

IN THE NEWS

Nazi-era paintings ordered returned

An Austrian court ordered the return of paintings to the heir of their original Jewish owner.

The ruling would return the works by Gustav Klimt to the heir of Czech-Jewish businessman Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer.

[Story, Pg. 3]

Israel kills Hamas leader

Israeli troops killed a senior Palestinian terrorist in the West Bank.

The Hamas field commander, Tabeth Salah a-Din, was shot dead in Tulkarm on Tuesday after opening fire on soldiers who surrounded his hideout.

The army said troops tried to arrest him, but were forced to resort to lethal measures when he resisted.

High court upholds suicide law

Orthodox groups expressed disappointment at a U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding Oregon's assisted suicide law.

The high court ruled Tuesday that Oregon's law, permitting doctor-assisted suicide, was not a violation of federal drug laws.

Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, said the ruling goes against Jewish teachings of the value and sanctity of life.

"The Bible instructs us to 'surely heal' the ill, not to speed their departure from this earth," he said.

Agudath Israel of America also spoke out against Oregon statutes, which they said "make it possible to commit murder."

Numerous other Jewish groups chose not to weigh in on the case but have been interested in its impact on end-of-life issues, a controversial subject in the Jewish community.

Six justices ruled in favor of Oregon, which allowed doctor-assisted suicide in a 1994 ballot initiative.



WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE • WWW.JTA.ORG

For Olmert, good ratings so far, but tough calls loom on horizon

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Widely praised for the low-key and sensitive manner in which he has taken over from ailing Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert is the odds-on favorite to win Israel's March 28 general election.

But the acting prime minister faces a number of severe early tests, and his continued popularity depends on how he copes.

First there is a potential flashpoint in Hebron, where young Jewish extremists have been defying police and soldiers and challenging Olmert's authority.

Then there are a number of delicate issues regarding Palestinian elections scheduled for Jan. 25.

Olmert already has had to make a call on whether there can be voting in eastern Jerusalem, and likely will have to decide in the immediate aftermath on Israel's attitude toward a Palestinian government including or even dominated by the terrorist group Hamas.

In the run-up to Israel's own election, Olmert will have to decide how specific he wants to be about the possibility of a second Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, following Sharon's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank last summer.

How Olmert deals with the Hebron challenge could set the tone for something much bigger — future Israeli withdrawals from large parts of the West Bank.

The standoff has been over the government's intention to evict Jewish settlers from Arab property in the town's vegetable market. The settlers say the property originally

was Jewish-owned, and therefore claim legal title to it.

Last Friday, young radicals from all over the West Bank converged on Hebron to confront police and soldiers responsible for the evacuation.

The radicals, many of them masked, went on the rampage Sunday, destroying and burning Palestinian property and pelting Israeli security forces with stones and eggs.

They also used threatening and insulting language.

The wife of Moshe Levinger, a prominent settler rabbi, railed at the police, "Sharon is dying because of our curses. You are next."

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israeli commentators agree that the showdown goes well beyond the few shops being evacuated in Hebron.

The settlers have two goals, they say: to cloud the memory of the successful and relatively peaceful evacuation of Gaza, and to drive home the message that any further attempted withdrawal will encounter fierce opposition.

"It is enough to look at the statements of a few settler leaders to understand that the struggle is to obscure the success of the disengagement from Gaza by standing firm against the government in the West Bank and Jerusalem," Ha'aretz editorialized.

"Olmert, who supported the disengagement and sees himself as Ariel Sharon's heir, will not be able to explain away any weakness he shows when confronted by a group of hooligans."

Yediot Achronot's military analyst, Alex Fishman, added that "anyone privy to the

Continued on page 2

■ *Olmert may fly to Washington soon after the Palestinian election*

Continued from page 1

settler scene would have known that after the disengagement, things in the West Bank would escalate, the Settlers Council would lose its power and the extremist margins would expand and grow even more extreme."

Faced with the settler challenge, Olmert has been talking tough.

In a government meeting Monday, he banged his fist on the table and promised zero tolerance toward the extremists, whom he described as "a particularly violent group."

The immediate result was an army order declaring the disputed market a closed military zone, and instructing soldiers and police to eject anyone who doesn't live there.

By Tuesday most of the outside settlers had been sent packing, on the understanding that the eviction of the Hebron settlers who had taken up residence in the market would be postponed for two weeks.

Whether this proves a brilliant tactical retreat — enabling the government to go in with much bigger forces next time — or a costly show of weakness remains to be seen.

Olmert's next vital decision may be what to do about Hamas.

By allowing Palestinians to vote in Jerusalem and Hamas to participate in the election, he already has laid himself open to a barrage of right-wing criticism.

The Likud's Silvan Shalom, who resigned on Sunday as foreign minister,

charged that Olmert has triggered a process that inevitably will lead to Israel negotiating with a terrorist organization that doesn't recognize the Jewish state.

There is talk of plans for Olmert to fly to Washington

fallout. Moreover, whatever Olmert does will be measured against what people think Sharon would have done.

So far Olmert is riding high: Polls give his Kadima Party between 40 and 52 seats in the 120-member Knesset.

That's more than its two closest rivals, Labor and Likud, put together.

Still, mistakes on the key issues could hurt Olmert's electoral prospects — and also prove costly for Israel. ■

Hamas' participation in the Palestinian government could pose a challenge to Olmert.

soon after the Palestinian ballot to coordinate positions on Hamas with the Bush administration.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has said that to participate in government, Hamas will have to accept all previous Palestinian agreements with Israel, including recognition of Israel.

Israel and the United States probably will add two more conditions: that Hamas desist from terrorism and that it disarm its militia.

Unless that happens, Israel could well find itself without a peace partner on the Palestinian side.

That leads to Olmert's third big decision. His position on peacemaking with the Palestinians has been to insist that the internationally approved "road map" plan is the only game in town.

But if Hamas' inclusion in a Palestinian government makes talks impossible, will Olmert be ready to go into more detail than Sharon about possible unilateral withdrawals from the West Bank?

Former Mossad analyst Yossi Alpher, now co-editor of the Web site www.bitterlemons.org, thinks he will.

"Olmert — who, to his credit, started talking about disengagement and the need to avoid a South African scenario at least a year before Sharon — may feel a need to be more explicit on these issues to ensure that the public understands why he is different from Likud and Labor," Alpher says.

The decisions for Olmert are particularly tricky because they occur in the run-up to an election and could have electoral

Israeli exports to Ireland rise

DUBLIN (JTA) — Israeli exports to Ireland rose dramatically in 2005.

Trade in chemical products accounted for a large proportion of the increase, according to figures released by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics.

Sales of Israeli products in Ireland rose 18 percent over the first 11 months of the year to \$147.8 million from \$125.4 million in the equivalent period in 2004.

Exports of chemical products nearly tripled to \$20.7 million from \$6.7 million. External trade in machinery and electrical equipment accounted for the bulk of the total at \$86 million. ■

Special Olympics held in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Jerusalem hosted a local version of the Special Olympics for the first time. Mayor Uri Lupolianski on Tuesday launched the winter games of the Special Olympics in Jerusalem, attending a gymnastics exhibition and a floor hockey match.

The municipality is holding the games in association with the Israeli Special Olympics organization in various locations around Jerusalem. Some 1,000 athletes from all over Israel are expected to participate.

A delegation from Greece, birthplace of the Olympics, also will arrive.

Competition will be held in various fields, including swimming, soccer, basketball, Judo, track and field, equestrian, bowling, gymnastics and more. ■

JTA WORLD REPORT

Daniel J. Krifcher
President
Mark J. Joffe
Executive Editor and Publisher
Lisa Hostein
Editor
Michael S. Arnold
Managing Editor
Lenore A. Silverstein
Finance and Administration Director
Noa Artzi-Weill
Marketing Director

JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1896, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
© JTA. Reproduction only with permission.

Jewish activists keep quiet on Alito

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For years, the warning that “the future of the Supreme Court is at stake” has been a rallying cry for activists.

During several congressional and presidential elections, they argued that the future of reproductive rights and church-state separation hung in the balance.

But as the Senate Judiciary Committee vetted Judge Samuel Alito for a seat on the United States’ highest court last week, many in the Jewish community conceded that they weren’t watching.

While Alito’s record and positions on key issues were of concern, activists said they took his confirmation, which is scheduled to come up for a vote in the Senate on Jan. 23, as a foregone conclusion.

Many said they, and the country, simply were preoccupied with other issues, from the congressional leadership shakeup to lobbying scandals to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s health crisis.

“I don’t think it’s on people’s minds at all,” said Anya Kamenetz, an associate editor at Heeb Magazine and author of “Generation Debt,” a new book. “People are consumed with Jack Abramoff and Tom DeLay.”

The weeks and months preceding the confirmation hearings saw a flurry of activity, but it has mostly quieted in the new year. That’s similar to what happened when John Roberts faced the same committee to be confirmed as chief justice last year: The news of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina domi-

nated the headlines during the Roberts hearings.

Certainly, the Alito and Roberts hearings did not provide the drama that came from the investigations into Justice Clarence Thomas in 1991, or Robert Bork, who was rejected from the court in 1987.

Jeff Ballabon, an Orthodox political leader who started a blog about the Supreme Court, did not file an entry about the confirmation process throughout the week.

“Everyone’s playing their roles,” Ballabon said of the hearings. “There are no surprises anywhere.”

Even those working to oppose Alito quietly acknowledged that he was more than likely to be confirmed by the full Senate. Political activists acknowledged that he may vote to overturn abortion laws, but took heart in the fact that even with Alito and Roberts on the new court, a majority would still be in favor of the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion.

David Luchins, an Orthodox Union leader who used to work for the late Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), said too many people are looking at the Supreme Court only through the lens of abortion.

“It’s a tragedy that for most Americans, the Supreme Court has been reduced to a one-issue arena,” he said.

Several Jewish groups, including the Union for Reform Judaism and the National Council of Jewish Women, opposed Alito’s nomination before the hearings began. Many other Jewish groups chose to stay out of the debate, an implicit statement that Alito was not controversial enough to oppose, as compared to Bork or Justice Antonin Scalia, who many in the Jewish community might

have opposed had he been nominated for chief justice.

Both Roberts and Alito received “well-qualified” ratings from the American Bar Association.

Luchins said many Orthodox Jews are concerned Alito would emulate Scalia, whom they see as problematic for religious freedom and expression.

“I’ve heard concerns by people in my community that the lumping of Alito with Scalia and Thomas may turn him into a Scalito,” using the nickname Alito has received, because of the similarities between the nominee and the sitting justice.

Kamenetz said having a conservative majority on the court is a “worst-case scenario,” but that it seemed to be a foregone conclusion after Bush was re-elected.

“A lot of apathy has kicked in,” she said. “It’s not the same level of enthusiasm as before the election. We just can’t summon that again.”



Nazi-looted Klint paintings awarded to victim's niece

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Following seven years of legal and diplomatic maneuvering over the ownership of Nazi-looted art, Maria Altmann has won her battle to recover paintings valued at \$200 million from the Austrian government.

After the case was submitted to binding arbitration, a three-man court of Austrian legal experts decided unanimously on Sunday that five paintings by Viennese artist Gustav Klimt belonged to Altmann and her four co-heirs.

The paintings were seized in Vienna by the Nazis in 1938 from Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer, a wealthy Jewish sugar magnate and Altmann’s uncle.

Altmann, a resident of Los Angeles, who will celebrate her

90th birthday next month, greeted the decision as “fabulous,” adding, “It is wonderful that justice has finally been done. That was my whole goal.”

The most famous of the paintings is a gold-flecked portrait of Altmann’s aunt, Adele Bloch-Bauer, currently a centerpiece of the Austrian National Gallery.

E. Randol Schoenberg, Altmann’s attorney, said that most likely this portrait, and a second portrait of the same subject, would remain at the Austrian gallery, after payment of compensation to Altmann. It is expected that the three remaining paintings will be transferred to Altmann.

Schoenberg predicted that his client’s victory will encourage other governments and museums to arrive at settlements on other cases of art taken from Jews during the Nazi era.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Group calls mayor's comments 'offensive'

The Reform movement called comments by New Orleans' mayor "offensive" and "misguided."

Mayor Ray Nagin suggested Monday that Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast last year because "God is mad at America" and said he hoped the city would become "chocolate" again.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, said the comments were a "distraction at a time when our nation is trying to rebound and recover from these horrific natural disasters."

Saperstein said: "We must focus on rebuilding and improving the lives of those affected by the hurricanes and on learning how to mitigate the damage from future natural disasters, and not waste time or energy assigning blame in God's name."

Wartime activities punished

A U.S. appeals court upheld the decision to strip a man of his citizenship for lying about his World War II-era activities.

The Jan. 12 decision strips Johann Leprich, 80, of his citizenship for lying about his participation in the Nazi Waffen SS when he immigrated to the United States in 1958.

The decision clears the way for Leprich, an ethnic German born in Romania, to be deported.

Film on suicide bombers honored

A drama about Palestinian suicide bombers won the Golden Globe for best foreign-language film.

"Paradise Now," a Palestinian-Israeli coproduction, was honored at Monday night's award ceremony in Los Angeles.

The Golden Globes are widely seen as a bellwether of results at the more prestigious Academy Awards.

While "Paradise Now" has been taken to task for presenting two suicide bombers sympathetically, it has raised eyebrows among Palestinians for criticizing the terrorist group that sends them on their deadly mission.

Steven Spielberg's "Munich," the controversial movie about the Mossad's hunt for the killers of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics, did not win awards.

Spielberg had been nominated for best director and the movie's screenplay had also been nominated.

Britain's Rachel Weisz, the daughter of wartime Jewish refugees, received the best supporting actress award for her role in "The Constant Gardener."

Oprah selects Wiesel book

Oprah Winfrey will visit Auschwitz and make Elie Wiesel's "Night" her next book-club selection.

The New York Times reported that Winfrey, the talk-show host, will visit the site of the death camp with Wiesel later this month.

"Night" chronicles Wiesel's experiences at Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

Yahoo loses court challenge

A U.S. court dismissed a lawsuit filed by Yahoo protesting a fine imposed by a French court.

The Jan. 12 ruling by the 9th Circuit Court of appeals rejected the lawsuit filed by the Internet search engine on technical grounds.

The ruling ignored the First Amendment issues the company had raised.

In 2002, a French court ruled that Yahoo was violating the country's laws against hate speech by displaying Web pages that

contained sales of Nazi-themed items. The fine amounts to some \$15 million.

MIDDLE EAST

Olmert seeks peace

Ehud Olmert said he would seek to restart peace talks with the Palestinians if elected Israeli prime minister.

But Olmert, in his most wide-ranging policy statement since standing in for the ailing Ariel Sharon, demanded Tuesday that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas crack down on terrorist groups as required by the "road map" peace plan.

"I hope that I will be able to enter negotiations with him, for a permanent settlement between us and the Palestinians, on condition he upholds his commitments," Olmert told reporters.

Opinion polls predict an easy win for Olmert, who is heading Sharon's Kadima Party, in the March 28 general elections.

Talking tough on Iran's nuclear program, Olmert said, "Under no circumstances, and at no stage, can Israel allow for someone who has such malicious intent to possess weapons of mass destruction."

But he declined to say whether this meant he would consider ordering a pre-emptive Israeli strike on Iran.

WORLD

Goldschmidt gets his visa

Moscow's chief rabbi, who was banned from Russia for more than nine weeks last year, was issued a new visa that is good for one year.

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, a Swiss citizen and Russian resident for 15 years, returned to Moscow last Friday.

In late September, Russian authorities canceled Goldschmidt's visa at a Moscow airport as he tried to re-enter the country from Israel; they cited vague security reasons.

After the issue was taken up by international and Russian Jewish leaders, Russia granted Goldschmidt a short-term visa in December, and he had to leave the country before the new year to apply for a long-term one.

Aliyah Day in France draws fewer people

The number of people attending an annual Paris event focused on aliyah fell by more than half.

About 2,000 people attended Sunday's Aliyah Day, an event put together by the Jewish Agency for Israel, compared to 4,500 a year ago.

January is a big shopping month in Paris, and unlike last year, this year's event was held far away from stores.

"It is true that only half the number of people came this year compared to 2005, but we consider that a pre-selection process has already been made concerning the seriousness of the intentions," said event director David Roche.

Czech man punished for neo-Nazi activities

A Czech man who yelled at protesters at an anti-Holocaust denial march was given a suspended sentence and probation.

Antonin Cermak, 21, who shouted, "only, only" as the protesters cited the death of 1.7 million Jewish children at the hands of the Nazis, was given a suspended sentence of 15 months in prison with subsequent probation of three-and-a-half years.

Cermak is appealing the verdict.

He was part of a neo-Nazi group that demonstrated in front of the German Embassy in Prague on Oct. 28 in support of Ernst Zundel, who is charged by German authorities with denying the Holocaust.