

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli authorities handed down their first indictment of a suspect held in connection with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. First Sgt. Arik Schwartz was charged with stealing weapons from his military base and giving them to confessed assassin Yigal Amir and to Amir's brother Hagai. [Page 2]

■ Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres signed a military cooperation pact aimed at boosting Moscow's relations with Israel. The pact calls for exchanges of military officials and visits to each country's military sites.

■ Vice President Al Gore is scheduled to appear at a rally for Israel at Madison Square Garden. Some Orthodox and right-wing groups threatened to pull out of the event if a member of Israel's opposition is not included in the program.

■ Israel's government withstood its first no-confidence motion brought against it since Shimon Peres became prime minister. The motion was submitted by the Likud Party in the wake of a report citing a rise in poverty in Israel. [Page 4]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres may seek an upgrading of military links with the United States when he visits President Clinton in Washington next week. Peres is reportedly holding consultations with Foreign Ministry officials about seeking a new defense agreement to replace the memos of understanding that now define U.S.-Israeli defense relations.

■ U.S. Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross arrived in Israel for the start of a renewed round of shuttle diplomacy between Jerusalem and Damascus.

■ Thirty Israel Defense Force officers and soldiers are expected to face a military trial after being accused of abusing prisoners' rights at an IDF jail. An inquiry was launched after complaints were filed describing humiliating treatment.

■ A pair of Siamese twins born in Israel were reported in stable condition after an operation to separate them. [Page 4]

A NEW ERA FOR REFORM JEWS [Part 1]**Children educated in 2 faiths barred from Reform schools**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

ATLANTA (JTA) — After an ardent debate at the biennial convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations here, Reform Jews have voted to permit only children who are not being educated in another religion to be enrolled in the movement's religious schools.

Leaders of the movement said it is the first time since adopting the principle of patrilineal descent that the UAHC, which prides itself on its outreach to intermarried families, has drawn a clear line excluding their children from a central communal activity.

Patrilineal descent, formally adopted as a policy in 1983, regards as Jewish a child born to a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother if the child is reared and educated as a Jew. That decision was a watershed break with Jewish tradition and Jewish law, which only regarded as Jewish children born to a Jewish mother. It often is cited by Orthodox leaders as a central factor for their lack of interest in dialogue with Reform Jews.

The Reform movement's new policy — adopted in a clear, but close vote last Friday — encourages congregations to "establish a clearly articulated policy that offers enrollment in Reform religious schools and day schools only to children who are not receiving formal religious education in any other religion."

But the murky question of whether children educated as Reform Jews as well as in another faith are regarded as Jewish at all by the Reform movement was left unaddressed by the resolution, as well by movement leaders interviewed after the vote.

Because autonomy — for congregations and individuals — is a fundamental tenet of Reform Judaism, the UAHC will now encourage its congregations to adhere to the new policy, but it cannot force them to implement it.

'What am I supposed to do?'

During the debate prior to the vote, Rabbi Sheldon Ezrick told the 4,000 delegates about his recent experience with one student in his Syracuse, N.Y., congregation's Hebrew school.

The boy was six weeks away from his Bar Mitzvah when the rabbi discovered that he was also preparing to receive his first Communion in a Catholic Church.

"So what am I supposed to do?" said the rabbi.

"I decided to let him go ahead with the Bar Mitzvah. A week afterward, I invited the Jewish father in to talk with me and asked him about it.

"He told me that 'we baptized our children because we want to give them the protection of both religions,' " related the rabbi, shaking his head in disbelief.

Ezrick said rabbis need the UAHC "to give us strong boundaries, so people can know whether they are in or out of Judaism."

Another rabbi, Arnie Gluck, from Somerville, N.J., said prohibiting these children from Reform religious schools "doesn't deny access to any child to study Judaism."

"We have programs that teach about Judaism. Religious school is not a place to teach about Judaism," he said. "It is where we teach Judaism."

Dru Greenwood, director of the UAHC's Commission on Outreach, said the resolution would affect very few families, because only a tiny percentage of Reform temple members are raising their children in two faiths.

But other speakers during the debate indicated that the problem may be more common.

"Rabbis and educators around the country are dealing with children who are questioning one God, who are asking, 'What about the Trinity,' who are asking, 'Why aren't you praying in Jesus' name?'" said Harris Gilbert, chairman of his Westfield, N.J., temple's outreach committee.

"This is in religious schools," he said. "Our goal is to raise Jewish children into Jewish adults."

Some of those in favor of the resolution said it is confusing to

children when they are reared with dual religious identities. "We don't say: 'Pretend that you're Jewish, try it out that God is one,'" said Rabbi Wolf Pruzan, the temple educator at Congregation Emanu-el in San Francisco.

"Young children only understand the now. It is cruel to them to say that this is a game, that you're Jewish today and next week you will be Christian, and when you're older and wiser you'll figure it out."

The vice chairman of the movement's outreach commission, George Markely of Bridgeport, Conn., who has been married to a non-Jewish woman for 25 years, spoke ardently in favor of the policy change.

"I do not want teachers engaged in a battle for the souls of our children — that is not their job," Markely said.

"Parents can make any choice they want, but we do not have to participate in asking a child to deny who he thinks he is.

"We cannot be all things to all people. Outreach does not mean that anything goes," Markely said. "I do not want to get Jewish grandchildren at any cost."

Although they were in the minority, opponents of the new policy were just as passionate.

"We have got to let them in the schools so we can show them the beauty of Judaism," said one delegate, from Tampa, Fla.

A delegate from Temple Emmanuel in Marblehead, Mass., said, "Many people join to see what will happen, to expose their children to Judaism. Any exposure to Reform Judaism is better than none."

One teen-age girl from New York City who was in Atlanta as a delegate with the movement's National Federation of Temple Youth, said, "When you put limits on it, you turn people off to the Reform movement."

The new policy concerning the education of interfaith children comes as many congregations also grapple with the role of non-Jewish adults in synagogue life. While some permit non-Jews to be called to bless the Torah, others allow them only to open and close the ark or to recite "less religious" prayers before the congregation, such as the prayer for the welfare of the community, the UAHC's Greenwood said.

Many congregations have only recently delineated their policies regarding the role of non-Jews in their ritual and administrative life. Many others have avoided defining what they will and will not allow for fear of alienating the non-Jews in their midst.

The debate at the convention over the religious school issue made it clear that some congregations will continue to allow children who are also being educated in another faith to be enrolled in their Hebrew schools.

But Greenwood was visibly relieved by the policy change.

"Outreach is not interfaith dialogue," she said. "In the past, we assumed that members intended to raise their children as Jews."

Reports of children being educated both in Reform Hebrew schools and in Christian or other religious schools as well "have become more frequent in the last three years," she said. "It became clear we were making an assumption that wasn't true." □

First indictment issued in assassination of Rabin

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — One month after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli authorities have handed down their first indictment of a suspect held in connection with the assassination.

First Sgt. Arik Schwartz was indicted Monday on

charges of stealing weapons from his military base and giving them to confessed assassin Yigal Amir and to Amir's brother Hagai.

Schwartz, a member of the prestigious Golani brigade, the same unit in which Yigal Amir served, was initially arrested a week after the Nov. 4 assassination of Rabin at a peace rally in Tel Aviv.

Schwartz was accused of providing the weapons to the Amirs during the past year for planned attacks on Palestinians, according to the charge sheet presented to a military court in Haifa.

Schwartz was also charged with hiding the weapons that he allegedly took from the army at a friend's house after the assassination.

Indictments were expected to be issued later this week against the Amir brothers and a friend, Dror Adani.

Four other suspects have been released and are under house arrest. It was not clear whether they will be charged.

Yigal Amir is expected to be charged with murder, attempted murder, conspiracy and disrupting an investigation.

Hagai Amir and Adani are expected to be indicted on charges of involvement in an alleged conspiracy to kill Rabin.

A Tel Aviv judge agreed Sunday to extend the period of Yigal Amir's detention by an additional four days.

Under Israeli law, suspects can be held up to 30 days without charges being pressed.

But after police said that they had uncovered important new evidence in the case "that could change the nature of the charges," the judge agreed to extend the period of detention.

In comments to reporters Sunday, Yigal Amir alleged that Israeli authorities had killed a security agent whom he hinted had helped him carry out the Rabin assassination.

"Why don't you publicize that they killed one of Rabin's bodyguards? The one who shouted 'The bullets are dummies,'" Amir told reporters.

3 right-wing leaders accused of sedition

Amir has repeatedly maintained in the past that he acted alone.

Previous reports indicated that it was he who shouted that the bullets were dummies when he shot Rabin, a move believed to be intended to confuse security agents during the fateful moments.

A government spokesman called Amir's comments on Sunday "nonsense."

Also Sunday, three leaders of the right-wing group Zo Artzeinu, or This Is Our Land, were charged in Jerusalem with sedition.

The charges came in the wake of a government crackdown on right-wing groups in the wake of the assassination.

Moshe Feiglin, Shmuel Sackett and Rabbi Benny Alon were accused of trying to stop the Israeli-Palestinian peace process by engaging in illegal activities to thwart government plans to transfer parts of the West Bank to Palestinian control.

The state said the three had gone beyond the limits of democratic protest this summer, when they urged supporters to block roads at major intersections and to refuse to cooperate with police attempting to break up their demonstrations.

The group's leaders maintained in turn that the demonstrations they led had made legitimate use of the principles of civil disobedience and that their actions were protected under the rules of Israel's democracy. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

**Orthodox Cabinet minister:
'Window dressing' or true voice?**

By Jacob Schreiber

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Rising to the rank of minister in Israeli politics is no easy task.

To do so, one normally has to be a political shark and one or all of the following: Israel Defense Force chief of staff, war hero, in the leadership of a large or pivotal political party or a longtime ally of a party leader.

Rabbi Yehuda Amital — who rose to national prominence when he was recently appointed a minister without portfolio in the new Cabinet of Prime Minister Shimon Peres — is none of these. His appointment came in an effort to represent the “good face” of religious Zionism and to help heal the near total rupture between Israel’s secular left and religious Zionist communities after the Nov. 4 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Soft-spoken and humble, the antithesis of the typical Israeli minister, Amital never coveted a seat in the Knesset or Cabinet. So what explains his meteoric rise from esteemed educator and leader of a small ideological movement to Peres’ Cabinet?

As always in Israel, it depends on whom one asks.

The government line is that Amital, 70, dean of the Har Etzion Yeshiva in Alon Shvut near Bethlehem in the West Bank, was brought on board to provide spiritual leadership and to facilitate dialogue between the country’s secular and religious Zionist communities.

Political pundits claim that Amital is Peres’ vehicle for demonstrating that he will serve as prime minister to all Israelis — including the religious Zionists and settlers — something, say some, his predecessor overtly was not.

'Merely window dressing'

Others, such as Yehiel Leiter, spokesman for the Yesha Council, which represents settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, say Amital is “merely window dressing.” Calling Peres a “consummate politician,” Leiter said the new prime minister “is not about to just wave us off with his hand and call us obnoxious like Rabin did. So he brings in Amital and says, ‘Hey, we have a guy with a kippah and a beard,’ but then will make no substantive changes in his policy toward us. Amital is merely naive.”

Such words do not anger Amital. Instead, they seem to sadden him. “These are small people who say such things,” Amital said in an interview. “They just don’t understand the extent of the chillul haShem (desecration of God’s name) caused by the assassination of Rabin and by the ongoing investigation of rabbis who might have used halachah (Jewish law) to incite to violence.”

“Someone has got to do something to rectify this situation,” he added.

Although Amital recognizes that the “politicians in Yesha” do not think that his joining the government will help anything, he believes that the “people of Yesha are behind me.” He added, “At a time when Israel faces such historic decisions, it’s crucial the settler population — and Orthodox Jews — have a vote in the government.”

Here lies the paradox of the Amital appointment: Although he has been warmly embraced by Israeli secularists thirsting for a moderate model of Judaism — and of religious Zionism — his assignment might cause serious divisions within the national religious camp.

This is because, unlike the majority of the national religious camp, Amital supports the peace process. As the leader of Meimad, the Movement for Religious Zionist Renewal, Amital has scolded his co-religionists for radicalizing religious Zionism and for transforming it into a land-centered movement.

He has also chastised the national religious camp for abandoning the reason the movement was initially established: to counter the view of fervently Orthodox Jews as being extremists and to bring all Jews closer together.

After the Rabin assassination, Meimad, somewhat of a pariah in its own community, suddenly is speaking volumes to many of the “silent moderates” in the religious Zionist movement who feel that they have allowed the camp’s more radical elements to gain too much sway.

Amital’s leap into prominence should only accelerate this process, much to the chagrin of groups such as Yesha and the National Religious Party.

Others, however, are pleased.

Rabbi Yair Kahan, a teacher at the Har Etzion Yeshiva who knows Amital intimately, said because Amital is the head of a yeshiva and a religiously inclusive man who is pro-peace, “he breaks the negative stereotype suffered by the religious nationalists.”

That stereotype has become particularly acute because Rabin’s confessed assassin, Yigal Amir, was the product of a religious nationalist yeshiva.

“By joining the government, he becomes a representative of Orthodox Judaism that secular people — and even [secularist Communications Minister] Shulamit Aloni — can respect,” Kahan said.

Amital, a bearded, grandfatherly figure, is revered — and loved — by his students at Har Etzion, who listen intently to his every word. When asked what they think of his political appointment, most voice concern, saying that at his age, he does not need the “anguish to the soul” he is bound to absorb while serving in public office.

Born in Transylvania in 1925, Amital studied in “cheder,” receiving virtually no formal secular education.

In 1943, the Nazis deported him to a labor camp; his parents and two siblings were killed at Auschwitz.

Amital came to Palestine in December 1944 and resumed his religious studies, eventually earning his rabbinical ordination. While in yeshiva, Amital joined the Haganah and fought in the 1948 War of Independence.

This experience later influenced him to formulate the idea of the “hesder” yeshiva, which combines religious studies with military service. And it was at Yeshivat HaDarom, where he served as a faculty member, that the first hesder group was formed.

'A glittering mezuzah'

A reserve captain in the IDF’s Armored Corps, Amital, married and the father of five, made his first foray into politics in 1988, when he served as the spiritual leader for Meimad, which failed to capture any Knesset seats in the elections that year. Meimad as a political party soon disbanded, only to be resurrected by Amital as a social movement in 1993.

Its basic principles include support of relinquishing lands for peace, while retaining a united Jerusalem and concentrating most settlements into large blocs that will be part of a continuous territorial link with the State of Israel.

Amital, a Talmudic scholar and normally placid speaker, recently lashed out at Orthodox rabbis for demonizing the government and mixing politics with halachah.

Now, Amital says, his main goals are to encourage secular-religious dialogue, to foster more interaction between Israeli and Diaspora Jews and to find remedies to the growing “spiritual vacuum” in Israeli society. He also believes that he can play a role by being the person to whom settlers can voice their concerns.

It remains to be seen whether he will have an impact on Israeli society or will be, as one rabbi from the territories who requested anonymity put it, “a glittering mezuzah for the Labor government to draw votes.” □

Despite clashes in West Bank, Israel keeps redeployment plan*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel is continuing its redeployment from West Bank population centers despite a number of recent incidents that threatened to delay the process.

Israel froze its redeployment plans last Friday after several incidents — including the kidnapping of two Israeli border police and the ambush of an Israeli jeep — prompted Israeli leaders to publicly question whether the timetable for withdrawals was too speedy.

“It is possible that we will have to delay redeployment,” said Health Minister Ephraim Sneh. “Why have we adopted a gradual process? So we will have the ability to stop if we are not satisfied” with Palestinian security measures.

The two border police were kidnapped Nov. 29 in Jenin by members of the Black Panthers, a local Palestinian vigilante group.

They were released after Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat reportedly joined in negotiations to end the kidnapping peacefully.

After the incident, a Palestinian military court in the West Bank Jericho enclave sentenced two of the kidnapers to nine years in prison with hard labor.

The kidnapping had been triggered by another incident the same day in the town of Kabatiya, located near Jenin, where Israeli security forces sought to arrest Samir Zakarneh, a Palestinian terrorist who was on Israel’s wanted list.

Zakarneh, who was later taken into custody by Palestinian officials, was subsequently sentenced to five years in jail.

He was convicted on charges of leaving Jericho, where he had been confined as a result of a previous conviction.

In another incident in the Jenin area, two Israeli soldiers were wounded Nov. 30 when gunmen opened fire on an army jeep that was escorting an Israeli bus near the Jewish settlement of Shaked.

Work on road at full speed

That same day in Nablus, 18 Palestinians were wounded in clashes with Israeli troops.

These incidents prompted Israeli leaders to warn last Friday that they would slow the troop withdrawals unless Palestinian officials did more to protect Israelis.

But on Sunday, Israeli and Palestinian officials met and agreed to continue the redeployment as planned.

Israel completed its withdrawal from the West Bank town of Jenin in mid-November.

It has committed itself to withdraw from five other Palestinian population centers — Tulkarm, Kalkilya, Nablus, Bethlehem and Ramallah — before the end of the month.

In Bethlehem, where the redeployment is scheduled to be completed — and celebrated — by Christmas, hundreds of local residents welcomed an advance group of 12 Palestinian officers as they arrived at the district coordinating office in nearby Beit Jalla.

To this end, work on the Bethlehem bypass road resumed at full speed in a push to complete its construction before Christmas.

The road is part of a network of bypass roads that will be used by Jewish settlers and Israeli security forces after Israeli troops withdraw from the West Bank population centers.

Environmental groups, which said the road would

damage the landscape of a national park, met Saturday night with Housing Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer and Environment Minister Yossi Sarid in order to resolve the dispute.

“I believe the bypass roads are quite helpful,” Sarid said Sunday.

“This is not an ideal solution, but it is the only solution I know which might improve the security situation of the Jewish inhabitants of the West Bank.”

Ben-Eliezer was optimistic that the Bethlehem road would be completed within two weeks.

But he acknowledged that some problems could be encountered with the Halhoul road, located south of the West Bank town of Hebron, in which Israeli troops are scheduled to redeploy in March.

Construction of the Halhoul road involves the expropriation of Palestinian-owned agricultural land, a situation that prompted Palestinians to clash Sunday with Israeli troops at the contested site.

In an unlikely alliance, the Palestinians’ cause was taken up by a group of Jewish settlers from Kiryat Arba and Hebron, who maintained that Palestinian anger over the expropriation could be ultimately turned against the settlers themselves.

A delegation of settlers met Sunday with Deputy Foreign Minister Eli Dayan, who promised to convey their concerns to the appropriate authorities. □

No-confidence motion defeated 53-48*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel’s government has withstood the first no-confidence motion brought against it since Shimon Peres became prime minister.

In a 53-48 vote, with five abstentions, the Knesset on Monday defeated the motion, which was submitted by the Likud Party in the wake of a report issued last week citing a rise in poverty in Israel.

In his remarks, Likud faction leader Moshe Katsav accused the government of being directly responsible for a growing gap between the rich and poor.

Social Affairs Minister Ora Namir of Labor conceded that the government needed to do more to deal with rising poverty levels in Israel, adding that the time had come to focus on providing direct assistance to the neediest members of Israeli society.

One in eight Israelis lived below the poverty line in 1994, the National Insurance Institute announced last week.

According to the institute, 671,500 people lived under the poverty line — defined as those with a monthly income of less than \$780.

The statistics showed that 23,000 more people lived in poverty than the previous year.

Some 42 percent of those under the poverty line were children. □

Siamese twins separated*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A pair of Siamese twins born Sunday were successfully separated in an operation at the Schneider Children’s Hospital in Petach Tikva that same day.

The baby girls were connected at the abdomen, and shared a digestive system and urinary tract, Israel Television reported.

The twins, however, will have additional operations.

The mother is a 30-year-old resident of northern Israel, it was reported. □