



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli security forces went on the alert for possible terrorist attacks after an undercover border police unit killed three members of the Hamas fundamentalist group in the West Bank town of Hebron. The Israel Defense Force said the Hamas members were on their way to carry out an attack against Israelis. Two of the three killed were said to be high on Israel's list of most wanted Hamas terrorists. [Page 3]

■ A top Israeli official, Elyakim Rubinstein, met with congressional leaders and administration officials on behalf of convicted spy Jonathan Pollard. Rubinstein also addressed the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which then joined the campaign seeking Pollard's release. [Page 2]

■ Several thousand Israelis walked from the West Bank town of Tulkarm to the coastal city of Netanya to protest the Palestinian self-rule accord. Organizers of the march said it was aimed at showing the danger of withdrawing to Israel's pre-1967 borders. [Page 3]

■ A Palestinian military court sentenced a Hamas terrorist to nine years in prison for transporting explosives on a truck that was driven from the Gaza Strip into Israel last month. Israeli police found the truck near Beersheba, where terrorists were planning to detonate the explosives.

■ Officials in Qatar said a deal to ship natural gas to Israel will be completed within in "a matter of weeks, not months," according to Robert Rifkind, president of the American Jewish Committee, who recently returned from a tour of Persian Gulf nations.

■ Israeli police arrested 18 members of an extremist Jewish group who tried to pray on the Temple Mount, site of the biblical Jewish Temple. It was the second time in less than a month that the group had tried to push past police at the site. At the same time, several hundred Jewish pilgrims visited the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron on Monday. The visit, under heavy army security, was arranged under an agreement that gives Jews sole access to the site on holy days.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Younger homosexual Jews seek integration as generation gap looms

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Eric Cohen, a 33-year-old health care consultant and a Jewish gay activist, is switching synagogues.

He has been a member of Manhattan's gay and lesbian congregation for the past few years, but he is soon planning to start attending a mainstream Conservative synagogue with a gay and lesbian club.

Cohen is one of many Jewish homosexuals who are moving out of the synagogues founded specifically to serve the needs of gay and lesbian Jews to join mainstream congregations.

Cohen is also a member of JAGL: Jewish Activist Gays and Lesbians, a two-year-old New York group devoted to political and social action.

Most members of JAGL are in their late 20s and early 30s, as are the organizers and many members of a newly formed group for gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews, called the Gay and Lesbian Yeshiva Day School Alumni Association.

Members of the new groups say they want to be able to feel comfortable as Jews outside of gay and lesbian synagogues. One of their goals, they say, is to make the larger Jewish community aware that they do not want to be ghettoized into solely homosexual environments.

There is a generation gap of sorts between young gay and lesbian Jews, who expect to integrate into the larger Jewish community, and older homosexual Jews, who founded the first gay and lesbian synagogues and came of age in a time when open integration was virtually unimaginable.

The differing expectations are due both to changes in communal and religious attitudes toward Jewish gays and lesbians and changes in society at large since the birth of the gay rights movement some 25 years ago.

An either/or choice

"The integration of identity has changed radically," said Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, New York's gay synagogue.

"In the 1970s and before, it was an either/or choice" between being gay and being Jewish, she said. "Today a young person growing up can see visible gay and lesbian Jews integrating those things."

When homosexual Jews attend college today, they find themselves in an environment where multicultural tolerance extends to gays and lesbians, according to Bob Goldfarb, 43, a marketer of classical music and a member of JAGL.

"When they come out of college they find the rest of the world is not so supportive. They think it ought to be, and that they can help change things so that being homosexual is not an automatic source of exclusion," he said.

For Beth, a lesbian raised in an Orthodox home who began acknowledging her sexual orientation about 15 years ago, "If there is one Orthodox rabbi who is quietly receptive and accepting — to me, that feels like a really wonderful thing because when I was dealing with 'coming out' I didn't know of any.

"For people growing up with a gay rabbi at a gay synagogue and this very public debate about homosexuality and Judaism, the reaction to the fact that two Orthodox rabbis may be quietly accepting is: Why the hell are there only two? It's a different perspective now," added Beth, who asked that her real name not be used.

The creation of the first gay and lesbian synagogues in 1973 — Beth Chayim Chadashim in Los Angeles, and Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in New York — meant that Jewish gays and lesbians for the first time had someplace to go to relate to their Jewishness communally.

Two decades later, much has changed about the acceptance of gays and lesbians within the wider Jewish community.

Jewish community centers have programs designed for gay and lesbian members and Jewish boards of family and children's services reach out to provide counseling and other services.

"Even Jewish repertory theater groups put on shows with gay and

lesbian themes," said Rabbi Allen Bennett, who was the first rabbi to make his homosexual orientation publicly known.

"Twenty years ago nobody would have touched this stuff," said Bennett, who was the first rabbi of San Francisco's gay and lesbian synagogue, Sha'ar Zahav, and is now director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the East Bay, in Oakland, Calif.

When he entered Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in the late 1960s, each candidate had to undergo a psychological evaluation before being accepted into rabbinical school. One of the questions asked was about homosexual tendencies. If the candidate answered that he had such tendencies, he was not accepted, said Bennett, who acknowledged that he lied at the time.

In contrast, HUC and the Reform movement's rabbinical placement commission recently adopted a policy of not discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation.

Many mainstream liberal congregations welcome gay and lesbian members and quite a few also have havurot or social clubs designed to serve their homosexual congregants.

The porous boundaries are working both ways: Most gay and lesbian congregations have seen a dramatic upsurge in the number of their heterosexual members, though straight Jews remain a distinct minority.

At Atlanta's Bet Haverim, the percentage of heterosexual members has doubled to 10 percent of its 100 congregants in under a year, said Michael Kinsler, past president of the synagogue.

"They're looking for a haimische and creative environment," said Kinsler.

There are at least 36 gay and lesbian congregations and havurot in North America, six of which are affiliated with the Reform movement and one which is connected to the Reconstructionist movement.

The Conservative movement passed a resolution in 1991 welcoming gays and lesbians as members of its synagogues, but also has a policy prohibiting homosexuals from working in rabbinic and other leadership positions.

However, the movement's Jewish Theological Seminary and the Rabbinical Assembly have, for the last two years, invited homosexual Jews to speak to their students and convention attendees about what it means to be Jewish and gay.

And rabbis connected with the liberal movements — even some in the Conservative movement — are increasingly comfortable performing commitment ceremonies for gay and lesbian Jewish couples.

According to Eric Cohen, gay synagogues "played an important role for people who were closeted."

"Then you started to see you weren't the only lesbian or gay Jew around, and as the gay liberation movement moved forward, Jewish gays and lesbians did exactly the same thing," he said.

"Now we're saying we have a place at the table in Jewish affairs and are trying to find what that place should be." □

Israel and U.S. Jews step up efforts on behalf of Pollard

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, April 17 (JTA) — With Jonathan Pollard's parole hearing approaching, efforts for his release are being stepped up by the Israeli government and the American Jewish community.

These efforts come against the backdrop of reports that surfaced last week of a possible spy swap that could free Pollard.

But President Clinton and the State Department

denied any knowledge of such a deal, which would involve the United States, Israel and Russia.

Israeli news reports had indicated that the Jewish state had proposed the swap to secure the release of Pollard, currently serving a life sentence for spying for Israel, and of Marcus Klingberg, who is serving an 18-year prison term in Israel for spying for the former Soviet Union. Russia, in turn, would release unnamed American agents.

Pollard, a former U.S. Navy analyst, will be eligible for parole in November, the 10th anniversary of his arrest. His parole hearing may be held as early as May.

The Israeli government's desire to resolve the Pollard case was reportedly made clear last week by Elyakim Rubinstein, the former longtime Israeli Cabinet secretary who now heads Israel's negotiating team with Jordan.

Rubinstein was in Washington, where he had meetings on Capitol Hill and with the administration concerning Pollard, according to an American Jewish leader.

The Jewish leader said that Rubinstein described these contacts in an April 12 address to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Pollard 'has already paid a heavy price'

Following the address, the Jewish group took its first-ever position asking for Pollard's release. In letters sent to the White House and the U.S. Parole Commission, the Conference of Presidents said that Pollard "has already paid a heavy price for his crime" and should be paroled on humanitarian grounds.

The Conference of Presidents letters follow a similar one sent by the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council to the parole commission.

It was under NJCRAC auspices that a committee of Jewish organizations first discussed the Pollard matter in the wake of his 1987 sentencing, and decided at the time that since there was no compelling evidence of anti-Semitism in the case, the Jewish community would not take a stance.

As Pollard's time in prison lengthened, and as an increasing number of grass-roots groups rallied to his cause, mainstream Jewish organizations gradually came on board seeking varying degrees of clemency for Pollard.

Last week's address by Rubinstein was "the first time an Israeli official has pointedly addressed the American Jewish community on the subject," according to the Jewish leader at the meeting.

Rubinstein's visit may be the most high-profile effort on behalf of Pollard to date, though Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has raised the issue with Clinton more than once. According to the leader, Rubinstein said that the White House is not convinced that Pollard is an important issue for the American Jewish community.

According to Seymour Reich, the former chairman of the Conference of Presidents who has taken a leading role on behalf of Pollard, support from the Israeli government and the American Jewish community is crucial if Pollard is to be released, in the face of expected opposition from the U.S. intelligence community.

"The trick now is for the president to understand that this is a key issue for the Israeli government and the American Jewish community. And it's the latter that has been lacking," said Reich.

The Conference of Presidents letter noted that Pollard has "expressed remorse for his actions and said it was never his intent to harm the United States."

"While there is no justification for his misguided actions, we believe he has already paid a heavy price for his crime," the letter said. □

Israeli security forces on alert in wake of killing of Hamas men

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) — Israeli security forces were on high alert this week for possible terrorist attacks after an undercover border police unit killed three members of the Hamas fundamentalist group in the West Bank town of Hebron.

Two of the three killed on Sunday were said to be high on Israel's list of most wanted Hamas terrorists.

The third, the leader of a local Hamas cell, was identified by members of his family on Monday after they initially denied that he had been among the dead.

The Israel Defense Force said the cell was responsible for killing at least six Israelis and wounding 12 during the past year.

The IDF issued a statement Sunday saying that the three Hamas members were on their way to carry out an attack against Israelis.

After killing the three men, Israeli soldiers found in their car two assault rifles, a submachine gun, grenades, ammunition and Israeli army uniforms.

The three were identified by the IDF as Jihad Golmi, Tarik Natshe and Adel Falah. Golmi, who was considered the leader of the group, escaped from an Israeli prison about 18 months ago.

The killings took place around 9 a.m. Sunday, when members of the border police undercover anti-terror unit ambushed the terrorists' car, riddling it with bullets in a grove just outside Hebron.

Security sources said Hamas may attempt to carry out terror attacks in the coming days in an effort to prove that its strength has not been diminished as a result of the killings.

Curfew imposed in Hebron

Maj. Gen. Ilan Biran, commander of the Israeli army's central command, said the IDF would continue its hunt for other Hamas cells operating near Hebron.

"There is another cell in this area, and possibly two or three others," he told reporters.

A curfew that was imposed on the Palestinian residents of Hebron immediately after the attack remained in effect on Monday.

Hebron Mayor Mustafa Natshe protested the curfew, saying it will only lead to more violence.

"In the city, these kinds of actions will only push more Palestinian youths toward joining the Hamas," he said.

Meanwhile, a senior member of the Palestinian Authority said the Israeli soldiers had killed the Hamas members in cold blood.

"I express sorrow at the killing of three Palestinian martyrs in Hebron," Nabil Sha'ath, in charge of planning for the Palestinian Authority, said in a statement.

"No one can but condemn liquidating a Palestinian human being in cold blood. I condemn this strongly, and we call for peace and security of both sides."

Sha'ath, appearing Sunday on the ABC-TV show "This Week With David Brinkley," said the Palestinian Authority is doing everything within its power to contain terrorists operating from Gaza.

Palestinian police detained about 300 members of the Islamic Jihad and Hamas fundamentalist groups after members of the groups launched two suicide bombings in Gaza on April 9, killing seven Israelis and an American woman who was studying in Israel.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat was not doing enough to crack down on terror.

"I don't believe that he has tried seriously," said Rabin, who also appeared on the television program.

Earlier, Rabin told Israel Television he would consider offering the Palestinians a state in Gaza.

"If they would agree to receiving a Palestinian state only in Gaza, there would be something to talk about," he said.

Arafat rejected the proposal.

The killings in Hebron on Sunday were followed by disturbances in the West Bank town of Ramallah, where Israeli soldiers clashed with Palestinian demonstrators demanding the release of fellow Palestinians still held in Israeli jails.

Thirteen Palestinians were detained after they refused to obey army orders to disperse. □

In protest against self-rule, rightist Israelis walk the walk

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) — Several thousand Israelis walked this week from the West Bank town of Tulkarm to the coastal city of Netanya to protest the Palestinian self-rule accord.

Organizers of Monday's march said the demonstration was aimed at showing how dangerous a withdrawal to Israel's pre-1967 borders could be for Israeli security.

The next phase for implementing the self-rule accord calls for Israel to hand over most of the West Bank to the Palestinians.

Marching across Israel's narrowest stretch, demonstrators made the 10-mile trek carrying signs that said: "Tulkarm-Netanya: Two-and-a-half hours for a tired donkey; three hours for a suicide bomber."

Along the way, the demonstrators stopped at Beit Lid Junction, near Netanya, where 21 people were killed in a terrorist attack in January.

The march was organized by Israel's right-wing parties, Jewish settlers groups, academics and retired army officers.

Meanwhile, a counter-demonstration in support of the peace process was held near Tulkarm on Monday.

Israeli youths belonging to the Peace Now movement joined Palestinians for the rally, during which they marked Israel's pre-1967 borders with a ribbon festooned with flowers. □

Rabbi sentenced to 2 years in prison for inciting racism

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) — The Jerusalem District Court has sentenced a Kiryat Arba rabbi who defended the killing of non-Jews to two years in prison.

The sentencing of Rabbi Ido Alba took place Thursday, one day after he was found guilty of all five charges against him, including inciting racism.

The charges stemmed from an article published last year in defense of killing non-Jews, especially those Arabs committed to a jihad, or holy war, against Israelis.

The article appeared shortly after Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein opened fire on Muslim worshipers in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, killing 29 people.

In the unprecedented ruling, the judge said Alba had sought to justify violence against Arabs. Alba also was found guilty of trying to obtain a gun silencer and ammunition and of obstruction of justice.

The Kiryat Arba rabbi protested the ruling, saying the judge had defamed the Torah.

In reading the summation, the judge did not refer to Alba as a rabbi. □

NEWS ANALYSIS:

French Jews appear split over choice for new president

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, April 17 (JTA) — As France's national elections approach, the country's Jewish population, like most French people, appears split over its next choice for president.

The French electorate is preparing to elect a successor to Socialist President Francois Mitterrand, who is suffering from prostate cancer and will be stepping down in May after serving two seven-year terms, an unprecedented period of power.

According to most opinion polls, Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac, a conservative, is likely to emerge as the leader from a field of nine candidates in the first round of elections, set to take place April 23.

If no candidate emerges with more than 50 percent of the vote, which is generally the case, runoffs between the two leading vote-getters will be held May 7.

Three recent opinion polls indicate Chirac will face Socialist candidate Lionel Jospin in the runoff.

Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, a fellow member of Chirac's Gaullist Party, has seen his early lead decline to the point where polls indicate that he will most likely not make it to the runoffs.

Unemployment a leading issue

But the polls also indicate that fully a third of the French electorate remains undecided.

France's estimated 700,000-strong Jewish community, which makes up less than 2 percent of the electorate, is not expected to rally behind any one candidate. Jewish supporters can be found in virtually every candidate's camp — with the exception of that of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the extreme right-wing National Front.

The country's Jews, like the rest of the population, have uppermost on their minds such issues as the country's high level of unemployment — which stands at 12 percent — rising rates of poverty and quality-of-life issues such as crime and the growing AIDS epidemic.

Because all the leading candidates have espoused their support for Israel and the Middle East peace process, the Jewish electorate is not focusing on foreign policy as a key issue in its choice of a candidate.

CRIF, the umbrella body representing secular Jewish organizations, has been careful to avoid backing any particular candidate. Instead, the group has issued a statement calling on the country's Jews to get out and vote.

Although it affirms its political neutrality, the CRIF statement included mention of the organization's opposition to "political parties calling for exclusion [of minorities] and to those who were seeking alliances with them." The statement was seen as a clear hint at Le Pen's National Front and at some of Balladur's followers, who recently met with Le Pen supporters.

Individually, however, some Jewish leaders are embracing particular candidates. Chirac, for instance, has garnered the enthusiastic support of Paris' local Lubavitch leadership. And several leading Jewish intellectuals have come out in support of Jospin.

Although the politicians attempt to target the Jewish electorate as part of their overall campaign strategy, leading French sociologists maintain that there is no such thing as a monolithic "Jewish vote" in France.

"One speaks of a 'Jewish community,' but one should keep in mind that, in fact, very few Jews see themselves as part of an organized community," said Pierre Birnbaum, a professor of political science at Paris University.

"By analyzing several elections, one can conclude that the Jewish vote is a myth," he added, noting that the community "would be able to play a specific role should the gap between two candidates be very small — something that never happened.

"In fact, all the candidates still seek this 'Jewish vote,' but one should consider that they also go for a great amount of local or minority votes. It's the addition of all those votes that finally makes the difference," he said.

Despite the assessment that there is no such thing as a Jewish vote, political scientists point out that France's Jews turned out a massive vote for Mitterrand in 1981 in an effort to retaliate against the party of outgoing President Valery Giscard d'Estaing, who was perceived to have a marked anti-Israel bias.

In this year's campaign as well, the candidates have sought the support of Jewish voters.

Balladur, in a recent interview with the Jewish weekly Actualite Juive, which is widely read by Orthodox Jews, made a point of stressing that Jerusalem belonged "a bit more" to Jews than to members of other religions.

He also said in the interview that he would back moving the French Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but only after the status of Jerusalem was worked out between Israel and the Palestinians, who claim the eastern portion of the city as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

Balladur's comment, which is a departure from French policy, was seen as an attempt to mend fences with Jews after reports surfaced that he had discreetly sought out Le Pen's backing in case of a runoff.

However, in interviews with several Jewish publications, Balladur has refused to condemn outright Le Pen's strongly nationalist, anti-minority position.

By contrast, Chirac, in an interview published by the Jewish weekly Tribune Juive, attacked the far-right views of Le Pen and pledged his support for Israel. □

Chinese leader may visit Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) — Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng is considering making an official visit to Israel, at the invitation of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The invitation was extended by Finance Minister Avraham Shohat, who met with Li on Wednesday.

Shohat, who was on an eight-day trip to China, also conveyed a message from Rabin regarding the Middle East peace process. Details of the message were not disclosed.

During the trip, Israel and China signed five agreements boosting economic cooperation and trade between Jerusalem and Beijing. The accords cover a variety of issues to encourage bilateral investment and avoid double taxation. □

Two organ recipients die

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) — Two recipients of organs transplanted from Alisa Flatow, the 20-year-old American student killed in Sunday's suicide bombing, died last week.

At Sheba Hospital in Tel Hashomer, 65-year-old Moshe Yamin died after a lung transplant. At Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv, 42-year-old Sarin Shmilovitz, who received a kidney and pancreas, died of a heart attack. The four other organ recipients were reported to be improving.

More than 2,000 people attended Flatow's funeral in West Orange, N.J., on Wednesday. Her coffin was draped in both Israeli and American flags. □