



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Some 200 Jewish leaders from around the world — including 70 from the United States — participated in ceremonies in Israel marking the end of the 30-day mourning period for the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Israeli leaders and Rabin's family gathered for a brief graveside ceremony. [Page 1]

■ Israeli prosecutors charged confessed assassin Yigal Amir with premeditated murder in the Nov. 4 slaying of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Amir's brother Hagai and a friend, Dror Adani, were charged with conspiracy to commit murder. [Page 4]

■ The U.N. General Assembly paid a special commemorative tribute to Yitzhak Rabin. Ambassadors from Israel, the United States, Russia, Norway and Japan joined the president of the European Union in delivering remarks, while condolence messages were read from Egypt, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

■ The National Council of Young Israel announced it would boycott the Dec. 10 rally for Israel at Madison Square Garden, saying that it would likely "further widen" the divisions among Jews. [Page 2]

■ Two Israeli soldiers were reportedly wounded, one seriously, when gunmen opened fire on an army ambulance near the West Bank town of Nablus, one of six West Bank Palestinian population centers from which Israeli troops are scheduled to withdraw by year's end.

■ U.S. Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross held four hours of talks with Syrian President Hafez Assad in Damascus before returning to Jerusalem. Secretary of State Warren Christopher may visit the region later this month if there are indications that the stalled Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations may soon resume.

■ A new group, comprised of right-wing nationalists, has joined the campaign to advance the separatist cause in Quebec. The group is headed by Raymond Villeneuve, who in the 1960s was convicted of involvement in a separatist bombing campaign.

Jewish leaders show solidarity during whirlwind visit to Israel

By Jacob Schreiber

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Braving bitter morning cold and beating rain, five senior Jewish leaders — each representing delegations from a different continent — laid a wreath at the grave of Yitzhak Rabin to mark his "shloshim," the end of the 30-day mourning period.

The five were part of an international mission of 200 top Jewish leaders from around the globe — including more than 70 from the United States — who came to Israel to express their personal grief and their communal solidarity with the people and government of Israel.

The 24-hour, whirlwind visit, co-hosted by the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency for Israel, included discussions with Foreign Minister Ehud Barak, President Ezer Weizman, Minister Yehuda Amital, Jewish Agency Chairman Avraham Burg and members of Knesset — as well as a heart-to-heart talk with Israeli high school students regarding their feelings about the assassination.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres addressed the group after sundown Tuesday. It was the first official meeting between Jewish community officials and the new prime minister, who decided not to hold any such talks until after Rabin's "shloshim" period ended.

Some Jewish representatives, such as JAFI Board of Governors Chairman Charles "Corky" Goodman, Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations Executive Vice Chairman Malcolm Hoenlein and Orthodox Union President Mandell Ganchrow, stressed the symbolic importance of having so many Diaspora leaders come to Israel on short notice to show their "solidarity with Israelis."

Other delegates came for more personal reasons. "I wanted to visit Rabin's grave, and pay my respects," said Jack Abuhatzera, a delegate from France and chairman of the World Sephardic Federation.

"We in the Diaspora also suffered from the assassination, and I needed an outlet to show it. All these meetings with Israeli leaders I've done before and are really secondary."

No 'quick fixes' to heal the rifts

Each speaker began with a few words about Rabin, but Jewish unity and solidarity were clearly the burning issues of the day.

Peppered with questions from the delegates, Amital, an Orthodox rabbi who recently joined the government, admitted that he did not have any "quick fixes" to heal the rifts between right and left or religious and secular in both Israel and the Diaspora.

Promising to use his new Cabinet position to study the issue, he also warned against using the word "unity" to mask differences.

"The problem with unity is that everybody wants it — as long as it's done 'my way,'" said Amital.

Although the minister stressed that differences were healthy and should be respected by the religious and the secular, he insisted that maintaining respect for Israel's democracy was, "even according to Torah," a matter of "pikuach nefesh," the safeguarding of life.

Agency Chairman Burg echoed the rabbi's opinion.

Warning the delegates not to be "faked out by artificial unity," Burg asserted that living in a society with multiple opinions is important and that "unity" must be realized in terms of "agreeing to the rules of the game — on a culture of how to agree to disagree."

As both speakers and delegates grappled with the big questions, precious few solutions — or even directions — emerged.

Hoenlein of the Conference of Presidents, an umbrella body of Jewish groups, acknowledged that the American Jewish community has yet to devise concrete steps for bringing the poles of the community together.

But, he said, "First, the proper environment must be created, then we can move along with implementing solutions." The first major effort, he said, is the mass rally scheduled for Dec. 10 at Madison Square Garden to demonstrate united American Jewish support for the government of Israel and its "pursuit" of peace.

Even though there seems to be a public consensus for the need to

tone down the rhetoric between right and left, some Jewish leaders still see the need to continue "telling it like it is."

"Some people are using the term 'unity' and 'halachah' to cloak the real issues," said Mary Ann Stein, president-elect of American Friends of Peace Now.

"But when signs hang in the street calling Rabin a traitor and a Nazi, I feel that organizations and the societies they represent need to take responsibility for their actions, and that we can't deny the right to demand this."

Issues other than peace and the assassination of Rabin were also on the minds of delegates.

Rabbi Michael Cohen, a representative of the Reconstructionist movement in the United States, repeatedly raised the question of the right of rabbis other than the Orthodox to have legal standing in Israel. But the officials to whom he addressed the questions skirted the issue.

And the OU's Ganchrow admitted that certain disputes between the Orthodox and the other religious denominations might never be settled because of "fundamental differences" on education and basic "halachic" issues such as conversion. Still, the OU, recognizing the dangerous rift brought about by the assassination, has created a new dialogue program.

Billed as the "1,000 Homes of Dialogue," the program — an offshoot of the OU's yet-to-be launched home "havruta" project — encourages families to invite people with different opinions to their homes for a night of guided, communal study. □

Soul-searching persists in the Orthodox community

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — Orthodox leaders are continuing to call for collective soul-searching in the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

At a service to mark the 30th day of mourning for Rabin at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun on Monday, Yeshiva University President Rabbi Norman Lamm said the Orthodox community had been too tolerant of reckless and arrogant rhetoric from rabbis prior to the killing.

"The Amirs and the Goldsteins did not invent their justifications" for their murderous deeds, said Lamm, referring to Rabin's confessed killer, Yigal Amir, and Baruch Goldstein, who massacred 29 Muslims at prayer in the Tomb of the Patriarchs last year.

Both were products of an Orthodox Zionist education.

"Yes, they were weeds in the garden, but it was our garden," Lamm said, where rabbis "took it upon themselves to speculate" on "halachic," or Jewish law, responses to Israel's political dilemmas "without traditional disclaimers of humility."

"Is it any wonder that young people, barely out of adolescence, extrapolated" from their teachings and "acted out the consequences?" said Lamm, who qualified his remarks by saying that they had "nothing to do with how one stands on the peace process."

"I am not taking sides on political issues," he said.

Lamm's speech came about a week after the board of Brooklyn's Orthodox Congregation Shaare Zion voted to suspend Rabbi Abraham Hecht, who in June proclaimed Jewish law permitted the assassination of Israeli leaders who made territorial concessions in the peace process.

An informed source said that since the vote, the board has been "trying to negotiate a resignation" by the rabbi and thereby avert action by synagogue members. New York state law puts the power to fire rabbis in the hands of congregations.

Hecht, who could not be reached for comment, has

reportedly said that after five decades of serving Shaare Zion, he would not accept the suspension.

Meanwhile, at the Orthodox memorial service, a call was issued to support the rally scheduled at Madison Square Garden for Dec. 10 to demonstrate solidarity with the government and people of Israel and "the pursuit of peace."

Organizers have cast the event as nonpartisan to attract the broadest-range attendance possible. But snags in its planning have highlighted how divided the community is.

Some Orthodox and other groups have protested the failure to feature speakers from Israeli opposition parties or other critics of the peace process, and some have threatened not to attend.

One such group, the National Council of Young Israel, announced Tuesday that it had decided to boycott the event. The rally's current program "is likely to only further widen the divisions within the Jewish people" that Rabin's death triggered, said the group, which participated in Tuesday's memorial to the prime minister.

Slated to speak are Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, U.S. Vice President Al Gore, Israel's Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yisrael Lau and Leah Rabin, widow of the slain prime minister.

Colette Avital, Israeli consul general in New York, issued a plea to the Orthodox gathering at Kehilath Jeshurun to come to the rally "without mixed feelings" and to work for Jewish unity "despite our differences."

'Help us heal the wounds'

"Together we must build bridges of understanding and avoid a rift" among the Jewish people, she said. "Let us stand together as one nation."

She said the Orthodox were uniquely positioned to help delegitimize intolerance and extremism.

"Please help us heal the wounds," she added. "Help us stop the finger-pointing."

For his part, Lamm pledged to incorporate into education at Yeshiva University lessons he said were especially critical after the assassination — lessons on tolerance, extremism, love of Israel and the relationship between Torah and democracy.

He said religious Zionists must also pose serious questions for which there are no easy answers, including:

Is Israel's territorial integrity one of the mitzvot for which all else must be sacrificed? Who specifically has the right to decide halachic questions that involve all Jewish people and does the halachic material exist upon which to base such judgments? Is religious Zionism inextricably tied to Messianic assumptions that the founding of Israel in 1948 was the beginning of redemption?

Meanwhile, Hecht recently issued a statement as head of the Rabbinical Alliance of America, calling upon world Jewry to observe Dec. 5 as the end of the 30-day mourning period for Rabin.

"We pray that there be an end to all violence," the statement said.

Hecht had written a letter of apology to Rabin in late October. Then, after Rabin's death, he issued a statement saying that his initial remarks had been taken out of context. "I quoted Jewish law as codified in Maimonides that conveys the seriousness of taking action that endangers human life," he wrote. "I never said or meant that Maimonides' ruling was to be applied, heaven forbid, against Rabin or any other person."

His synagogue's president, Morris Franco, did not return telephone calls.

Last month, Franco penned a letter to Prime Minister Shimon Peres saying the congregation rejects "all messages of hate and condemn[s] all acts of violence." □

A NEW ERA FOR REFORM JEWS [Part 2] 'Know Torah,' exhorts Schindler in his parting message to UAHC

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

ATLANTA (JTA) — When Rabbi Alexander Schindler stepped up to the podium to deliver his farewell presidential address here last Shabbat, the more than 4,000 Reform Jews packed into Atlanta's civic center knew that they would hear exquisite imagery and oratory.

Many also expected that in the speech he referred to as his "Jewish ethical will," the outgoing president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations would discuss some controversial new policies, as he has routinely done in the past.

At the last biennial convention, for example, Schindler proposed that the Reform movement proselytize Judaism to non-Jews, and that congregations allow the non-Jewish parents of B'nai Mitzvah to be accorded the fullest possible honors connected to the Torah.

This year, however, Schindler exhorted his fellow Reform Jews to follow a more traditional path.

"I feared and still do that we Reform Jews are entirely too lax in our observances," said Schindler, who has led the movement for 22 years and will officially retire in June.

"Having asserted our autonomy, insisting on our right to choose, too many among us choose nothing at all, or, choosing something, we observe it only haphazardly."

Name change a few votes shy

Schindler's farewell was addressed to delegates to the UAHC's five-day biennial and the parallel Women of Reform Judaism and National Federation of Temple Youth conventions.

Participants attended dozens of workshops and panel discussions, most of them devoted to the themes of education, observance and social action.

At a plenary session, a vote to change the name of the organization to something more contemporary and reflective of its mandate fell a few votes shy of the two-thirds necessary to alter the organization's constitution.

The group also adopted a new policy to permit only children who are not being educated in another religion to be enrolled in the movement's religious schools.

Resolutions supporting American military involvement in Bosnia and one applauding a deal struck between the movement's youth group and Habitat for Humanity for Reform teens to construct houses for the poor and homeless passed easily.

And in a show of support for religious pluralism in Israel, two Israeli natives, unable to marry in their homeland because he is a Kohen and she is divorced, were married before the delegates and the bride's parents.

The message from the top of the movement, however, was focused on religious observance of Jewish rituals in an almost traditional mode.

"The covenant is a two-way street, my friends, and in this, my parting message and my ethical will, I urge our fellow Reform Jews to abandon the noncommittal stance that too many have about temple life," said Schindler in his remarks. "So inbound are we in our lives from community, so accustomed to our individualism, that we often carry a kind of consumerist prove-it-to-me attitude that is impossible for even the best rabbi and the liveliest congregation to fulfill.

"Let us overcome the arrogance that blocks our perception of divinity. Let us overcome the fear that constrains us to flee from the synagogue and from spiritual commitment," he said.

He defined his movement's central mission as one

of teaching "our children Torah, not just to know Torah, nor even to teach Torah, but to be Torah."

Still, Schindler did not neglect the things that make Reform Judaism unique. He emphasized the value of outreach to non-Jews married to Jews, social action and a paradigm that questions all orthodoxies.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, who will fully take over as president of the UAHC when Schindler retires, closed the biennial convention Sunday by amplifying the themes articulated by his predecessor. Yoffie made it clear that the movement's leadership is catching up with its constituency, which for the last few years has been evincing a hunger for greater Jewish literacy and religious connection.

"The urgent need of the hour is a spiritual intensification of major proportions," said Yoffie.

"My goal is to build a movement of Reform Jews for whom Torah is at the center of their lives.

"My goal is a movement which does not speak of 'identity' or 'continuity,' the fuzzy and feeble generalizations that are so popular today, but which speaks instead the language of brit, mitzvah and God.

"Reform Jews are coming home. We are coming home to God, because God called us into being, sent us on our way, chose us and thrust distinctiveness upon us.

"We are coming home to Torah, because it is the very essence of our being, and because we see as our first duty and greatest joy the teaching of those sacred texts that bind us to a shared faith and a shared way of life," he said.

Sabbath worship on Friday night and Saturday morning was spirited. More yarmulkes were in evidence than ever before at a Reform movement biennial, and even a few tallitot were draped on the shoulders of worshipers.

Vendors at the Judaica exhibition at the convention reported sell-out business in ritual items, reflecting, perhaps, the sparks of greater interest in living more observantly.

Seen at the concierge desk

Four prayer services were offered each morning: one in the traditional Reform style, one based on feminist liturgy, a service of healing and one devoted to worship in the Sephardi style. Each attracted at least a few dozen people, and the Sephardi service was packed.

The ascent to greater observance among Reform Jews was far from consistent, however. On Friday night about a dozen Shabbat dinners were offered to delegates, who were supposed to attend the one for their region.

But many well-heeled couples from the biennial were seen at the concierge desk of the Marriott Marquis hotel here, making reservations for dinner that night at seafood and other local restaurants.

At the same time, the Judaica exhibit closed late Friday afternoon but re-opened at 3:30 Saturday afternoon, hours before the end of the Sabbath.

As soon as it re-opened it was packed — with participants as crowded into the hall as New Yorkers are into subway cars at rush hour.

When asked about these seeming inconsistencies, Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, the recently elected president of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Reform movement's seminary system of four campuses, said: "The convention is the definition of where we want to be rather than necessarily where we are."

He had complained to the UAHC leadership about the early opening of the Judaica exhibit on Shabbat, he said, believing that it sent the wrong message to Reform Jews.

"The movement is struggling in its own self-identity," the rabbi said. "This is a movement still in process that has not yet gotten where it's going." □

Prosecutors charge Rabin's confessed assassin

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As the 30-day mourning period for Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin came to an end, Israeli prosecutors formally charged confessed assassin Yigal Amir with premeditated murder in the Nov. 4 slaying.

According to the charge sheet submitted Tuesday to the Tel Aviv District Court, Amir was also charged with conspiracy and carrying arms without a license.

His brother Hagai was charged with involvement in a conspiracy to kill Rabin and illegally manufacturing weapons.

Dror Adani, a friend of the Amirs, was also charged as a member of the conspiracy.

The three were expected to be brought before the court Wednesday to hear the charges against them.

According to the indictment, Yigal Amir decided after the September 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles in Washington to kill Rabin in order to prevent the implementation of Israel's accord with the Palestinians.

He turned to his brother Hagai and to Adani, who agreed to join the conspiracy, according to the prosecutors.

The charge sheet said the three initially considered blowing up Rabin's car or firing an anti-tank rocket into his apartment. It cited three separate planned attempts, in addition to the Nov. 4 shooting, in which Yigal Amir shot Rabin as he was leaving a peace rally in Tel Aviv.

Hagai Amir and Adani did not know of Yigal Amir's plans to carry out the Nov. 4 assassination and were therefore not charged with murder, Israel Radio reported, quoting the charge sheet.

A separate indictment charged the three with planning attacks against Arabs.

Yigal Amir, who confessed to the killing, has expressed no remorse over his actions.

Prosecutors asked that the Amir brothers and Adani be tried before a panel of three judges. The state listed 43 witnesses for the prosecution.

Meanwhile, police continued their investigation of right-wing figures to determine whether they could be charged with incitement.

Kiryat Arba resident and former Knesset member Elyakim Ha'etzni was called in for questioning at the police Serious Crimes Unit headquarters on Tuesday. □

Jewish relief efforts continue as peacekeeping forces arrive

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK (JTA) — The recent peace efforts in the former Yugoslavia have had the same effect on the Jews of the region as they have had on other groups there, according to an official of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Using the example of Jews who fled their homes for safety, Yechiel Bar-Chaim, the JDC country director for the former Yugoslavia, said: "Jewish refugees, just like all other refugees, can't help but feel mixed emotions on the one hand because the fighting has stopped."

"On the other hand, no one knows whether the peace will last and whether they will return home," said Bar-Chaim, who recently returned from the area.

In an interview here Monday, Bar-Chaim said Jewish-sponsored humanitarian efforts, begun at the outset of the war, will continue.

The Jewish community's reaction comes as NATO troops began to arrive in the region to enforce a U.S.-brokered peace accord between Serbs, Croats and Bosnians.

A peace treaty ending the 43-month war was initialed last month in Dayton, Ohio, and is scheduled to be signed Dec. 14 in Paris.

Bar-Chaim said that unlike other groups, Jews, who live throughout the former Yugoslavia, were not subjected to "ethnic cleansing" during the war. "The World War II experience has made all sides especially sensitive to the needs and qualities of our people throughout the former Yugoslavia," said Bar-Chaim, who is based in Paris.

An estimated 6,000 to 7,000 Jews still live in the former Yugoslavia, according to the JDC. An estimated 700 live in Bosnia; 3,500 in Serbia; and 2,100 in Croatia, where most are concentrated in the capital of Zagreb.

Bar-Chaim, who was part of a delegation from the JDC and the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, recently returned from Banja Luka, a Serb-controlled area in central Bosnia, where food and other aid was delivered to refugees.

About 19 Jewish families live in Banja Luka.

The JDC, a nonpolitical organization and one of the United Jewish Appeal's main beneficiaries, has been able to contribute significant aid to the Jewish communities in the region, partly because it gained the trust of the three warring factions.

"There was no hidden agenda," Bar-Chaim said. As a group, Jews also "generally refrained from strong involvement in the political arena," he said, though some "Jews in all communities could be considered human rights activists, nationalists."

The war resulted in some 2.5 million refugees, 1,900 of them Jewish, Bar-Chaim said. Most of the Jewish refugees were from Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia that was hard hit by the war, he said.

About 20 percent of the Jewish refugees remained in the region, mostly in Belgrade, the capital of what remains of the former Yugoslavia — comprising Serbia and Montenegro.

And 1,100 Jewish refugees, as well as 1,200 who were not Jewish, were evacuated in 11 convoys by the JDC and La Benevolencija, the Bosnian Jewish humanitarian aid society. Some of the rescued Jews resettled in Israel, Britain and Canada, among other countries.

La Benevolencija, which is headed by Jacob Finci, plans to continue its work in the area, Bar-Chaim said, adding that "reconstruction and rehabilitation will take a long time."

He cited the ongoing need for La Benevolencija's pharmacy and soup kitchen in Sarajevo, which helps Jews and non-Jews alike. The soup kitchen serves 400 meals a day, he said.

Humanitarian aid efforts also have led to a "flowering of Jewish education," Bar-Chaim said. After years of war, he said, there is an increased interest in the region in the "answers" that the "Jewish faith offers." □

Family gathers at Rabin grave

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli leaders and the family of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin gathered at his grave to mark the end of the 30-day mourning period Tuesday.

Rabin's widow, Leah, wore a blue blazer and colorful scarf around her shoulders to signal the end of the mourning period. Her son Yuval, daughter Dalia and grandchildren stood weeping before the new grave beneath gray skies at Tuesday's brief ceremony.

Yuval Rabin recited Kaddish, the mourner's prayer, which was followed by two eulogies given by Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Israel Defense Force Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak. □