

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****Rabin's death leads U.S. Jews to reflect on impact of rhetoric**

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — The American Jewish world was gripped by shock, grief and then outrage at the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the hands of a right-wing Jew who reportedly said he was acting in the name of God.

Anguished soul-searching about the community's wrenching rifts over the peace process was accompanied by charges that both lay and religious leadership here did not do enough to condemn the vitriolic debate.

Vigils and memorial services were scheduled in synagogues and community centers in almost every large Jewish center in the nation, according to the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

In an apparent effort to find a redeeming aspect to the killing, some voiced hope and prayer that Jews would be unified by their shared horror at the tragedy.

"We have to take a very deep look inward and see how we have been responsible," said Rabbi Rolando Matalon, leader of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, a Conservative synagogue here.

"The leadership has not spoken loudly enough against those calling Prime Minister Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres traitors and murderers. It has not disciplined them or delegitimated them," he said.

Matalon joined Jonathan Jacoby of the Israel Policy Forum to lead a vigil of hundreds opposite the Israeli Consulate in the hours after Rabin's death.

Israeli writer Amos Oz cautioned at the vigil against allowing the act to further polarize the Jewish community.

He called for "soul-searching" and said Jews "must be careful not to just blame it on all the right wing."

Rather "there are certain individuals who should go to synagogue and kneel before the ark to apologize for the reckless words they've uttered," he said.

Susan Shapiro, a religion professor at Columbia University who was at the vigil, said: "I don't think only the right wing has to do teshuvah," she said, using the Hebrew word for "repentance."

"Everyone must take responsibility — it's the only way to pull together."

"We call upon American Jewry to denounce and reject the malevolent rhetoric which has corrupted parts of our community and intimidated many into silence," Seymour Reich and Karen Rubinstein, heads of the American Zionist Movement, said in a statement.

**'Climate of verbal violence'**

Ambassador Colette Avital, consul general of Israel in New York, called a news conference after the assassination where she said the "incitement" against Israel's leaders through violent rhetoric created an environment that made the killing possible.

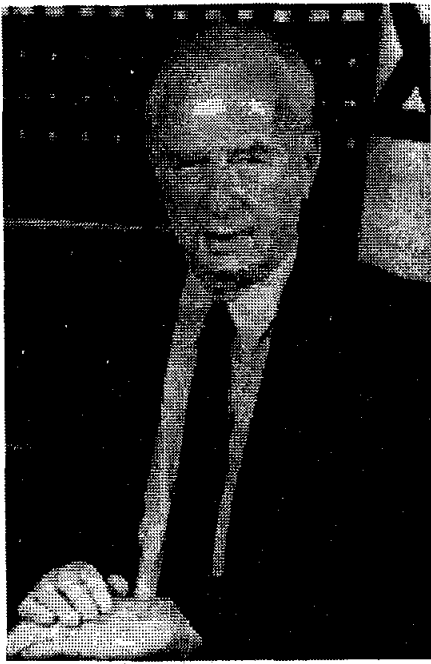
"This act probably could not have happened if there had not been a certain climate of verbal violence," which included "comparing him [Rabin] to a Nazi," said Avital, clad in black and looking pale and subdued. "I believe violent language leads to violent acts."

Twenty-four hours earlier she had sat in the same room with some of the same reporters, viewing a new video on the peace process produced by the consulate to be distributed nationwide to counter a campaign of "misinformation" by the opposition.

Much of the Jewish public debate has been based on "ignorance," said Avital, who added that the tape was aimed at creating a "more educated" kind of discussion.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which recently passed a resolution calling for civility in public discourse, condemned the killing and "the kind of rhetoric, which, when pushed to the extreme, can lead to terrible deeds."

"This senseless act of violence, completely against Jewish values, follows a campaign of verbal violence launched over the past months by

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ President Clinton led a delegation of American Jewish officials and members of Congress to attend the funeral of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated Saturday night at a peace rally in Tel Aviv.

■ The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the JCRC of New York and the Israeli Consulate in New York are sponsoring a national memorial service for Rabin on Tuesday morning at Carnegie Hall. Vigils and memorial services were scheduled in synagogues and community centers in virtually every large Jewish population center in the nation.

■ Jewish groups applauded the Argentine Supreme Court's ruling to extradite former SS Capt. Erich Priebke to Italy. The ruling ends 18 months of legal action, and some say it may alter the image of Argentina as a haven for Nazi fugitives.

■ President Clinton kicked off the National Jewish Democratic Council's quest to help Democrats retake the Congress and hold onto the White House. Amid chants of "four more years" by 900 cheering Jewish Democrats who raised more than \$600,000 for the organization's "Making a Difference in '96" campaign, Clinton laid out his administration's accomplishments and goals.

extremist elements in Israel and in the Diaspora," said the conference statement.

Leon Levy, the conference chairman, appeared at the vigil prior to his departure Sunday for Israel as part of a special delegation to the funeral of Rabin, whose death he likened to that of John F. Kennedy.

In both instances, he said, "someone was erased who was molding history."

The assassination "is not an accident and did not come in a vacuum," said Jonathan Wolf, a N.Y. resident and participant in the vigil, which was attended by a sizeable Orthodox contingent.

The act "comes out of a political context in which a lot of the right wing, especially the religious right, has said Rabin and Peres were traitors and murderers and wanted the State of Israel to be destroyed," he said.

"If you say that enough, something like this can happen and I hope these people are doing teshuvah," Wolf added.

Avital, Wolf and others cited the proclamation in June by Orthodox Brooklyn Rabbi Abraham Hecht that Jewish law permitted the assassination of the prime minister because of territorial concessions he was willing to make for the sake of peace.

Ironically, Hecht penned a letter to Rabin in late October repudiating "any words and actions of anger" that "have caused hurt."

Hecht could not be reached, but many Orthodox and other organizations opposed to the peace process took pains to issue statements in the wake of the killing that said that even though they disagreed with Rabin's political course, they mourned his death and condemned the murder.

Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, called the killing a "heinous crime" and a "horrible tragedy."

"At times we disagreed with his approach but never with his goals or his mission" for "peace and security with Israel's neighbors," he said.

"The responsible voices of our community have consistently rejected and renounced extremist acts and calls to violence, while calling for civility and comity in debate," Ganchrow added.

### **'Gave his whole life' for peace**

Chaim Kaminetzky, president of the National Council of Young Israel, said, "We and the other opponents of the Oslo agreements have always shared [Rabin's] goal of achieving a real peace, with security, for the Jewish state, and putting an end to the bloodshed, which has once again stained the land we hold holy."

"While we have strongly disagreed with the process," he said, "we have always believed that peace can never be achieved by one Jew perpetrating acts of violence upon another."

Rabbi Avi Weiss, president of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns-AMCHA, called for deep soul-searching for all Jews.

Weiss, who describes himself as "an ardent but mainstream opponent of the peace process" said it was nevertheless critical for both camps in the debate to rein in those on the fringes.

"It is my responsibility whenever I'm present and there are words that are explosive, to raise my voice and say it's not acceptable," he said.

"I do do that and it hasn't been easy," Weiss stated.

"The central challenge today is to ask ourselves how have we sunk to this level and what we can do to replace hatred with love, how to show respect to people with whom you disagree."

Meanwhile, Rabin's chief spiritual adviser, Rabbi

Efraim Zelmanovich, was in New York when Rabin died and appeared at the vigil outside the consulate.

"He gave his whole life for the peace process, which we believe is the best thing to happen to Israel since its establishment," said Zelmanovich, who heads the Israel Rabbinical Forum, a group of about 300 rabbis who support the peace process.

"Each person who called Rabin a murderer or a traitor has part of the responsibility for this murder," said Zelmanovich, calling the act "chillul haShem," or "desecration of God."

"I hope God will forgive us that we are a holy people in a holy land" in which someone "did so terrible and horrible a thing."

The rabbi said Rabin sought frequent consultation with him in his search for Jewish sources supporting his peace policies.

### **Trying to pull the community together**

Meanwhile, memorial services were scheduled throughout the country this week.

In Louisville, Ky., the local board of rabbis was coordinating a service with the local Jewish Community Relations Council to "try to pull the community together," said Marie Abrams, former chairwoman of the JCRC and a current vice chairwoman of the NJCRAC.

Abrams described Louisville, where a 35-member mission just returned from Israel, as "stunned and distraught."

The service was planned to give people "a chance to express their grief and recommit themselves to the peace process."

Jerry Milch, director of the community relations council in Bergen County, N.J., where Orthodox opposition to the peace process is fervent and the community is deeply divided, planned to call for healing at a service designed to be completely "apolitical."

"I hope it would bring us together and make us understand we can disagree but we can never allow disagreements to descend into violence," said Milch.

A national service was scheduled for Tuesday at New York's Carnegie Hall sponsored by the Presidents' Conference, the JCRC of New York and the Israeli Consulate.

At her news conference, Avital recalled that Rabin was asked only a few weeks ago in New York whether he was frightened for his safety.

"He shrugged and said he'd lived through more difficult situations in his life and had a mission to fulfill," she recalled.

She later mused she had spoken with Rabin only hours before his death, which she learned about while hosting a lunch at home for Jordanian ambassadors and members of the royal family.

"It was chitchat, just chitchat," an obviously shaken Avital said of the conversation with the prime minister. □

### **U.S. official urges Arab boycott end**

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau, who was in Riyadh last week to meet with King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, reiterated Washington's call for an end to the Arab boycott of Israel.

Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan was recently quoted as saying that his country would not lift the boycott until Israel achieved peace with Syria and Lebanon.

Saudi Arabia joined the other Persian Gulf states in agreeing last year to lift the secondary and tertiary boycotts against Israel as a result of Israeli and Palestinian peace moves. □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****Rabin's final hour marked by support and songs of peace***By Michele Chabin*

TEL AVIV (JTA) — At 9:30 on Saturday night a smiling Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stood before 100,000 people, young and old, Jew and Arab, who had come to show support for his peace process.

At 9:50 p.m., he was shot down by Yigal Amir, a 27-year-old Jewish law student. By 11:15 p.m., he was pronounced dead at nearby Ichilov Hospital.

For Israelis everywhere, even to professed right-wingers, the news of the assassination came as a shock. For those Rabin supporters who had attended the massive rally just an hour earlier, the blow was beyond comprehension.

Two hours before the assassination, a huge crowd of peace supporters stood in Malchai Yisrael Square in the heart of Tel Aviv. Reportedly the largest gathering in the city's history, people of all ages waved banners proclaiming "Peace Yes, Violence No" and "A Strong Nation Makes Peace."

Although some of the speakers spoke in purely political terms, calling on those assembled to vote for the Labor Party next November, at times the rally seemed more like a festival than a political demonstration.

Enticed by the promise of rock music, as well as the opportunity to show their support for the peace process, tens of thousands of teens sat on the grass or danced in the large fountain 20 feet below the podium.

Parents with young children, white-haired grandparents, young Israeli Arabs — all had traveled short and long distances to attend the rally.

Standing some 15 feet away from Rabin, who was flanked by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and other ministers, one could sense a feeling of goodwill. Peres later said that he thought that it was Rabin's "happiest day."

Rabin surprised the crowd by embracing Peres, his political rival of more than two decades.

In a speech that will long be remembered, Rabin began by thanking "everyone who came to make a stand here against violence and in support of peace."

"This government, which I have the privilege to head together with my colleague Peres, has decided to give peace a chance. I have been a military man for 27 years," he continued. "I fought as long as there was no chance for peace. I believe there is such a chance now, a great chance, and we must take advantage of it, for the sake of those who are here and all those who are not."

**Ripped through the song sheet**

The crowd was even more surprised when Rabin joined in a rousing rendition of "Shiru Shir Hashalom," Hebrew for "we will sing a song of peace."

Although reluctant at first to sing, the introverted prime minister placed the song sheet in his breast pocket. It was only after performer Miri Aloni cajoled him into participating that Rabin borrowed a song sheet and began to sing, albeit quietly.

Later, Peres revealed that the bullets, on the way to Rabin's chest, also ripped through the song sheet.

But before that moment, the crowds gathered below the podium were spurred by the sight of Rabin's singing and joined in at the top of their lungs.

Not long afterward, the crowd began to disperse. Some heard the fatal gunshots ring out in the night. Most learned of the tragedy several minutes later. By that time, many people had already boarded buses for the trip home.

On a bus bound for Jerusalem, rally participants listened in strained silence as Israel Radio first announced that three shots had been fired and that the prime minister

might have been wounded. A few minutes later, word came that Rabin had been badly injured.

"Badly" was downgraded to "seriously," until, at 11:15 p.m., Israelis learned that Rabin had succumbed to his wounds. Leah Rabin, the prime minister's wife, they were told, was at his bedside.

As the announcement was made, everyone on the bus seemed to cry out at once. Teen-agers in Peace Now T-shirts, clutching banners, wept into the darkness as the bus made its ascent to Jerusalem. □

**Shot heard around the world followed by wide praise for Rabin**

NEW YORK (JTA) — Political and religious leaders around the world expressed their shock and sorrow over the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and praised the slain leader as a champion of peace.

They also called on the people of Israel and the Middle East to redouble their efforts in their search for peace as a fitting memorial to Rabin.

At the same time, Jewish communities worldwide came together in the hours after the attack to share their grief and show solidarity with the State of Israel.

Some world leaders — including U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Czech Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus, Belgian Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien — issued statements shortly before leaving their countries to attend the funeral in Israel on Monday.

At the United Nations, Boutros-Ghali condemned "in the strongest possible terms this outrageous act of terror which has struck down one of the greatest leaders in Israel's history." Boutros-Ghali, as the former acting foreign minister of Egypt, accompanied the late President Anwar Sadat on his groundbreaking trip to Jerusalem in 1977. Sadat himself was assassinated in 1981.

In Rome, Pope John Paul II condemned the killing at his weekly Sunday address in St. Peter's Square.

"I fervently hope this grave and painful episode does not disturb in an irreparable way the search for peace but rather serves as a further stimulus," he said.

Roman Jews flocked to the city's main synagogue Saturday night for an impromptu prayer service.

In Germany, Bundestag President Rita Sussmuth, speaking Sunday before a women's congress of the Christian Democratic Union Party, called for a minute of silence to honor Rabin.

Jacques Santer, president of the European Commission, said in Brussels on Sunday that Israel "has lost a great leader."

Czech President Vaclav Havel deplored the attack and said he was "deeply moved by the act of terrorism" because he "highly honored Rabin and his work."

In Canada, Chretien said, "The world has lost a great man dedicated to peace and reconciliation."

Memorial services were planned by the Jewish communities in Toronto and Montreal for Monday night.

Jewish Agency emissaries in the former Soviet Union reported that they received dozens of faxes and telegrams from government leaders in Moscow, Odessa, St. Petersburg, Kiev and other capitals.

Messages of condolence were also issued in South America, where Venezuelan President Rafael Caldera and Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori paid tribute to Rabin and urged the continuation of the peace process for which he gave his life. □

*(Contributing to this report were JTA correspondents Ruth E. Gruber in Rome, Randi Druzin in Prague, Joseph Kopel in Brussels, Miriam Widman in Berlin and Bram D. Eisenthal in Montreal.)*

## From soldier to statesman, Rabin leaves legacy of peace

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — In the final words of his final public speech, a call for peace was on the lips of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Speaking at a pro-peace rally in Tel Aviv on Saturday night before some 100,000 supporters, Rabin gave voice to the pursuit that, more than anything else, defined and distinguished his second term as the leader of Israel.

"This rally must send a message to the Israeli people, to the Jewish people around the world, to the many people in the Arab world and indeed to the entire world, that the Israeli people want peace, support peace."

An hour later, the man who led his country in war and in peace was dead, the victim of an assassin's bullets.

The pursuit of peace did not come easily to Rabin.

The old general who had repeatedly vowed never to negotiate with the "PLO murderers" later found himself at the center of the "handshake that shook the world," signing an accord with Yasser Arafat, the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Rabin forever struggled to balance the possible benefits of peace with the demands of Israeli security and his longtime distrust of Israel's Arab foes.

And it was possibly because of these doubts, shared by many Israelis, that his people felt comfortable entrusting to Rabin — the most acclaimed hero of the 1967 Six-Day War — the job of pursuing the peace process.

Perhaps at no time was Rabin's ambivalence about the task more evident than in his uneasy smile when he exchanged that historic handshake with Arafat on the White House lawn on Sept. 13, 1993, to seal the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The chain-smoking, often gruff-sounding Israeli leader who recently said that the only place he would not smoke was in the White House — because he was not allowed — traversed many a blood-soaked battlefield on his long journey to the White House lawn.

### Hoped to make Israel blossom

In fact, he was barely out of boyhood when he got his first taste of war. Born Yitzhak Robicov on March 1, 1922, to Russian parents who had immigrated to what was then British-mandate Palestine, he grew up hoping to become one of the pioneer farmers who would make the Land of Israel blossom once again.

But at the age of 19, he changed course, taking a step that would alter his fate — and that of a country that had not yet been reborn: He joined the Palmach, an underground elite commando unit led by Moshe Dayan, to fight British rule in Palestine.

He rose through the ranks, eventually becoming deputy commander of an operation in 1945 that freed 200 illegal Jewish immigrants from the Atlit detention camp.

A year later, he was arrested by the British, along with hundreds of other Jewish leaders in what came to be known as "Black Saturday," and spent six months in a British detention camp.

In October 1947, Rabin was named deputy commander of the Palmach, where he met fellow member Leah Schlossberg, who became his wife in August 1948.

In the 1948 War of Independence, Rabin commanded the Harel Brigade, leading them in the fight to open the road to a besieged Jerusalem, and liberating neighborhoods of the city.

He rose through a series of military positions before becoming the seventh IDF chief of staff Jan. 1, 1964. It was as chief of staff that Rabin led the IDF to victory in the Six-Day War. He said in a 1975 television

interview that the 1967 liberation of the Western Wall, which he had failed to liberate 19 years earlier during the War of Independence, was the "fulfillment of a dream" and the "peak of my life."

In 1968, Rabin left the military and was appointed ambassador to the United States, a post he held until 1973.

He was elected to the Knesset in December 1973. When then-Prime Minister Golda Meir formed her government in April 1974, he was named labor minister.

After the near-disaster of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Rabin was the choice of the ruling Labor Party to succeed Meir, who resigned June 2, 1974.

At 52, he became the youngest — and first native-born Israeli — ever to lead his country.

Asking the Knesset to approve his new government, he referred to Israel's social crisis after the Yom Kippur War and pleaded for national unity. "Some have forgotten the ancient historic lesson that because of needless hatred, Jerusalem was destroyed," Rabin said.

In June 1976, his government issued the order for the Entebbe raid in which Israeli commandos liberated hijacked Air France passengers from the Uganda airport.

In 1977, Rabin was forced to resign when it was discovered that his wife held an illegal bank account in the United States.

In the national unity governments that Likud and Labor shared from 1984 to 1990, he was defense minister, orchestrating the withdrawal of IDF forces from Lebanon and establishing a security zone in southern Lebanon.

It was also during his tenure as defense minister that the Palestinian intifada, or uprising, broke out in 1987 in the territories.

In a stern but controversial order, Rabin told the troops to "break the bones" of the Palestinian protesters.

Rabin was elected chairman of the Labor Party in its first nationwide primaries, conducted in February 1992.

### 'Bullet cannot destroy peace'

Running on a slogan of "peace with security," he led his party to victory in the June 1992 Knesset elections.

A month later, Rabin formed Israel's 25th government, in which he held the dual portfolios of prime minister and defense minister. This provided him with the confidence to pursue his peace policies — a course that was to lead to the handshake with Arafat and to the signing of a peace treaty with Jordan on Oct. 26, 1994.

Also last year, Rabin shared a Nobel Peace Prize with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Arafat.

The prospect of an Israeli withdrawal in territories Israel held since 1967 prompted widespread protests by the Israeli right, which viewed the actions of the Rabin government as a blow to the dream of a Greater Israel.

Rabin is survived by his wife; two children, Dalia and Yuval; and three grandchildren.

Peres, the longtime political rival of Rabin who became his partner in the quest for an enduring regional peace, delivered an emotional speech in which he referred to a scrap of paper containing song lyrics that was found in Rabin's shirt after he was shot. The lyrics were of a song of peace that Rabin and his fellow Cabinet ministers had sung at Saturday night's rally.

"A bullet can tear through a piece of paper. It also can tear a body," said Peres, who was named acting prime minister at an emergency Cabinet meeting shortly after the assassination.

"But a bullet cannot destroy the ideal of peace."

President Clinton was visibly shaken and on the verge of tears when he voiced his goodbye to the Israeli leader within hours of the assassination.

"Shalom, chaver," said Clinton: "Goodbye, friend." □