

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ In a surprise move, the "advise and consent" committee of the Jewish Agency's Board of Governors decided to reject Yehiel Leket and to endorse Avraham Burg to become the new chairman of the Jewish Agency and World Zionist Organization. The committee made its decision after meeting with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who had backed Leket, the acting chairman.

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Because of the Presidents' Day holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Feb. 20.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**In a twist of fate, bombing of Dresden saved Jewish lives**

By Gil Sedan

DRESDEN, Germany, Feb. 14 (JTA) — On Feb. 12, 1945, most of the 2,000 Jews who still lived in the eastern German city of Dresden received a brief letter from Gestapo headquarters.

They were ordered to report at exactly 6:45 a.m. on the following Friday, Feb. 16, to Zeughausstrasse 1, with light luggage sufficient for "a march of two to three days."

"You must take into account that you will be taken on work duty outside Dresden," the letter read.

The letter, in fact, was an invitation to Theresienstadt, the Czech ghetto that served as a major transfer point to the extermination camps.

The next evening, the sirens howled, signaling the start of a saturation bombing raid that has had few historic parallels.

In a twist of fate for the Jews of Dresden, the massive air strike that nearly destroyed their city 50 years ago this week also saved their lives.

On Feb. 13, 1945, at 9:45 p.m., an armada of the Royal Air Force covered the skies of Dresden, showering the city with bombs. Another British bombing raid took place a few hours later. American bombers completed the devastating attack the next morning.

Between 25,000 and 35,000 Germans were killed in the raids, either from direct hits or from the ensuing incineration of the city. Phosphorus bombs dropped by the British created fires so strong that they generated a whirlwind which sucked oxygen from all directions, suffocating those who were not immediately burned to ashes.

Some 12,000 buildings were destroyed, among them the magnificent Zwinger Museum and the Church of Our Lady, which was considered at the time the most beautiful Protestant church in all of Europe.

But the bombs also brought deliverance for the city's Jews.

'How can you be glad at death?'

"I wasn't glad about the bombs," said Heinz Joachim-Aris, the head of the small Jewish community still living in Dresden.

The community numbers about 90 people, half of them recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

"How can you be glad at death and destruction?" he said. "But it is a fact that thanks to those bombs, our deportation to Theresienstadt was foiled."

Another Jewish resident of Dresden remembered how she and her mother went the next morning to the local Gestapo headquarters. They wanted to make sure it was no longer there.

Yet another resident, Sara Sabastinsky, returned to Dresden later that year — from the Auschwitz concentration camp.

She, too, had no desire to rejoice over the tragedy of Dresden.

"But as I looked at the ruins, I was glad at one thing only — that I survived," she recalled.

The bombing of Dresden is one of the more controversial chapters in the history of World War II.

Many Germans believe that the bombing, which came late in the war, was unnecessary for a number of reasons.

Germans maintain that Dresden had at the time no strategic importance.

Far from having military installations worth targeting, the city was crowded with civilians — mostly elderly people, women and children — as well as with refugees who were fleeing from the advancing forces of the Red Army.

The Allied command maintained in turn that it had decided to bomb Dresden as part of a concentrated effort to put a quick end to the war.

British and American military leaders also sought to reach Berlin before the advancing Red Army, whose forces were only about 140 miles from Dresden when the bombing took place.

Against this backdrop, Germany commemorated the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Dresden this week in a series of state ceremonies that were

attended by approximately 2,000 guests from around the world.

Among the many visiting guests was Gen. John Shalikashvili, chairman of the U.S. joint chiefs of staff, who joined with his British and German counterparts — and with the Duke of Kent, who represented Queen Elizabeth II — to lay wreaths at a vast local cemetery where many of the those killed in the Dresden raid were buried.

Among the speakers at the various events was German President Roman Herzog. Speaking Monday at the Hall of Culture, a large Communist-era auditorium in Dresden, Herzog urged the nations of the world to pledge an end to all wars.

But the main point Herzog wanted to drive through was the fact that Germans, too, had suffered during the war.

He thoroughly rejected the notion that the Dresden bombing was the price Germany had to pay for its wartime atrocities.

“One cannot calculate life against life, pain against pain, horror against horror,” he said.

“If one looks at history merely in terms of states and nations, the settlement of accounts seems simple: The Germans started the war, and just punishment was meted out to them for doing so.

“But this is too simplistic a view,” he said. “Only if one imagines all those different people who must have died in that night of destruction does the human tragedy of modern warfare become apparent.”

Among those who died in the Dresden raid, Herzog pointed out, were “Gestapo officers who drew up the lists for the deportation of Jews” as well as “the Jews on those lists.”

Demonstrations against ‘the cult of sacrifice’

Herzog, as other speakers at the series of commemorative events, did not attempt to diminish the responsibility of Germany for the horrors it committed during the war.

Instead, he and other German leaders attempted to strike a balance between Germany as perpetrator of war crimes and Germany as victim, particularly during the Dresden bombing.

This line of reasoning was the subject of much debate among Germans in the days leading up to the commemorations and is likely to continue as the country attempts to confront the full reality of its ugly wartime past.

As Herzog spoke Monday, small groups of demonstrators gathered both inside the Hall of Culture and outside on the street to protest against what they termed the “cult of sacrifice” — the glorification, as they saw it, of the victims of the Dresden bombings.

Other demonstrations were held during the series of commemorations, with some protesters saying the focus on the Dresden bombing belittled Jewish suffering at the hands of the Nazis.

The German media devoted their full attention to the series of commemorations. Newspapers ran article after article about the Dresden bombing. Television devoted prime-time hours to an elaborate account of the historic background to the raid.

Perhaps one of the more memorable statements about the bombing was made by a veteran British pilot who offered his own viewpoint to a German television reporter in London.

“At the time,” the pilot said, “we were not aware of the dimensions of Nazi crimes. Had we known in 1945 what we had learned later, I would have justified a dozen Dresdens.” □

Legislators introduce long-awaited terror bill

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Feb. 14 (JTA) — With the help of Congress, President Clinton has launched phase two of his war on terrorism.

In the Senate and in the House of Representatives, legislators introduced the administration’s Omnibus Counterterrorism Act of 1995 last Friday. The long-awaited bill seeks to ban fund raising by American organizations that benefits terrorist groups abroad.

The bill would also make it a federal crime to engage in terrorist acts and in the planning of terrorist acts both in the United States and abroad, if such acts affect U.S. interests. And it would establish the death penalty as punishment for terrorism that results in murder.

Clinton began the American effort to combat terrorism two weeks ago by freezing the assets of 12 terrorist groups and preventing future money transfers to them. Among the terrorist groups included in his order were the Islamic fundamentalist groups Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad. Also included were two Jewish organizations, Kahane Chai and Kach.

The Treasury Department, which is responsible for the effort, has not been unable to say how much money, if any, has been seized.

Jewish groups were quick to praise the new bill, which was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Sens. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), Herb Kohl (R-Wis.) and Joseph Biden (D-Del.), and in the House by Reps. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Norman Dicks (D-Wash.).

“Passage of this tough, comprehensive bill will go a long way toward keeping our country from being used as a base to organize, finance and direct terrorist activity here and abroad,” Anti-Defamation League officials said in a statement. The statement was jointly signed by David Strassler, ADL national chairman, and Abraham Foxman, ADL national director.

Reservations voiced about constitutional issues

Although ADL and other Jewish groups support the bill, some have joined the senators who introduced the legislation in expressing reservations about certain aspects of the initiative.

Provisions in the bill that give law enforcement officials greater flexibility in launching investigation of terrorist suspects could pose constitutional problems, the senators said in announcing the legislation at a news conference last Friday.

In addition, a section of the bill that would allow expedited closed-door deportation hearings for aliens accused of terrorist activity is problematic, they said.

At their joint news conference last Friday, Specter, Kohl and Biden pledged to air concerns about these provisions at hearings on the measure in the coming months. Despite their reservations, the senators expressed optimism that the bill would ultimately pass Congress.

Under the bill, the president would compile a list of international organizations suspected of terrorism. Anyone who raises funds for organizations on the list would have to register with the administration.

Before any money could be transferred to an organization on the list, the American fund-raisers would have to certify to the administration’s satisfaction that the money was only being used for humanitarian, educational or religious purposes.

The bill also authorizes wiretaps for investigation of international terrorism plots and institutes into law a 1991 international treaty aimed at identifying plastic explosives by airport sensors. □

Security on alert as massacre in Hebron has 1st anniversary*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 14 (JTA) — Israeli security forces were on high alert throughout the country this week as Palestinians marked the first anniversary of the massacre at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the West Bank town of Hebron.

Police set up random roadblocks — particularly in and around Jerusalem and Tel Aviv — on Tuesday, which, according to the Muslim calendar, is the anniversary of the massacre.

In Hebron, Palestinian youths marked the day by throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. One Palestinian was killed and four others wounded during the clashes with Israeli security forces.

Palestinians in Hebron observed a general strike to commemorate the massacre; partial strikes were observed in the West Bank towns of Ramallah and Nablus.

The Israel Defense Force sent in reinforcements to Hebron, after hundreds of Palestinian youths rioted there Monday night, pelting soldiers with rocks and setting up makeshift roadblocks.

Hebron Mayor Mustafa Natshe told reporters that he could not rule out a future massacre of Palestinians by radical armed Jewish settlers.

Some 300 Muslims filed into the Tomb of the Patriarchs at noon Tuesday for a memorial service.

A total of 29 people were killed when Dr. Baruch Goldstein, a settler from nearby Kiryat Arba, opened fire on Muslim worshipers at the Mosque of Abraham, one of several prayer areas located within the tomb.

Goldstein was beaten to death by worshipers at the mosque.

Meanwhile, in Kiryat Arba, preparations were under way for a service to commemorate the anniversary of Goldstein's death.

In the aftermath of the Hebron massacre, Israeli settlers and members of some American tours made pilgrimages to Goldstein's grave to honor the memory of the man who is to some a hero.

"There will be a gathering at his grave," said Kiryat Arba councilman Aharon Friedberg.

"Friends and public officials will reminisce about Dr. Baruch Goldstein, may his memory be blessed."

But another Kiryat Arba leader, Elyakim Haetzni, said Goldstein had carried out a "terrible act" in a climate of growing hatred between Arabs and Jews.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin lashed out Tuesday against those who honored Goldstein's memory.

"If necessary, we will take steps in the face of utterances we hear in the Israeli media from Israelis who support the despicable act of the murderer Goldstein and who even call for a repetition of his deed," Rabin told reporters.

"This is incitement to murder, and those in charge of the judicial system and law enforcement must deal with them."

The planned memorial rally for Goldstein drew sharp criticism from government ministers.

Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban said the army should prevent the memorial from taking place.

He noted that had Palestinians wanted to commemorate the death of one of the suicide bombers who carried out the Jan. 22 double suicide bombing near Netanya that killed 21 Israelis, the army would have prevented it.

Environment Minister Yossi Sarid said charges should be brought against any group or individual who expresses sympathy or shows support for Goldstein's actions. □

Pact: Trucks will transfer fuel at Israel-Gaza crossings*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 14 (JTA) — Israeli and Palestinian officials reached an agreement this week on a new plan for delivering fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip.

The agreement, reached only days before Gaza was due to run out of gasoline, came Monday, when Israeli Energy Minister Gonen Segev met in Gaza with Ahmed Karia, the Palestinian Authority official in charge of economic affairs.

Israel halted fuel shipments to Gaza after terrorists ambushed a convoy of fuel trucks in Gaza last week, killing one Israeli security guard and wounding another.

Under the new arrangement, Israeli trucks will no longer enter the Palestinian self-rule area. Instead, gasoline will be pumped from Israeli to Palestinian delivery trucks at the Erez and Nahal Oz crossings.

Segev said he expects the gasoline deliveries to resume later this week. □

Diamond dealer, daughter safe after kidnapping attempt foiled*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 14 (JTA) — An attempt to kidnap a diamond dealer and his daughter was foiled last week after a car chase and a shootout in northern Tel Aviv left one of the abductors dead.

Police still were searching last week for a woman involved in the abduction of Asher Gertler and his 18-year-old daughter, Keren Gertler.

Keren Gertler, a soldier, had been taken captive the morning of Feb. 7 as she was driving to her base. She was held in an apartment until her release that same night.

Her father was kidnapped after the abductors told him that they had his daughter and he should meet with them. Asher Gertler was put in a car with the second kidnapper, Avi Sapan, an Israeli champion marksman.

Throughout the day, police trailed the car through northern Tel Aviv and its environs, following signals emitted by the car's mobile phone.

When police closed in on the car, Gertler managed to escape, even though he was shot. Police then shot and killed Sapan.

Police said Sapan and his female accomplice planned to demand a ransom of \$2 million in cash and diamonds for Keren Gertler's release.

Her grandfather, Moshe Shnitzer, is a former president of the Israel Diamond Exchange. □

Australia prepares new list of suspected Nazi criminals*By Jeremy Jones*

SYDNEY, Australia, Feb. 14 (JTA) — Investigators have started to prepare a new list of suspected Nazi war criminals living in Australia, an Australian Federal Police official said this week.

The suspects, on a list given to police by the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, are believed to be former members of Nazi killing squads that operated in Nazi-occupied Lithuania.

The issue was reignited with the publication in this week's Australia-Israel Review of an angry attack of the Australian government by Robert Greenwood.

Greenwood led investigations between 1987 and 1991 of alleged war criminals living in Australia.

"The politicians of this country have let down the Jewish people," he said. □

OSI vows to pursue deportation despite setback from Lithuania*By Jennifer Batog*

WASHINGTON, Feb. 14 (JTA) — Lithuania's decision not to prosecute a man the United States wants to deport for his alleged involvement in Nazi war crimes has drawn fire from U.S. government officials and Jewish leaders.

Although officials say the move will not stop deportation proceedings against Aleksandras Lileikis, of Norwood, Mass., it will hinder the government's ability to expedite the process through extradition.

The Justice Department, which initiated proceedings against Lileikis in September, contends that as head of the Vilnius Gestapo during World War II, Lileikis signed orders directing his troops to hold Jews at the Vilnius hard labor camp and then turn them over to killing squads for execution. His actions resulted in the roundup of some 55,000 Jews.

Ironically, documents from Lithuanian archives spurred the Justice Department's Nazi hunting branch, the Office of Special Investigations, to begin investigating Lileikis.

The case is "one of the most important Nazi cases brought anywhere in the world in recent history," OSI Director Eli Rosenbaum said at the time. Rosenbaum, who served as OSI's acting director for 10 months, was formally named director last week.

Lileikis would have been the first Nazi war criminal prosecuted in independent Lithuania.

Jewish officials are disappointed in the decision.

"It's a disgrace," said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress. "Lithuania has betrayed the memories of tens of thousands of innocent people."

The Lithuanian government told the U.S. Embassy there earlier this month that it had no documents supporting claims that Lileikis, now 87, participated in Nazi war crimes.

Lileikis has admitted involvement with the Nazis, but denies responsibility for any deaths. He is fighting OSI's deportation attempt.

Lithuania's contention that it has no proof drew strong reaction from Steinberg. "They're not telling the truth," he said. "If they say they don't have the documents, they're not telling the truth."

A Justice Department official said the new developments will not affect efforts to deport Lileikis. "We will continue to seek his denaturalization, and make an effort to get him out of the country," said department spokesman John Russell.

WJC is not giving up, either. Steinberg said the international umbrella organization will work to convince the Lithuanian government to change its mind.

Meanwhile, Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas is scheduled to visit Israel later this month. According to Steinberg, the visit will be "a diplomatic disaster" if Lithuania does not change its mind about Lileikis. □

Ambassador, church criticize Philippine press' anti-Semitism*By Tom Tugend*

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 14 (JTA) — The Philippine ambassador to the United States has joined the Roman Catholic archbishop of Manila in denouncing an anti-Semitic campaign being waged against a Jew in the Philippine media.

The target of the attacks is David Weil, who

represents a number of multinational firms that supply goods to the Duty Free Philippines (DFP) stores.

Weil and Benjamin Lim, DFP general manager, are engaged in a bitter business dispute, whose ramifications apparently reach to the highest levels of government.

Columnists in some major Philippine newspapers have entered the dispute by focusing on Weil's Jewishness.

A column in the Manila Times, considered the country's leading daily, carried the headline "Jew-ty Free." The writer of that column refers to Weil as "Mr. Jew-ty Free."

Another columnist, writing in the Manila Bulletin, quotes an unidentified reader, who lambasts "this Jewish trader," while a third paper refers to "a Jew named David Weil."

In response to a protest by Neil Sandberg, director of the American Jewish Committee's Pacific Rim Institute, Raul Ch. Rabe, the Philippine ambassador in Washington, wrote that because he frequently speaks out against Filipino stereotyping in the United States, he is particularly sensitive to the AJCommittee's concerns.

Rabe promised to alert government and press officials to the anti-Semitic attacks.

Earlier, Cardinal Jaime Sin, archbishop of Manila, voiced his concern about the anti-Semitic language in the media.

In a letter that he wrote to the Weil family he pledged to "raise the matter to the proper authorities."

He closed by stating, "The Catholic Church is one with you in this protest. We are brothers." □

Yemenite sect leader Meshulam convicted in last year's shootout*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 14 (JTA) — Rabbi Uzi Meshulam, the radical Yemenite sect leader, was convicted recently in connection with a fatal shootout with police last year.

Meshulam and 11 followers were convicted of a series of offenses, including endangering lives, insurgency, conspiracy, illegal possession of weapons and assault.

In March, Meshulam and 100 of his followers holed up in a heavily fortified home in Yehud, near Tel Aviv, demanding that a commission of inquiry be formed to investigate the fates of hundreds of Yemenite children who disappeared after their families emigrated to Israel in the 1950s.

Meshulam and others in the Yemenite community have alleged that the children were sold for adoption.

In May, after several attempts to negotiate with Meshulam failed, police stormed the Yehud house. One of Meshulam's followers was killed by a sharpshooter after he shot at a police helicopter.

The trial, which began in August, was interrupted by sporadic demonstrations by the defendants and their followers both inside and outside the courtroom.

At a recent hearing, Meshulam was given permission to leave the court after threatening to break into song if forced to take part in what he called "this game of democracy."

Judge Amnon Strashnov of the Tel Aviv District Court took two hours to read the 90-page ruling before pronouncing Meshulam and his followers guilty of crimes relating to the siege in Yehud.

The government earlier this year appointed a state inquiry into the disappearance of the Yemenite children.

In December, another committee headed by retired Judge Moshe Shalgi concluded that there had been no wrongdoing and that most of the children had died of various illnesses. □