

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israeli troops completed their withdrawal from Jenin, the first West Bank town to fall under Palestinian self-rule as the result of an agreement signed in Washington in September. Israel moved up the withdrawal by a week to demonstrate its continued commitment to the peace process. [Page 3]**

■ **Israeli warplanes fired rockets at guerrilla targets south of Beirut. The strike was aimed at bases belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, which militantly opposes the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.**

■ **Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu pledged to improve the political climate in Israel. The pledge came as the Knesset held a special memorial session for the slain prime minister.**

■ **Members of Congress, local dignitaries and Jewish community leaders planted a tree at the tip of the Ellipse in Washington in memory of Yitzhak Rabin. The event was sponsored by the Jewish National Fund.**

■ **The University of Virginia announced a new policy allowing students the option to request a refund of part of their student activities fee if they do not want to fund certain student activities. The new policy comes in response to last year's Supreme Court decision allowing public funding for a student-run Christian magazine at the university.**

■ **The president of the Argentine Supreme Court stepped down from the investigation of the 1992 car bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires. The move came after the judge was criticized for the slowness of the court's investigation.**

■ **A Paris court sentenced Christian Didier to 10 years in prison for the 1993 killing of Rene Bousquet, the wartime leader of the collaborationist Vichy police who was charged with the deportation of 2,000 Jewish children. Didier killed Bousquet before he could go on trial for crimes against humanity.**

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Backlash against right wing still reverberating in Israel**

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a religious extremist has put Israel's political right wing on the defensive.

Still shocked by the murder, the right is also reeling from accusations, lodged by Rabin's widow, Leah, and others, that opposition leaders fueled the fires of incitement.

In the days after the killing, Rabin's widow and Labor Knesset members have blasted the right, asserting that Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu and other members of the opposition did nothing to curb anti-Rabin rhetoric during stormy Knesset sessions and at public demonstrations.

From the right's perspective, the arrest of several young religious extremists in connection with the murder has made a bad situation even worse. "It was bad enough when we thought Yigal Amir was a lone fanatic," a Likud supporter attending Sunday's massive memorial rally in Tel Aviv for the slain prime minister said, referring to Rabin's confessed assassin.

But "hearing that the assassination might have been masterminded by a Jewish underground and sanctioned by rabbis is almost too much to bear."

Possible rabbinic sanction for the assassination was highlighted when reports surfaced that Israeli police would question two rabbis about whether they approved the assassination.

Both rabbis, Rabbi Nahum Rabinovitz of Ma'aleh Adumim and Rabbi Dov Lior of Kiryat Arba, strongly denied the allegations.

"They do not have the least shred of truth," Rabinovitz told Israel Radio. Rabinovitz, who openly opposes the peace accords with the Palestinians, was one of a group of some 20 rabbis who issued a ruling in July calling on Israeli soldiers to disobey orders to evacuate army bases in the West Bank.

Israel's chief rabbinate is also looking into the matter, after being provided a list — by Yoel Bin-Nun of the West Bank settlement of Ofra — of rabbis who had called for Rabin's death. Although no rabbis have been arrested, the very thought that rabbinical leaders might have sanctioned the murder spurred several angry newspaper editorials.

The Hebrew daily Davar Rishon wrote, "If anyone needs to rend his clothes over the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, it is — first and foremost — the national-religious public, including its rabbis and leaders."

Ma'ariv agreed: "The actual responsibility for the awful deed lies with the spiritual leaders who incited to murder and gave their approval for murder."

'A real witch hunt'

From the right's perspective, the fact that most right-wing and religious leaders have denounced the murder has not prevented a backlash, according to Yehudit Tayar, spokeswoman for the Yesha Council, which represents settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"People here are pretty shaken up. Our office has received several threatening phone calls, and we're starting to hear reports of discrimination."

"There is a real witch hunt going on," said Ruth Matar, co-founder of Women in Green, a group that opposes territorial compromise.

Describing an incident on a television show involving her daughter-in-law Nadia Matar, the organization's co-founder, Ruth Matar said, "When Nadia was interviewed on 'Good Morning Israel' following the assassination, the interviewer said, 'You've been awfully quiet this week.'"

"The implication was, 'Don't you feel guilty about the assassination?'"

Although Ruth Matar called the assassination "a tragedy for the Jewish people," she placed much of the blame for the strained relations that existed between the government and the right wing squarely on Yitzhak Rabin's shoulders. The Rabin government "has been the most inciteful in the history of the state. It has likened the Likud to Hamas.

"Unfortunately, the climate here has been one where the majority of

people feel disenfranchised, as if they have no input into government policy."

Shmuel Sackett, co-chairman of Zo Artzeinu, another organization opposed to giving land to the Palestinians that has organized nationwide protests, agreed.

The assassination never would have happened, he said, "if the prime minister would have listened more to the right wing and given us the feeling that, at the very least, we were being listened to.

"Only out of sheer frustration does someone like Yigal Amir do what he's been accused of doing."

Frustrated or not, right-wing leaders appear united in their efforts to heal the rift between them and other segments of Israeli society. "The Yesha Council held a meeting and decided to abstain from any public activities during the 30-day mourning period," Tayar said.

"Although we disagreed politically, Yitzhak Rabin was our prime minister. We're also in mourning. We remember him as the chief of staff during the Six-Day War."

As to future demonstrations, she said, "We have always been careful about what we said, never called Rabin a traitor, but if you have a demonstration with 100,000 people, it's impossible to control every individual."

That being said, Tayar added, "I would hope that people will be more sober-minded and tone down their rhetoric. In an electrified atmosphere, someone who is unbalanced could react in a violent way."

This view is shared by Shlomo Riskin, chief rabbi of the West Bank settlement of Efrat.

Riskin was indicted by many this week, along with Nadia Matar and others, for his role in occupying a hillside near Efrat during a series of settler protests against the expansion of Palestinian self-rule.

Amir, Rabin's confessed assassin, was involved in at least one of those demonstrations, some of which turned into ugly clashes with Israeli soldiers.

"Most of us never dreamt to what extent vitriolic debate can lead to bloodshed," Riskin said in an interview.

In the aftermath of the killing, Riskin is calling for greater tolerance among Israelis.

"Forget about Greater Israel; it is not really a reality anymore. Forget about dismantling all the settlements, because it will cause terrible alienation on the part of 50 percent of the country.

'More bridge-building, fewer demonstrations'

"Somehow we must reach some kind of middle ground in which we give up parts of Judea and Samaria, and keep other parts of Judea and Samaria," the New York-born rabbi said. "This is the only way to achieve a wide consensus without compromising the principles of the government in power."

Although reluctant to point any fingers, Riskin clearly sees a need for religious Jews in general — and the religious school system in particular — to engage in reconciliation, not recrimination.

"We need to be involved in more bridge-building and fewer demonstrations," he said.

"As educators in the national religious camp, we must tone down everything we say about the cardinal importance of the Land of Israel, and instead stress the cardinal importance of the people of Israel.

"It must be made clear that the most valued thing in Jewish law is not even the Western Wall, but a human life," he said.

Whether Israel's right wing can overcome negative associations with the assassination remains to be seen, according to Hebrew University Professor Ehud Sprinzak, an expert on Jewish fundamentalism.

"The right's future depends on whether or not they

will recognize that they have had a direct or indirect part in the creation of the conditions that led to the assassination," said Sprinzak, author of "The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right."

The first step for their rehabilitation, he said, "is to change the rhetoric. The second is to act forcefully against those marginal elements that are still talking about 'Peres the traitor' and the 'treacherous government.'"

"If the Israeli right can do that," he said, "it can become what it always should have been: a respectable and constructive opposition." □

German neo-Nazi arrested, this time on publishing charge

By David Kantor

BONN (JTA) — A leading German neo-Nazi already convicted of inciting racism has been arrested on new charges of Holocaust-denial and racial incitement.

Gunter Deckert, the former chairman of the extreme right-wing National Democratic Party, was arrested Nov. 8 at the Frankfurt airport upon his arrival from Spain.

Police officials said Deckert was arrested in connection with a book he co-published, "The Case of Gunter Deckert."

Police may charge him with writing anti-Semitic portions of the book and with its distribution, both of which are illegal under Germany's laws against provoking racial incitement.

In April, Deckert was sentenced to two years imprisonment for translating and circulating a speech delivered at a 1991 neo-Nazi rally by Fred Leuchter, an American Holocaust denier.

Deckert was expected to start serving the two-year sentence by the end of the month.

The case, which has been the subject of three trials in as many years, created a stir here and abroad last year, when a state court in the southwestern city of Mannheim gave Deckert a one-year suspended sentence, describing him as a dedicated nationalist who resented the moral and financial demands Jews have made on Germany in the wake of the Holocaust.

Two judges who issued the sympathetic statement were removed from the bench amid an international outcry, and another trial was held at which April's verdict was reached.

That verdict was upheld in October by a federal appeals court.

In a related development, neo-Nazi activist Mainolf Schonborn was sentenced last week to 27 months' imprisonment. A court in the western German city of Dortmund found the 40-year-old extremist guilty of relaunching a neo-Nazi organization that had been banned by the authorities. □

Stamp to memorialize Rabin

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A stamp commemorating the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin will be issued a month after his death.

Israel's Postal Authority said the stamp would bear Rabin's official photograph and would be issued in a 5-shekel denomination.

Communications Minister Shulamit Aloni said in a statement that stamps in memory of prime ministers are usually issued on the one-year anniversary of their death.

But in light of the circumstances surrounding Rabin's death, she added, it was decided that a stamp in his honor should appear sooner. □

Israeli court opens the door for non-Orthodox conversions

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In a landmark ruling, Israel's Supreme Court has opened the door for recognition of Reform and Conservative conversions performed in Israel.

In a 6-1 decision issued Sunday, the court ruled that a person who asks the Interior Ministry to be listed as a Jew in the civil population registry does not require approval from the chief rabbinate, which only recognizes Orthodox conversions in Israel.

However, the court did not explicitly recognize Reform conversions, saying that it would be up to the Knesset to pass the appropriate legislation.

Passage of such legislation, leaders of the Reform movement said, would be difficult given the expected opposition by members of the religious parties.

Nonetheless, leaders of the Reform movement hailed the ruling as historic — while Orthodox groups rejected it.

"There is no way now that anyone will be able to block the recognition of Reform and Conservative conversions in Israel," Uri Regev, head of the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center in Israel, told Israel Radio.

Israel's Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau rejected the decision, saying that the Orthodox establishment would never accept what he called "the fiction of Reform conversions."

The court's decision was described as a "devastating blow to the Jewishness of the 'Jewish state'" by Agudath Israel of America.

That organization represents fervently Orthodox Jews.

"By enabling the recognition of conversions in Israel by Reform rabbis, the Supreme Court ruling represents a giant step forward toward the ultimate import to the Holy Land of the 'religious pluralism' syndrome which has wreaked havoc in the United States," Agudah's president, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, said in a statement.

Erode Orthodox monopoly

The organization's international body, Agudath Israel World Organization, recently launched a campaign aimed at combating efforts by liberal Jewish groups to attain religious pluralism in Israel.

The Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative movements are all involved in an effort to erode the Orthodox monopoly on religious affairs in Israel as well as Orthodox control over personal-status issues such as marriage, divorce and burial.

The Supreme Court's decision came as a result of a petition brought by Hava Goldstein, a Brazilian immigrant who underwent a Reform conversion after marrying an Israeli.

The Interior Ministry refused her request to register her as a Jew.

The ministry cited an ordinance that requires anyone who wishes to be registered as a Jew to first receive approval from the rabbinate.

The high court ruled that the ministry's reason for refusing Goldstein's request was invalid, because the ordinance applies only to matters of personal status, such as marriage and divorce.

It does not apply to civil issues, such as how a person is listed in the population registry, the Supreme Court ruled.

Justice Meir Shamgar, a former court president, wrote in his majority opinion: "It is possible that a man

could be considered Jewish for the sake of one law, but not be considered Jewish for the sake of another law."

He added that the court was asked to consider only whether the state's reason for rejecting the request was wrong, not whether Reform conversions are valid.

Therefore, Shamgar wrote, the court could not state that a Reform conversion enabled Goldstein to be registered as a Jew.

Chief Justice Aharon Barak, who also voted with the majority, said the type of conversions valid for this purpose would be decided by the Knesset.

In the meantime, he added, the guidelines should be those already established for what constitutes conversion under the Law of Return.

According to that law, Reform and Conservative conversions performed overseas have been recognized as valid since 1989, but not those performed in Israel.

In his dissenting opinion, Justice Zvi Tal said the population registry is not merely a "statistical service," and that identity cards, in which the holder's religion is listed, are issued as the basis of most civilian life.

He said a recognized government authority, until now the rabbinate, should set the criteria for registration as a Jew.

The high court is expected to take up another challenge to the religious status quo in six months, when it is scheduled to deal with a petition submitted by parents of adopted children who underwent Conservative conversions in Israel.

That ruling could affect thousands of new immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who are now officially classified as non-Jews.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, about 10 percent of the immigrants from the former Soviet Union are not Jewish according to Jewish religious law.

Regev was quoted as saying that thousands of these immigrants might want to undergo Reform or Conservative conversions if they were officially recognized. □

Jenin becomes autonomous as Israelis finish withdrawal

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli troops have completed their withdrawal from Jenin, the first West Bank town to fall under Palestinian self-rule as the result of an agreement signed in Washington in September.

Israel moved up the withdrawal by a week to demonstrate its continued commitment to the peace process in the wake of the Nov. 4 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

On Monday, as Israeli troops left the building that had served as their headquarters, thousands of cheering Palestinians lined the streets to welcome buses bringing an advance guard of Palestinian police to the town.

A Palestinian flag was raised at the former army headquarters.

At a gas station on the outskirts of the city, Israeli and Palestinian officers shook hands to mark the formal transfer of power.

Israel began its withdrawal from Jenin on Oct. 25. Located in the northern West Bank, the town has some 40,000 Arab residents.

Maj. Gen. Ilan Biran, who is the commander of the region that includes the West Bank, said joint Israeli and Palestinian police patrols would begin operating in the area this week.

Israel Radio quoted a senior Palestinian police official as saying that the Israeli redeployment from the West Bank town of Tulkarm would begin next week with the opening of a liaison office. □

Jewish spiritual healing moves into the mainstream

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Not long ago, the notion of prayer curing physical ills could be found only among Christian Scientists and Pentecostal Christians.

Today, a similar notion is gaining wide credence — and a growing audience — among religiously liberal Jews.

The Jewish concept of spiritual healing is not that prayer alone can cure physical illness, nor that prayer will necessarily cure when used alongside traditional medicine.

"We make a distinction between curing and healing," said Rabbi Simkha Weintraub, rabbinic director of the recently created National Center for Jewish Healing. "The last thing I want to do is to sell snake oil."

"We look at the person and we see a body, a psyche, emotions and a spiritual and religious life," he said. "We're trying to make sure that the spiritual dimension isn't neglected."

According to Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, distinguished professor of education and Jewish religious thought at the Reform movement's seminary, "We are conscious of our limitations and are groping for ways to let God's power and presence into our lives more clearly."

Borowitz gave the keynote speech at a conference co-sponsored by the national center, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

The conference — "From Where Will My Help Come?: An Academic Exploration of Sources of Healing Within Judaism" — was held this week at the N.Y. campuses of the Conservative and Reform seminaries.

Attending the conference were some 200 rabbis and Jewish communal workers — about 25 percent more than originally anticipated.

Hunger among Jews

It was believed to be the first time that the three liberal Jewish seminaries jointly sponsored a project.

Those involved with Jewish healing say they see a widespread hunger among Jews coping with chronic illness who want to integrate spirituality with their medical treatment in order to heal their psyches as well as their bodies.

In eight Jewish communities today — from San Francisco to New York City — organized support groups and prayer services exist for Jews living with chronic illnesses and their families. Similar groups are in the early stages of development in a dozen cities, including Minneapolis, Phoenix and Philadelphia, and another five communities have expressed interest.

Prayer services for healing are also being held with increasing frequency in countless Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform congregations across North America.

Sometimes they are held around issues paining the entire Jewish community, such as the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Usually, they are conducted for a congregant suffering from illness, or from grief over the death of a loved one.

The prayer service at the N.Y. conference was based on the Jewish contemplative tradition. Participants, for example, joined in the chanting of a "niggun," a wordless tune that is rooted in Chasidic custom, and the singing was interspersed with instructions to relax and various blessings to give thanks.

The national center helps train local rabbis, chaplains, educators, social workers and laypeople to get support groups and healing services off the ground, and provides suggested prayers and texts for group study.

It also works to catalyze Jewish organizations to address this issue, and to move the concept of Jewish healing from the margins of the Jewish establishment into the mainstream.

When the national center recently sent out a "save the date card" for "Refainu" — "we heal" — an upcoming conference devoted to Jewish healing, slated for Summit, N.J., in January, 450 people — including rabbis from all four denominations — called to say they want to attend, though there is room for only 150. Registration was closed even before the sign-up forms were printed. In 1997, the seminar is slated to be held in Los Angeles.

The goal, says Weintraub and others involved with the effort, is to help those in crisis find access to the resources that the Jewish tradition has to offer. "Times of illness and death are spiritual moments for a lot of people. We want to help them find meaning and relevance at these points in their lives," said David Hirsch, president of the national center, which is based in New York.

Hirsch's interest in Jewish healing dates back to his earliest childhood memories. When his mother was pregnant with him, she was diagnosed with cancer. She lived with that cancer for 15 years.

Part of a family of prominent Jewish philanthropists, she wanted desperately to find some spiritual succor to help her cope with being ill. "She couldn't find spiritual Jewish support," Hirsch recalled, despite the fact that she was well-educated Jewishly.

Then someone gave her a book by the founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, called "Science and Health." Hirsch took her young son to many of the prayer and study meetings she attended, where she found the comfort she needed to fight the cancer.

Although his mother never converted to Christianity, Hirsch said it was sad that she could not find any points of access to Jewish sources. The Christian Science book "is fine, but it's not ours," said Hirsch. "We have to open up our own book instead of others'."

In the Jewish community, there remains some resistance to the concept of spiritual healing. "The word 'healing' means many different things" to different people, said Hirsch. "And there are Christological overtones to the term 'healing' in this culture."

Upsurge in interest

"But where some Christians talk about faith, we talk about hope," added Weintraub in an interview at the National Center for Jewish Healing's new headquarters, cramped in small rooms on the top of a Manhattan mansion owned by the N.Y. section of the National Council of Jewish Women.

"We talk a lot about the moment," said Weintraub. "We don't talk much about the afterlife unless someone brings it up," citing another difference between the Christian concept of spiritual healing and the Jewish.

Despite reticence in some quarters, though, there is a remarkable upsurge in interest, he said.

Why now? There are several reasons, said Hirsch. There has been "a tremendous failure of expectations with the medical system," he said.

Doctors are no longer viewed as infallible, he said, adding that with the adoption of managed care, physicians and nurses have less time to talk and counsel a patient.

In addition, people with terminal illnesses who until a few years ago lived only weeks or months are now surviving for up to 20 years and need help coping with the stress of illness over the long term.

There is an openness to spiritual development in North American culture at large, he said, and there is "a lot more interest in death. The image of 'the grim reaper' has given way to 'the light.'" □