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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Knesset backs early elections

The Knesset approved a bill to hold new elections by a vote of 81-30 with four abstentions. The Labor-sponsored bill faces two more votes, which could happen as early as next week.

Netanyahu indicated that he does not intend to block its passage. By a vote of 56-48, the Knesset also rejected the premier's stance on the Wye agreement, which calls on the Palestinian Authority to fulfill five conditions before Israel resumes implementation of the accord.

Meanwhile, former Israeli army chief Amnon Shahak rejected a call from opposition leader Ehud Barak to join the Labor Party, saying he intends to run for prime minister himself when new elections are held.

During a meeting with Shahak, Barak appealed to him to change his plans, saying his candidacy would only split the left-wing vote in a race against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. [Page 1]

Jewish lawmakers vote party line

The 21 Jewish Democrats in the House of Representatives united with their party on Saturday to unanimously oppose all four impeachment articles against President Clinton.

On the other side of the aisle, Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) voted for the two articles that passed the House. In his last vote as a member of the House, Rep. Jon Fox (R-Pa.), who was defeated for re-election, voted in favor of all four articles considered by the House.

Rep. Bernie Sanders, an independent from Vermont, voted against impeachment.

Bomb in Germany triggers talk

The destruction of the gravestone of one of German Jewry's most prominent postwar leaders triggered a discussion in Germany on the security of Jewish institutions and the spread of right-wing extremism.

The director of the city's department of the interior said the self-made bomb that destroyed the tombstone of Heinz Galinski was hidden in the lid of a bottle of gas.

The explosion, which occurred over the weekend, was so strong that pieces of metal were found in a wide circumference around the grave. [Page 2]

Israel preparing for elections after premier loses Knesset vote

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The U.S.-brokered Wye agreement has proved to be the final straw for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's fragmented coalition.

With coalition hard-liners attacking the accord's land-for-security arrangements, and the opposition attacking the premier's recent decision to freeze implementation of the agreement, the outcome of a Knesset session Monday appeared to be a foregone conclusion. During that session, the 120-member Knesset overwhelmingly approved a bill to hold new elections by a vote of 81-30, with four abstentions.

The vote came after the Labor Party rejected an 11th-hour call from Netanyahu to form a national unity government.

The bill's passage was guaranteed earlier in the day, when Netanyahu's Likud Party, recognizing that it could not secure a majority for the prime minister's freezing of the peace process, said it would back the call for early elections.

With its passage, the bill was sent back to the Knesset's Legislative Committee prior to two more votes, which could happen as early as next week.

But it was widely believed that the coalition and opposition would soon agree upon a date for elections prior to the completion of the legislative process.

Netanyahu is said to want elections in May, while Labor favors March.

At the opening of Monday's session, legislators passed the first reading of a bill to cancel the law for the direct election of the prime minister. Netanyahu is the only Israeli prime minister to be elected in this manner.

Prior to the vote, legislators agreed that if the bill becomes law after two subsequent votes, it would not apply to the upcoming election.

Monday's vote on holding new elections followed a stormy session in which Netanyahu asked the Knesset to back his stance on the Wye agreement, which calls on the Palestinian Authority to fulfill five conditions before Israel resumes implementation of the accord, which was signed in October.

By a vote of 56-48, the Knesset rejected that stance.

Earlier in the session, Netanyahu appealed for a 72-hour break to explore the possibility of forming a national unity government.

He attributed his about-face, after weeks of publicly ruling out the possibility of such a government, to an impassioned plea made during the session by the leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, Aryeh Deri.

Deri's speech "did something to me. It came from the heart," the premier said. "It's very possible that we can't [succeed], but maybe we should make an effort.

"If we succeed, the people of Israel will thank us. If not, we will know that we tried. I am extending my hand for national unity."

Opposition leader Ehud Barak, whom Netanyahu called on to respond immediately, dismissed the proposal, saying it was "too late."

Recounting the divisions that have plagued Netanyahu's coalition of right-wing and religious parties, Barak said he doubted real unity could be achieved.

He also questioned the authenticity of the proposal.

"We believe that only peace, clear red lines and a determined fight against terrorism will bring real peace. I am not convinced that this government, as a collective which determines the fate of Israel, is going to pursue this," Barak said.

"As painful as it is, I felt it is too late. Everyone must judge for themselves, but I cannot say that this is a serious proposal." During the often contentious debate,

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. calls for Wye implementation

Israel should adhere to the Wye accord, U.S. officials said after the Israeli Cabinet voted to freeze implementation of the agreement.

"We would hope that the Israeli government as well as the Palestinians would live up to the letter and spirit of the agreement," U.S. National Security Adviser Sandy Berger told CNN.

American officials have called on the Jewish state to live up to the accord even if new elections are held there.

Israelis deny spying charges

Two Israelis denied in a court in Cyprus that they had spied against the Mediterranean island.

The court set a trial date of Jan. 20 for the two men, who were arrested in November.

Israel has denied the charges, but has not refuted reports that the two were working for an Israeli intelligence service.

Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres said last week the two were working to prevent a terrorist act against Israel.

Booklet angers women's groups

Israeli women's rights groups criticized the Health Ministry for distributing booklets with ultrasound pictures of human embryos to women requesting abortions.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that women appearing before ministry committees to seek approval for an abortion were given the booklets, which include the statement, "Surely you must be interested in the stage of development of the embryo in your womb."

Deputy Health Minister Shlomo Benizri, a member of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, defended the practice.

A number of hospitals said they would not distribute the booklet.



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Netanyahu accused the left wing of renegeing on its promise to provide him with a safety net on matters relating to the peace process.

"You said you would provide a safety net. We know what kind of safety net that is. One with rips in it," he said.

Barak retorted that the government was more interested in its own survival than in upholding the 2-month-old Wye agreement.

"Time after time, we saved this government from its own coalition in order to continue the process," Barak said, adding that the opposition had come to believe that the "government is not interested in upholding the agreement but only in its political survival."

The former army chief then pointedly asked the premier, "Why don't members of your own government support you?"

As the coalition and opposition work in the coming days to agree on a date for new elections, their decision will be significant for one expected prime ministerial candidate — former army chief Amnon Shahak.

Shahak is currently on leave from the army. By law, he must wait out a 100-day grace period before entering politics. Shahak rejected a call from Barak to join the Labor Party, saying he intends to run for prime minister. He is expected to head a new, centrist party being formed for the elections.

During a meeting with Shahak, Barak appealed to him to change his plans, saying his candidacy would only split the left-wing vote in a race against Netanyahu.

Meanwhile, several prominent figures in the Likud Party were rumored to be thinking of breaking away to join other parties or form new ones — among them Communications Minister Limor Livnat and former Cabinet ministers Dan Meridor and Benny Begin. □

Germany weighs Jewish security after bomb rocks Berlin cemetery

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — The destruction of the gravestone of one of German Jewry's most prominent postwar leaders has triggered a discussion in Germany on the security of Jewish institutions and the spread of right-wing extremism.

The director of the city's department of the interior, Eckart Werthebach, said the bomb that destroyed the tombstone of Heinz Galinski over the weekend was hidden in the lid of a bottle of gas.

Werthebach said the number of anti-Semitic incidents in Berlin this past year increased significantly, but did not give any statistics.

Galinski, who died in 1992, was one of the most prominent Jews in Germany after World War II. The survivor of three Nazi concentration camps, Galinski led the Berlin Jewish community for 43 years. He also headed the Central Council of Jews in Germany from 1988 until his death.

Ignatz Bubis, Galinski's successor, said he is "certain that it is an attack by the right wing, which wants the Jews to get out of Germany."

But Bubis rejected assertions that the attack on Galinski's grave marks a dramatic increase in anti-Semitism. He said Jewish cemetery desecrations have become part of everyday life in Germany and called for better security measures.

Authorities said Galinski's grave is patrolled hourly. The unknown assailants possibly gained access to the grave from an adjacent military cemetery by scaling a barbed-wire fence.

The Berlin police president met Monday with a representative from the local Jewish community to review security at the city's Jewish institutions.

Police said they are investigating possible parallels between this attack and other Jewish cemetery desecrations in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany.

In 1997, there were 40 Jewish cemetery desecrations in Germany, compared to 26 in 1996 and 40 in 1995. In 1997, the number of anti-Semitic incidents — largely acts of propaganda — in Germany increased slightly compared to 1996 after several years of decreasing numbers. □

JEWISH WORLD

Spanish Jews mark Chanukah

Members of Spain's Jewish community held their first public celebration of Chanukah since the Expulsion in 1492.

Israel's Sephardi chief rabbi, Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, led more than 1,000 people at the ceremony in Girona on the eighth night of the festival. The ceremony took place at a site where the city's Jewish residents sought shelter from anti-Semitic mobs in 1391.

Communist retreats from remark

The head of Russia's Communist Party awkwardly attempted to disassociate himself from an anti-Semitic statement made last week by a prominent member of his party.

Gennady Zyuganov said he disagreed with the views of Viktor Ilyukhin, who said Jews in President Boris Yeltsin's inner circle were responsible for "genocide" against ethnic Russians.

Zyuganov said Russians in Yeltsin's Cabinet had caused more harm to the country than those ministers widely believed to have Jewish ancestry.

Rabbis oppose gay marriages

Reform rabbis in France, Belgium and Switzerland issued a statement expressing their opposition to gay marriages.

The move was prompted by a controversy in France over a bill to grant extended rights to gay couples. The statement was also issued to refute claims by Orthodox rabbis in France that their Reform counterparts support such marriages, one of the rabbis who signed the statement said.

Publisher to look at Nazi past

Bertelsmann, the world's largest publisher of English-language books, said it appointed a panel of historians to investigate its activities in Nazi Germany. The announcement followed allegations that the company, which had previously said it actively opposed Nazi rule, had mass-produced Nazi propaganda and other anti-Semitic works.

Businessmen back racist mailing

Two California businessmen are backing the efforts of white supremacists to reach out to thousands of homes in Idaho.

The two, who grew wealthy in the computer business, did not deny allegations that they financed the recent mailing of anti-Semitic posters and videos to some 3,000 Idaho residents.

The Alabama-based Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate groups across the United States, said it was surprised by the quality and sophistication of the mailings.

Washington activists race to learn who is Dennis Hastert

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Who is Dennis Hastert?

That was the question Jewish activists and everyone else in Washington was asking this week after the six-term congressman from Illinois emerged from the wreckage of the impeachment debate as the consensus choice to fill the Republican leadership void, which was suddenly created after House Speaker-designate Rep. Bob Livingston (R-La.) announced over the weekend that he would resign from Congress in the wake of revelations of his marital infidelity.

Hastert is expected to be elected speaker on Jan. 6.

Hastert, a former high school wrestling coach, has a reputation as a behind-the-scenes deal-maker and consensus builder — a skill most political observers say he will need to employ as he faces the challenges of bridging deep divisions within the Republican Party and reaching out to Democrats across the fierce partisan divide.

As chief deputy whip, Hastert has close ties to Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Texas), the prime mover behind President Clinton's impeachment. But for the most part, little is known about the man who would be third in line to become president, and the generic initial reactions from some Jewish activists reflected this fact.

"He's in a unique position to be a very strong speaker with universal support," said Matt Brooks, executive director of the Republican-aligned National Jewish Coalition.

Brooks cited Hastert's record supporting aid to Israel and Jerusalem as Israel's capital, adding that his group was in the process of finding out more about him.

While his interactions with the Jewish community have been limited — there are relatively few Jews in Hastert's district west of Chicago — Jews from his home state say he is far from an unknown quantity.

Michael Kotzin, director of Chicago's Jewish Community Relations Council, described Hastert as a "solid Midwestern hard-working kind of guy who has been accessible to our community and has been there on Israel matters."

Chuck Brooks, executive director and treasurer of National PAC, the largest pro-Israel political action committee, noted that Hastert has a 100 percent voting record on pro-Israel issues. Hastert has visited Israel on three separate trips.

On the church-state front, the other realm of major Jewish concern, Hastert has staked out positions that are more or less in step with conservative Republicans. The Christian Coalition gave Hastert a 100 percent rating, and he voted earlier this year in favor of a constitutional amendment allowing for prayer in public schools — an issue that is viewed by some in the Jewish community as a church-state litmus test.

Marcia Balonick, executive director of the Joint Action Committee for Political Affairs, an Illinois based multi-issue Jewish PAC, said her group has never supported Hastert because of his opposition to abortion rights and support for school vouchers and other measures that challenge church-state separation.

Hastert's emergence, meanwhile, even struck Jewish Democrats as relatively unobjectionable. "If the standard is milquetoast, then Hastert wins with flying colors," said Stephen Silberfarb, deputy director of the National Jewish Democratic Council. "He might be better than Livingston, but he's not a sufficient upgrade to make people forget Newt Gingrich." □

Russian Jews support new political party

MOSCOW (JTA) — Several Jewish leaders threw their support behind a new centrist political party in Russia.

Russian Chief Rabbi Adolph Shayevich and Jewish legislator Yosef Kobzon were among those who attended the first meeting of the Fatherland Party, founded by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov.

Luzhkov is a likely candidate in Russia's next presidential election, scheduled for 2000.

He recently spoke out against anti-Semitism and ultranationalism in Russia. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish high school kids get a taste of D.C. politics*By Mica Schneider*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — "Yes, there are Jews in Iowa."

And to make sure his senator's staff realized that, Eliot Garfield walked into Tom Harkin's office wearing the slogan scrawled across the bottom of his name tag.

By the time Garfield and the six other Jewish high school students from Iowa reached their Democratic senator's office, they were experienced lobbyists on the three issues they discussed at the Religious Action Center's L'Taken conference.

The conference brought 250 Jewish high school students from eight states to Washington on a recent weekend to learn about issues on the Reform movement's legislative agenda.

At the culmination of the conference, the students descended on Capitol Hill, awkwardly clad in suits and skirts and toting loose-leaf notebooks, to voice their opinions in meetings with members of Congress from their respective states.

The students chose to lobby for aid to Israel, in favor of federal hate crimes legislation and in support of the Patients Bill of Rights.

Harkin did not attend the meeting.

But Garfield reminded his legislative assistants of the importance of a patients rights bill, which the senator supports, by quoting a passage from a work Maimonides wrote in the 12th century.

"Though the text is from the 12th century, there is no reason why it shouldn't be at the top of society's agenda today," Garfield argued.

Melissa Werner told Harkin's aides that her family has problems getting insurance because of a "pre-existing condition" no one in her family has anymore.

While the senator's legislative assistant for health care reform, Tom Vinson, wrote down Werner's address and phone number to contact her family, he said the office does not usually hear from "the people who support bills, because they figure, 'Harkin supports that bill, he doesn't have to hear from me.'"

"But we do," he said.

Rabbi Debby Hachen of Westboro, Mass., said students walked away with an understanding of how complex it is to get a piece of legislation through Congress.

But she said they also learned also how one individual can make a difference in light of how few people speak up.

Like the rest of Washington, this group could not escape the debate over President Clinton's impeachment. The students gathered for the closing of the conference in a room just doors away from where the House Judiciary Committee was holding the impeachment hearings.

Rep. Jim Leach (R-Iowa) "asked us our position on the impeachment process when we were done stating our issues," 16-year-old Garfield said. "We gave him seven nos."

The Religious Action Center, which serves as the Reform movement's public policy and lobbying mechanism in Washington, aimed to teach the students how to promote Reform Jewish interests in Washington and their hometowns.

"Our job is to let members of Congress know about Jewish

issues," Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center, told the students.

"Without us, they can't do their job. It's true of 16-year-olds as much as it's true for 60-year-olds. If you have the ability, you have a responsibility."

Congregations brought adults and children to the center's Washington office as early as 1973 to learn how and why Jews lobby on the Hill, said Rabbi Mark Israel, director of congregational relations.

In the 1980s, the center made the weekend seminar more formal, and numbers began to climb to the level they stand at today — about 800 to 1,000 students every year.

The center plans two more conferences, in February and March, but they are already full.

It wants to increase the number of programs to six and decrease each conference's attendance to 200. That way more students could participate and the size of the groups would be more manageable.

Rabbi Peter Kasden of Temple Emanu-El in Livingston, N.J., was one of the first leaders to bring Jewish students to Washington. Kasden said he was tired of going to New York on trips that took students to Broadway shows, dinner and some museums, when he could bring his students to Washington for an entire weekend for \$25 — a cost that has since risen.

"Everything they do has to have a Jewish reason," Kasden said.

"It's the idea of tikkun olam, heal the world, only they don't just learn it, they practice it. They will feel more adult when they leave."

Legislative assistants run the conference as part of their yearlong fellowships at the center and coordinate discussions of current events they say few students understand when they arrive on Friday night.

Brian Leiken, a legislative assistant, said, "They're starting to realize there is a world outside of their school worlds."

From Friday night to Sunday, the conference packed the students with information on current issues in Congress, and the result — exposing students to the issues they are almost able to vote on — shows just how pivotal an experience the weekend is, Pelavin said.

"For a lot of them, they are thinking about stuff they never thought about before," he said.

"We hope they leave here with an increased knowledge of what Jewish tradition says about current issues, increased knowledge of the current issues and understanding the ability each one of them has to make a difference."

But perhaps because of the impeachment controversy, some students from New Jersey said they know now that politics is not for them.

"I just don't think politics is a very positive area," Courtney Darrow of Temple Emanu-El said in light of President Clinton's battle with Congress.

Aside from lessons learned on Capitol Hill, many students left with new friends and fresh experiences.

"We come from a small Jewish community of 150 families and only 60 children in the religious school," said Margi Rogal, a parent chaperone for the students from Iowa. "It's good to have our kids exposed to other Jewish kids, because most of their friends aren't Jewish." □