program."

Bandel, however, insisted that without explicit agreement from the rabbinate, the institute would be meaningless.

Meanwhile, the Conservative movement is gearing up to return to court. Both the Conservative and Reform movements had put on hold several court cases related to religious pluralism issues to give the Ne'eman Committee a chance to work.

On May 14, the Supreme Court is slated to discuss whether to lift the freeze on the Conservative movement's case to win recognition of conversions of adopted babies. The state will ask the court to keep the freeze in place. For his part, Brown warned the movements not to renew the court battle.

"If they want to work towards good will, they will find partners," he said. "If they want confrontation, that's what they'll get." □

## New Israeli report criticizes yeshiva funding, security steps

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's comptroller has released a report critical of the country's government and the army.

The report, issued by Miriam Ben-Porat, charged the government with giving too much money to the fervently Orthodox community and the Israel Defense Force with failing to take effective action against terrorists and criminals.

Issuing her annual report on the activities of the government and government-run agencies, Ben-Porat attributed what she called the preferential treatment given to yeshivas to political pressure on the government and the agreements Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signed with the fervently Orthodox, or haredi, parties when he formed his government in 1996.

Ben-Porat charged that billions of dollars had been wasted — money that could have been spent on improving education, transportation and creating more jobs. She also cited instances in which some yeshivas submitted lists of fictitious students in order to receive more funding from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

In her annual report — Ben-Porat's 10th and final one before her expected retirement later this year — she also pointed to widening social gaps and some instances of alleged corruption.

Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi, who heads a ministerial committee overseeing the State Comptroller's Office, said all of the issues raised in the 1,300-page report would be examined, including Ben-Porat's criticisms of a number of political appointments.

"This includes ensuring that every appointment by a minister or the government will only be based on professional criteria," Hanegbi told Israel Radio.

Regarding terrorist activities, the report noted that after a series of suicide bombings in 1995 and 1996, the IDF, the Prime Minister's Office and the Finance Ministry had come up with a number of plans to increase security — none of which was implemented.

The report further said the country's security measures had failed to prevent the infiltration of terrorist and criminal elements from the self-rule areas, and had also failed to block the illegal entry of Palestinian laborers. □