



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) is on the verge of suspending his bid for the Republican presidential candidacy.** Aides for the first American Jew to launch a Republican bid for the White House blamed lackluster fund raising, which they said led to a serious cash-flow problem.

■ **Israel and the European Union signed a free-trade accord.** Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres flew to Brussels to sign the agreement, which Israel hopes will lessen its trade imbalance with its largest trading partner. [Page 2]

■ **Former SS Capt. Erich Priebke was extradited from Argentina to Italy, where he will face trial on war-crimes charges.** Priebke, 82, boarded a plane for Italy on the 50th anniversary of the start of the Nuremberg trials.

■ **The detention of Yigal Amir, confessed assassin of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, was extended by 11 days.** A hearing took place amid reports that Amir had been trained by the Shin Bet as a security guard in 1992 before being sent on a government mission to Latvia.

■ **A prewedding reception was held in the Knesset for a couple denied permission by the Orthodox establishment to marry in Israel.** The couple will travel to the United States next week for a marriage ceremony — which will be recognized as valid in Israel — performed by Reform rabbis at the Reform movement's biennial conference.

■ **Israel and the Persian Gulf state of Qatar signed a document laying the groundwork for an aviation agreement between the two countries.** The director general of Israel's Civil Aviation Administration said the first two commercial flights from Qatar are expected to land in Israel in the coming weeks.

■ **Israel devalued the shekel by 1.5 percent as there was heavy demand for foreign currency in the business sector.** The devaluation, which resulted in a rate of 3.1 shekels to the dollar, came amid concerns about possible cuts in the state budget by the government being formed by Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

AT THE G.A. [Part 1]

Spirituality finds its voice as focus of leadership assembly

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

BOSTON (JTA) — It felt like a summer camp reunion as a thousand Jews, crowded into an overflowing hotel ballroom, swayed arm-in-arm while musician Debbie Friedman led them in singing a prayer asking God for healing and strength.

The setting, however, was a reunion of a different kind — the annual gathering of Jewish communal leaders at the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations.

The experience of joining other Jews and singing and praying together “was like being cleansed inside,” said Marci Erlebacher, her eyes wet with tears.

“We need to get in touch with our Judaism,” said Erlebacher, who volunteers as vice president for community relations at the Syracuse, N.Y., Jewish federation.

This year's general assembly marked the first time that lay leaders and staff members of Jewish communal organizations across North America focused on experiencing — and not just talking about — the stuff that inspires Jewish continuity. The shift in focus came just as the North American Commission on Jewish Identity and Continuity issued its final report, urging stronger communal attention to Jewish identity-building programs.

The convention, held here at the Hynes Convention Center Nov. 15-17, was like an enormous Jewish continuity idea fair as communal leaders debated their priorities: funding Jewish education, strengthening Jewish culture, creating more programs to attract young adults and intermarried families, or providing human services.

Many communities are grappling with painful decisions about what funding to cut in order to support new initiatives intended to connect more Jews with the life of the community.

The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey found that more than half of adult Jews do not belong to or regularly participate in synagogues, Jewish community centers or Jewish federations.

The attempt to counter this trend comes as communities face a shrinking pool of dollars and increasing social service needs.

Power and influence at stake

“The overriding issue for [local] federations is how do we make sure there are resources for all” these plans, said Jonathan Woocher, executive vice president of the Jewish Education Service of North America, known as JESNA, which works closely with federations on continuity-related issues.

Jewish federations are the local fund-raising umbrella groups that run — and fund — many of the Jewish communities' social service, educational and cultural programs. As priorities change, the power and influence of those who have long enjoyed running the Jewish community is also at stake, said speakers at several sessions at the assembly.

“Being in partnership [with other organizations] means giving up power,” warned Miriam Yenkin, chairwoman of the Jewish Education and Identity Committee in Columbus, Ohio.

“Change is dislocating, unnerving. We had better be ready to lose positions, portfolios and power,” agreed Shoshana Cardin, chair of the United Israel Appeal.

“People my age should get out of the seats and give people under 40 the control,” exhorted Cardin, who is a longtime leader of Jewish organizations.

But amid the mood of trepidation, there was something else overarching the debate and feeding a sense of unity of purpose: connection with Jewish spirituality, which was a major focus of the most popular working sessions at the gathering.

Four institutes, each containing several workshops and panel discussions, were offered to the 4,000 general assembly delegates: financial resource development; public social policy and human services; Israel-Diaspora relations; and Jewish identity and continuity.

G.A. organizers expected about 600 participants in the Jewish identity

and continuity track, but were inundated by requests from hundreds more who wanted to join. Although enrollment was closed at 850, at least 1,000 crowded into overflowing ballrooms to sing, to dance and to pray together.

Although continuity has been high on the agenda of the CJF gathering for several years, this year's program emphasized hands-on connection with "doing Jewish."

"So often our only connection to the Jewish community is through politics," said Erlebacher. "For a long time I said that politics is my spirituality. I felt turned off by synagogues. Now I've learned that there is a place for me spiritually in Judaism and that I just have to seek it."

According to Richard Siegel, executive director of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, "The most important part of this journey must take place when we return home," when Jewish organizational leaders can implement "doing Jewish" in their own programs.

Additional sessions themed around "Jewish Hope, Jewish Joy, Jewish Culture: Invigorating the Jewish Community" were crowded. A lecture on the Torah portion of the week, given by internationally renowned teacher Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, was packed.

Rabbi Simkha Weintraub expressed shock that two sessions devoted to Jewish spiritual healing were included in the hectic G.A. schedule — a first for the convention — and that the sessions which he and others led were overflowing with eager participants.

"Jewish continuity is coming of age," said Weintraub, rabbinic coordinator at the National Center for Jewish Healing. "This buzzword has reached a content level that is at once deeply personal and deeply communal."

Delegates from the host federation, the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, wore buttons at the G.A. espousing "Torah and Tzedek," or justice.

Anything so religiously rooted "wouldn't have been on a federation button a decade ago," said Carolyn Keller, director of the Boston federation's commission on Jewish continuity, speaking at a session devoted to synagogue-federation partnerships.

Many of the continuity themes discussed in the G.A. sessions are dealt with in the report of the North American Commission on Jewish Identity and Continuity, which was released at the convention.

The 88-member commission consisted of rabbis, academics, educators and lay leaders from across the religious spectrum, who came together six times in the last two years to formulate a plan for the Jewish community as a whole.

The report, titled "Lechadesh v'lekadesh," or "To Renew and To Sanctify: A Call to Action," endorses principles that are already being adopted in many local communities and being planned in many others.

'You have to have the tools'

They include building communitywide partnerships and investing in intensive Jewish education, youth programs and young families.

"This was not a commission that discovered new ideas that no one had thought of before," said JESNA's Woocher, who staffed the commission. "The most remarkable thing, given the breadth of the group, is that there is a lot we actually agree on."

One of the major points of agreement is the necessity to fund and make available to all Jews an intensive Jewish education. "It's very hard to talk about prayer in synagogues when there isn't Jewish literacy," said Barry Shrage, president of the Boston federation, at a session titled "From Vision to Action."

"You have to have the tools in order to be spiri-

tual," agreed Deborah Lipstadt, an associate professor of Modern Jewish Studies at Emory University in Atlanta.

Many sessions included time devoted to studying parts of Torah. Such sessions served as a way of realizing in an immediate and powerful way the big-picture goal of many communities.

The assembly's focus on youth and Jewish continuity was in strong contrast to one evening's entertainment, which consisted of an intermarried pair of well-known theatrical personalities — Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson — introducing other gray-haired stars who reminisced about the glory days of yesteryear by telling stories threaded with Yiddish jokes.

It reminded many in the audience of nothing less than the entertainment at the "borscht-belt" hotels in the Catskill Mountains.

Perhaps next year, said John Ruskey, executive director of education and community services at UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, "if we keep moving ahead, an evening plenary will be devoted to text study." □

Israel and E.U. sign accord, ending arduous negotiations

By Joseph Kopel

BRUSSELS (JTA) — Capping a period of difficult negotiations that began nearly two years ago, Israel and the European Union have signed a new accord designed to strengthen their political and economic relations.

Signaling the accord's importance to Israel, Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres, making his first trip abroad since the Nov. 4 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, flew here Monday to sign the agreement.

"Europe is today offering to be a contributor, not a dominator," Peres told reporters at E.U. headquarters.

"We look forward to seeing new European involvement in peace" in the Middle East, he added. "You shall see us in your councils of science. We shall see you in our councils of peace."

The new accord, which replaces a 1975 trade and cooperation agreement between Israel and what was then known as the Common Market, will grant Israel special status to participate in the European Union's scientific and technological research and development projects — the "councils of science" to which Peres referred.

The accord will also provide for expanded free trade between Israel and the 15 nations comprising the European economic bloc. Israel hopes that the new accord will help lessen Israel's growing trade imbalance with the European Union, which stands at \$8 billion.

The European Union is Israel's main trading partner, receiving some 35 percent of Israel's total exports.

The new agreement — which will need to be approved by the Knesset and the parliaments of the E.U. member states before it becomes effective Jan. 1, 1997 — will allow 90 percent of Israeli agricultural products to be exempt from E.U. tariffs, compared with the current 70 percent.

Spanish Foreign Minister Javier Solana, who signed on behalf of the 15-member E.U. countries, said the accord took on special meaning in the wake of the Rabin assassination. "We are confirming once again our feeling of solidarity and support for the family of Rabin, the State of Israel and the Israeli people," he said.

The accord — signed a week before the scheduled start of a Euro-Mediterranean conference in Barcelona, Spain — is part of an E.U. strategy to create a zone of stability and a vast Mediterranean free-trade area by 2010.

The European Union signed economic accords earlier this year with Tunisia and Morocco. □

To Jews' dismay, amendment on religious equality surfaces

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Nearly one year after congressional Republicans pledged to pass a constitutional amendment on religious equality, the issue has formally hit the legislative calendar.

But as the division deepens among proponents of an amendment that could bring prayer back to the public schools, Jewish opposition remains steadfast and united.

While much of the federal government was shut down over budget issues last week, Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), outflanked school-prayer advocates in Congress when he introduced his own version of the controversial amendment.

Hyde's version of the measure, known as the religious equality constitutional amendment, does not explicitly mention school prayer.

But it would allow voluntary prayer in public schools as well as public funding of parochial schools and other forms of government-sponsored religious expression.

Hyde, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, rushed to the floor to beat the Republicans' point man on the issue, Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.).

Istook disagrees with Hyde's version and a draft of his own measure — yet to be introduced — explicitly calls for school prayer.

When discussion of a constitutional amendment first began after last year's elections, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) tapped Istook to write an amendment to be introduced over the summer. But the deadline slipped as advocates ran into trouble drafting the measure.

Hyde's amendment came as a surprise to many activists. After months of inaction, Istook was on the verge of introducing his own measure, Capitol Hill aides said.

Fearing that the measure would be too "radical," Hyde introduced his own, an aide involved in the drafting said.

The sparring between the Istook and Hyde camps means little to Jewish activists who have launched an aggressive campaign to fight the measure — in whatever form it ultimately takes.

Jewish groups are not wholly united on the issues surrounding the role of religion in the public arena — some Orthodox groups, for example, favor public funding for parochial schools. However, Jewish groups across the board have vehemently voiced their opposition to amending the constitution for any religious purpose.

'Coerce, control, compromise'

"In the end it does not matter whether the amendment calls for school prayer or not," said Richard Foltin, legislative director and counsel of the American Jewish Committee's Washington office.

"It's the intent of the Congress" and of the lawmakers, he said, "that courts would look at."

At least two-thirds of the Senate and House of Representatives must pass the measure in order to send it to the states for ratification. In order to become law, at least 38 states must ratify a constitutional amendment.

Although President Clinton has expressed opposition to the idea of a constitutional amendment, the president has no official role in constitutional amendments and has no veto power over Congress' action.

On Nov. 16, the morning after Hyde introduced his amendment, religious and civil liberties activists swung into action to fight the measure in the halls of Congress.

The amendment "will ultimately allow the government to coerce, control and compromise religion," the Coalition to Preserve Religious Liberty declared in a letter

hand-delivered to all members of Congress asking them to oppose the Hyde amendment.

"We should not trade the delicate balance inherent in the First Amendment for the blunt cut of 'religious equality,'" said the coalition, which includes several Jewish organizations.

"If there is one touchstone of church-state relations in the United States, it is that no American should be made to feel a religious outsider by their government," the letter states.

The 50-member coalition includes organizations across the American Jewish political and religious spectrum, including the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot. Other members include: B'nai B'rith, the American Jewish Congress, the AJCommittee, the Anti-Defamation League and the National Jewish Democratic Council.

As opponents began their campaign to derail the amendment, supporters began to line up behind it.

Among organizations of the religious right, the Center for Law and Religious Freedom said it "fully supports" the Hyde amendment. The National Association of Evangelicals has also embraced the measure.

But the largest such organization, the Christian Coalition, has withheld its endorsement.

A Christian Coalition official said his organization, which made a constitutional amendment on religious equality the centerpiece of its Contract with the American Family, would wait until next month's hearings on the issue to weigh in behind a specific measure.

Hyde plans to hold hearings on the measure in December.

But the Christian Coalition official said, "Let there be no doubt that we stand behind the principle of the Hyde amendment 100 percent."

Advocates admit that the amendment's future is far from certain. "To say the battle will be uphill is a dramatic understatement," a congressional aide working to pass the measure said.

The full text of Hyde's amendment is:

"Preamble: Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States in order to secure the unalienable right of the people to acknowledge, worship and serve their Creator, according to the dictates of conscience.

"Text: Neither the United States nor any state shall deny benefits to or otherwise discriminate against any private person or group on account of religious expression, belief or identity; nor shall the prohibition on laws respecting an establishment of religion be construed to require such discrimination." □

Australian city unveils memorial

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Perth, the capital of Western Australia, has become the first Australian municipality to establish a civic memorial to the victims of the Holocaust.

With prominent government officials in attendance, the memorial was unveiled on the 57th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the night of Nov. 9-10, 1938, when marauding bands of Nazis destroyed Jewish property in Germany.

The memorial was erected in Perth's Stirling Gardens, a prime location in the city. Although a number of Holocaust memorials have been established by Jewish communities across Australia, the Perth monument was a project of the city and state governments. □

University of Virginia allows students to obtain fee refunds

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In a move that could set a precedent for public colleges and universities across the country, the University of Virginia has begun to allow students to request a refund of activities fees used to subsidize campus religious and political groups.

The action comes in response to a Supreme Court decision in June requiring the state-funded university to use a portion of the student-activity fund to subsidize *Wide Awake*, an evangelical Christian student magazine.

Jewish groups, who decried the court decision as a blow to the principle of church-state separation, are welcoming the university's new policy as a good-faith effort to reconcile the ruling with the objections of students who do not wish to subsidize religious groups that propagate views with which they disagree.

"I think it reflects sensitivity to the separation principle," Sam Rabinove, legal director for the American Jewish Committee, said of the university's action.

"Nobody should have to pay money, whether it's a tax or a compulsory student-activity fee, to fund religious activity."

In *Rosenberger vs. the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia*, the court ruled 5-4 on free speech grounds that the university could not constitutionally deny funding to a student-run religious magazine while providing funding to other student groups and publications.

The court rejected the contention — advanced by the AJCommittee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League and other groups — that the case involved state funding for religious advocacy, which is prohibited by the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

Now, in an attempt to ward off potential lawsuits, the university founded by Thomas Jefferson has set up new guidelines that will allow students to claim a refund amounting to 25 percent of their \$28 annual student-activity fee — a number the university arrived at because it said one-fourth of the student organizations are related to speech or publications.

To obtain the refund, students must complete a form identifying speech groups with which they disagree.

O'Connor opens door

"There is no rush to seek refunds," said Michael Sampson, editor in chief of the *Cavalier Daily*, the university's student newspaper. But, he added, "in the long run it is a necessary decision that will profit the university and the students."

In her concurring opinion, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor opened the door to partial refunds for students who object to the use of their fees in subsidizing a religious message with which they disagree.

"A fee of this sort appears conducive to granting individual students proportional refunds," she wrote.

The university's action, which comes as Congress is weighing a constitutional amendment that would give religion the same protections afforded to all other speech, attempts to "make the best of a bad situation," said Marc Stern, co-director of the AJCongress' legal department.

The new policy, he said, provides an out for students who do not want their fees to "support someone else's church."

Stern cautioned, however, that the move could create divisiveness on college campuses "as people have campaigns and countercampaigns urging people to withhold funds from various organizations."

Steve Freeman, director of the legal affairs depart-

ment for the ADL, cautiously welcomed the university's decision to grant refunds.

But he warned that as it adheres to the Supreme Court's decision, the university must "walk a very fine line" through the "gray area where the court was clearly split."

On the one hand, the university must comply with the mandate to provide funding for religious publications; at the same time, it must steer clear of endorsing or favoring a particular religious message, he said.

Officials at public colleges and universities across the country, faced with similar dilemmas over student-activity funding, have been watching the University of Virginia case closely.

It remains unclear whether they will choose to follow suit and allow students to opt for similar refunds of their activity fees.

"It would be a total administrative nightmare for a university to calculate all these responses and then apportion funds," Stern said.

"I could see how administrators wouldn't want to be burdened with it." □

German neo-Nazi begins two-year prison sentence

By David Kantor

BONN (JTA) — A well-known German neo-Nazi has begun to serve a two-year jail sentence for inciting racial hatred, even though he still faces a recent arrest in connection with a book he co-published.

Gunter Deckert, the former head of the extreme right-wing National Democratic Party, was arrested Nov. 8 because the book "The Case of Gunter Deckert" contains anti-Semitic remarks.

The book recounts his standing trial in Mannheim, Germany, for denying that the Holocaust ever occurred.

On Nov. 16, he began to serve a two-year sentence resulting from that case.

Prosecutors had successfully argued that Deckert, a high school teacher, should serve the two years without delay.

In June 1994, Deckert received a one-year suspended prison term and was praised by the judges, causing concern in the Jewish community, among others.

Another trial was held in April 1995, and Deckert was sentenced to two years in prison for the translation and circulation of a speech by Fred Leuchter, an American Holocaust denier.

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

Meanwhile, the chairman of the extremist right-wing Republicans has left the party to avoid being kicked out. Franz Schoenhuber, one of the party's founders, was the author of a book glorifying his service with an SS unit during World War II.

He lately has come under heavy criticism for maintaining contacts with a notorious neo-Nazi activist, the Bavarian-based publisher Gerhard Frey. □

Israel to top 6 million by 2000

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's population may top 6 million by the year 2000 if current growth rates continue, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, which recently issued its annual statistical abstract.

The population of Israel last year stood at 5.6 million, with 81 percent comprised of Jews.

The population grew by 140,000 people, similar to the growth in 1993 and 1992. □