

NEWS AT A GLANCE

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■ The appointment of Lamberto Dini as Italy's new prime minister has left the country's neo-fascists with little influence over Italy's new government. Dini, an internationally known economist who was treasury minister in the outgoing government, was named prime minister-designate Jan. 13 by President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro. He replaces billionaire businessman Silvio Berlusconi, who resigned in December after serving seven months in office. [Page 4]

■ The site of the former great synagogue of Leipzig has become the subject of a power struggle between the local Jewish community and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. A dispute between the two groups has delayed the construction of a monument at the site of the synagogue commemorating the 14,000 Leipzig Jews who were murdered by the Nazis during World War II. [Page 4]

Israel seals off territories after devastating attack that left 18 dead

By Naomi Segal and David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 22 (JTA) — The Israeli Cabinet voted unanimously to seal off the Gaza Strip and West Bank following Sunday's suicide bombing at a crowded bus stop near the coastal city of Netanya.

The Cabinet reached the decision Sunday evening after the ministers broke off their regular session earlier in the day when news of the attack was first reported.

The attack prompted President Ezer Weizman, whose post is largely ceremonial, to step into the political arena with a call to postpone Israel's ongoing negotiations with the Palestinians.

"I believe we should now suspend the talks — not stop them, but suspend them — and tell him [Palestinian Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat] to make a bigger effort" to put an end to terrorist attacks against Israelis, Weizman told Israel Television.

At least 18 people were killed, most of them soldiers, and more than 60 wounded when two explosions took place at a snack bar near the bus stop.

"I started running in the direction of the explosion to see what happened. I saw some people lying on the ground," David Sachor, an eyewitness, told Israel Radio. "Then there was a second explosion, two minutes after the first one."

The Islamic Jihad movement, which militantly opposes the Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative, took responsibility for the attack. The group said the attack involved two terrorists, both of whom came from Gaza. But authorities said it was still unclear whether two suicide bombers carried out the attack or if one terrorist with explosives strapped to his body set off the first bomb and then blew himself up in the second explosion.

The incident took place at the Beit Lid intersection between Netanya and the West Bank town of Tulkarm. The site, which is a busy transit point for soldiers, was crowded with troops who were waiting for buses to return them to their bases after spending the weekend at home.

'No words to describe the atrocity'

The first explosion went off at about 9:20 a.m. local time. A second, larger explosion followed minutes later.

Of the 14 dead positively identified so far, two were civilians.

Some 46 of the 62 people who were wounded were still in nearby hospitals Sunday night. Of those, 14 were said to be in serious condition.

The bombing was the bloodiest terror attack in Israel since a suicide bomber killed 22 people aboard a Tel Aviv bus last October.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who arrived at the scene with Police Minister Moshe Shahal, called the attack another attempt by Muslim extremist terror groups to undermine the peace process.

"There are no words to describe the atrocity that was carried out at the Beit Lid junction," Rabin said.

Angry Israeli demonstrators who arrived at the scene before Rabin greeted the prime minister with shouts of "Rabin the Traitor" and "Death to Arabs."

Rescue teams arrived at the site soon after the explosion. They evacuated the wounded to nearby hospitals in Netanya, Kfar Saba and Hadera. Some serious cases were flown to Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem.

Medical teams, members of the army rabbinate and the Chevra Kadisha burial society spent much of the day sifting through the debris, collecting disembodied limbs and flesh for examination and burial.

Cranes were brought in for workers to search for body parts that were strewn among nearby trees.

After cutting off their regular Cabinet session earlier in the day, government ministers reconvened in the evening for a special session to discuss measures that should be taken in the wake of the attack.

Many ministers called for a reassessment of current security measures to prevent future terrorist attacks inside Israel. But most of them also reiterated that the peace process must not be halted.

The Cabinet issued the order to seal off Gaza and the West Bank after less than an hour of the special emergency session. The closure means that

all Palestinians from the territories will be barred from entry into Israel unless they have special permission covering medical or other humanitarian reasons.

Such closures, which have been applied in the past following major terror attacks, have resulted in a diminution of such incidents during their duration.

But invariably they are lifted after a time — in part as a result of pressures on behalf of the Palestinians, tens of thousands of whom are cut off from their jobs and livelihoods in Israel as a result of the closures.

The ministers continued their deliberation late into the night, and informed sources said further measures were under consideration.

Attending the session were top-ranking officers from the Israel Defense Force, the police, the Shin Bet and other agencies.

Reacting to the attack, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres disagreed with Weizman's call for postponing peace talks.

"It is clearly a further strain on the peace process, but this is not a reason to stop the peace process to satisfy the attempts of the people who want to assassinate the peace process," Peres told Israel Radio.

"We must find a solution from an operational point of view, not a political point of view," he said.

Peres also said that if it were proven that those responsible for the attack did indeed come from Gaza, Israel would demand that the Palestinian Authority crack down on the Islamic Jihad and Hamas fundamentalist movements there.

Shahal was expected to renew his call for stationing additional police at roadblocks between Israel and the territories, and also for stationing police at bus stations like the one at Beit Lid, where an IDF unit has already been operating to ensure security at the site.

Earlier in the day, Rabin and other government officials spoke of the need for a total separation between Israelis and Palestinians in the face of the difficulties Israeli security forces have encountered in preventing terrorists from getting into Israel.

Calls for Rabin to step down

"It's very difficult to stop a terrorist from coming to commit a suicide attack or plant a bomb," Environment Minister Yossi Sarid told Israel Radio.

"The security branches are doing their utmost, but even the best security branches cannot prevent all kinds of terrorist attacks and such a kind in particular," he said.

Palestinian officials condemned the attack in the name of Arafat, who did not, however, speak publicly about the incident.

Dr. Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli Arab who is an adviser to Arafat, issued a statement saying Arafat condemned the attack.

"Chairman Arafat condemns the attack which has injured innocent people near Netanya," Tibi told reporters. "The aim of these attacks is to kill the peace process, and it is the responsibility of all of us to prevent the enemies of peace from reaching their goals."

Israeli opposition members called both for an immediate halt to the negotiations with the PLO and for the Rabin government to step down.

Likud opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu said the attack proved the government's weakness and its failure to combat terror.

Members of the National Religious Party also called on the government to resign. The right-wing Tsomet party said the attack was a reminder of what would happen if the IDF withdrew from Arab population centers in the West Bank, which is the next step called for in implementing the Palestinian self-rule accord.

Protests were held at several sites in Israel following the attack.

The attack drew a swift condemnation from President Clinton, who said, "Once again, the enemies of peace have struck down innocent people in an evil effort to destroy the hopes of peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Arabs."

Several American Jewish groups issued statements deploring the attack Sunday, including the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the American Jewish Congress, the State of Israel Bonds and the Coalition for Jewish Concerns—Amcha.

The Conference of Presidents said it was "waiting to hear PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's personal condemnation" and called on the international community to "act in a concerted way to cut off funds and arms to these [terrorist] groups."

An army spokesman released some of the names of the dead soldiers on Sunday night.

They were: Lt. David Benzino, 20, of Ashdod; Lt. Adi Rosen, 20, of Moshav Bizzaron; Lt. Yuval Tuvia, 22, of Jerusalem; First Sgt. Anan Khadour, 24, of Daliat al-Carmel; Staff Sgt. Damian Rosovsky, 20, of Moshav Kaddim; Sgt. Maya Kupstein, 19, of Jerusalem; Sgt. Daniel Tsikvashvili, 19, of Jerusalem; Sgt. Yaron Blum, 20, of Jerusalem; Cpl. Eli Dagan, 18, of Kochav Yair; and Cpl. Eitan Peretz, 18, of Nahariya. □

Israel links past and present in marking Auschwitz liberation

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Jan. 22 (JTA) — Ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp took place in Israel on Sunday, hours after a terrorist attack in the center of the country claimed at least 18 lives.

At a service at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein filled in for Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was visiting the scene of the attack. Rabin's message tied together the past and the present.

"Today, once again, monsters in human form have tried to destroy us and the chance for peace," Rubinstein said, reading Rabin's statement. "To our enemies we say, 'One thousand attacks will not make us surrender. We will continue to build our home here. We have no other.'"

A railway freight car used by the Nazis to transport Jews to the concentration camps was put on display as a "Memorial to the Deportations." The railway car was given to Israel by the Polish government, and designed into a monument by architect Moshe Safdie.

Samuel Pisar, chairman of the Friends of Yad Vashem, France, and author of "Blood and Hope," told Israel Television what the monument meant to him.

"Even today, maybe we are hearing echoes, explosions, of Auschwitz in our midst," he said. At least 1 million Jews were murdered in Auschwitz.

One survivor of the Nazi death camp told Israel Radio she hoped the memorial would serve as a message to future generations. "I only can hope that the future generations will not forget the suffering of those who survived and kept holy the memory of those who did not. We have tried to survive with all our strength in order to tell what happened to our people," she said.

A gathering of thousands of Holocaust survivors was later held in the Jerusalem International Convention center. Survivors inscribed their names and tattoo numbers in a special book and received special medals.

Booths were also set up to help relatives and friends relocate each other. □

Supreme Court to clarify use of religious displays on public land

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Jan. 22 (JTA) — In a potentially explosive case involving the display of a Ku Klux Klan cross on public land, the Supreme Court is expected this term to clarify the use of religious displays on public property.

The high court last week agreed to hear an appeal stemming from a Columbus, Ohio board's decision to ban the Ku Klux Klan from sponsoring a cross in a public park in front of the state Capitol while allowing the display of a menorah and a Christmas tree.

Legal experts expect the court to use the case, Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board vs. Pinette, to resolve conflicting lower court rulings on the issue.

Citing the First Amendment, which states that Congress "shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion," the Supreme Court five years ago banned religious displays in government buildings.

Since then, various lower courts have ruled that religious displays near government buildings or court houses also violate the Constitution. Others courts, however, say that certain displays are legal.

In appealing to the court, the Capitol Square Review Board, an appointed governmental body with jurisdiction over the park, argued that the cross is the "quintessential symbol of the Christian faith."

Because the Klan proposed to place the cross near the Capitol, it "involves the state in a violation of the establishment clause," the board argued.

The cross was put up in the Columbus park in December 1993 and was torn down within 24 hours. It was not placed back there this past year.

KKK says cross is form of free speech

Vincent Pinette, grand titan of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, argued that the cross must be allowed in the park because the government can "neither favor some religious expressions over others nor discriminate against unpopular political views in a public forum."

The KKK also argued that the state must allow free speech in the park and the cross is a form of speech.

The American Jewish Congress filed a friend-of-the-court brief asking the Supreme Court to take the case.

"Free speech does not extend to a free-standing religious symbol at the seat of government," said Mark Stern, co-director of the Commission on Law and Social Action of the AJCongress. Stern opposed the display of all religious symbols in the Columbus park.

Chabad-Lubavitch has erected a menorah during Chanukah in the park since the mid-1980s.

The Anti-Defamation League, a staunch opponent of religious symbols in public places, has remained on the sidelines during the legal battles over the KKK's cross.

ADL remains concerned that since the park is used throughout the year for hundreds of displays, protests and speeches, no one would think that certain displays would imply that the government was endorsing religion.

In fact, ADL participated in a rally last year at the park commemorating the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination.

ADL regional director Alan Katchen said the group plans soon to revisit its decision not to join the case.

Nathan Lewin, an attorney who has argued in courts nationwide in favor of the public display of menorahs, plans to file a friend-of-the-court brief in this case.

"Of course we're not supportive of the KKK, but a private cross on public land is of course entitled to constitutional protection," Lewin said. □

Hungary marks 50th anniversary of liberation of Budapest ghetto

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST, Jan. 22 (JTA) — Members of the Hungarian government joined the local Jewish community last week to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Budapest ghetto by Soviet troops.

"It's a must to remember those days," Chief Rabbi Tamas Raj said at the ceremony. "It helps to heal the wounds."

In below-zero temperatures, some 100 people gathered Jan. 18 at the entrance to the former Budapest ghetto to attend the commemoration.

The ceremony was organized by the Hungarian Holocaust Remembrance Committee.

Zoltan Gal, speaker of the Hungarian Parliament, along with two government ministers, joined the leadership of the Hungarian Jewish community at the ceremonies.

While the commemoration was a poignant, emotional event for the Jewish community, for the Hungarian people at large the remembrance was not without controversy.

The liberation of the ghetto by Soviet troops also marked the beginning of an unpopular Soviet occupation and domination of Hungary.

Communist rule did not end here until the country's communist government fell in 1989.

Some 50,000 Jews were liberated by the Soviet army on Jan. 18, 1945.

Between Nov. 18, 1944, and that date, approximately 20,000 Jews died in the ghetto of starvation, disease, exposure or at the hands of thugs working for the fascist Arrow Cross.

Before the ghetto was created, some 450,000 Jews — almost 90 percent of the country's Jewish population — were sent to Nazi death camps after the German occupation of the country began in March 1944.

Budapest's Jewish ghetto was one of the few in Europe to be left intact after the war.

Although the Nazis had placed land mines throughout the ghetto, they did not have the chance to destroy it because of advancing Red Army forces.

At present, an estimated 100,000 Jews live in Hungary, most of them in Budapest.

The country's Jewish community is currently the largest in Eastern Europe. □

Navy founder to be promoted

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Jan. 22 (JTA) — One of the founders of Israel's navy and its first commander, American-born Shaul Ben-Zvi, is to be promoted posthumously to the rank of rear admiral.

Prime Minister and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin authorized the promotion for Ben-Zvi, who died last year at the age of 72.

Rabin is to award the rank to Ben-Zvi's widow, Rose Shulman, at a ceremony scheduled to take place in the coming days.

Ben-Zvi was born Paul Shulman in Connecticut in 1922.

He attended the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis during World War II, where he met David Ben-Gurion.

In 1946 he retired from the U.S. Navy and joined the New York operations of the "Mossad for Aliya Bet," a network smuggling arms and immigrants to Israel.

He came to Israel in May 1946 and was appointed the fledgling navy's chief of staff and later its first commander. □

Power of Italy's far-right diminished in new government

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Jan. 22 (JTA) — The appointment of Lamberto Dini as Italy's new prime minister has left the country's neo-fascists with much-diminished influence in Italy's new government.

Nonetheless, given its strength in Parliament and in local governments, the political right still has to be monitored closely, observers here said.

Dini, an internationally known economist who was treasury minister in the outgoing government, was named prime minister-designate Jan. 13 by President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro.

He replaces billionaire businessman Silvio Berlusconi, who resigned in December after serving seven months in office.

Berlusconi's right-wing coalition included five ministers from the neo-fascist-led National Alliance Party, marking the first time neo-fascists had entered Italian government since World War II.

The National Alliance won more than 13 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections last March, making it the third largest party in the country.

Dini, though close to Berlusconi, is considered a technocrat not formally allied to any political party.

He named his new government last week, and as he had promised, it was composed of other technocrats chosen for their expertise rather than for their political affiliation.

Dini was scheduled to present his government — Italy's 54th since World War II — to Parliament this week.

Franco Pavoncello, a political scientist and vice president of the Rome Jewish community, said he felt the appointment of the conservative Dini as prime minister dealt a blow to the left in Italy.

But, he said, it also spelled a major defeat for the National Alliance, whose members had assumed many lower-ranking positions in government ministries in addition to their holding five Cabinet seats under Berlusconi.

"The [National Alliance] was practically colonizing the ministries," Pavoncello said.

"That's the biggest defeat for the [Alliance] — they can't do this anymore," he said.

Political climate remains unclear

He said the political climate, particularly where the right wing was concerned, remained unclear and required careful monitoring.

Pavoncello noted that the National Alliance would hold its congress this week, adding that it would represent a "crucial moment" for the right.

At that congress, the Italian Social Movement (MSI) — the neo-fascist core party of the National Alliance — is supposed to be dissolved.

At the same time, the National Alliance will declare a more mainstream right-wing platform.

National Alliance leader Gianfranco Fini has been pushing for this move.

But hardline MSI members have made it known that they might not back these changes and that they may even split off to form their own party.

The MSI was formed after World War II by followers of fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

Until Berlusconi's government, the party had been on the fringes of political power, with no possibility of entering government.

The more moderate National Alliance members, Pavoncello said, "are in bad shape."

"I don't know if the party will make all the changes [toward moderation] they want," he added.

Now that the far-right is out of power, Pavoncello said, it will have to be watched closely to see if moderate positions adopted while the National Alliance was part of the government became more hardline.

"What will the situation be now that everything is back to 'normal?' " he asked.

"How will the right react? They don't have to act nicely now. They will have a freer hand. The respite might be over." □

Leipzig Jewish community at odds with Claims Conference over inheritance

By Gil Sedan

BONN, Jan. 22 (JTA) — The site of the former great synagogue of Leipzig has become the subject of a power struggle between the local Jewish community and an organization set up to distribute German reparations to Holocaust survivors.

The impressive Moorish-style synagogue was burned down on Kristallnacht, in November 1938, when anti-Semitic mobs in Germany attacked Jewish sites throughout the country.

Now, the city of Leipzig and the local Jewish community want to erect on the site a monument commemorating the 14,000 Leipzig Jews who were murdered by the Nazis during World War II.

But so far, nothing has come of the plans — primarily because the local Jewish community and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany are at odds over who is in charge of the site.

In 1948, the Soviet occupation authorities who were in control over what was then East Germany returned the site to what remained of the Jewish community.

But in 1987, two years before the collapse of East Germany, under orders of the government, the Jewish community was forced to sell the property to a local housing company.

Following the reunification of Germany in 1989, the local Jewish community claimed that the turnover of the property was illegal and claimed ownership of the real estate.

Leipzig officials are meanwhile claiming that the property belongs to the city.

Despite their differences, city officials and the Jewish community have agreed to erect the memorial monument on the site.

But the Claims Conference cast its veto over their agreement.

The Claims Conference was set up as a result of the Luxembourg Agreement of 1952, which called for the German government to pay reparations to victims of Nazi war crimes through the conference.

The conference does not object to erecting the monument.

But it wants to do so only after the issue of ownership has been cleared — if need be, in the courts.

Claims director Karl Brozik has argued that since the original Jewish community of Leipzig has perished, its legal heirs were not the new Jewish community, but rather Jewish Holocaust survivors throughout the world.

Only 34 Jews are currently registered in the local community, in addition to 60 recent emigres from the former Soviet Union.

But Rolf Isaacsohn, director-general of the community, told the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* earlier this month that the current community was continuing the heritage of past communities and ought to be regarded as an outgrowth of the prewar community. □