

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres delivered a message of peace to Syrian President Hafez Assad during a speech to a joint session of Congress. He later urged continued activism on behalf of the peace process to a group of American Jewish leaders who participated in a National Peace Process Advocacy Day in Washington. [Page 2]

■ Organizers of Sunday's Madison Square Garden rally in New York issued a statement apologizing for the fact that thousands of people "were unable to gain entrance to the event due to stringent security requirements and circumstances beyond our control."

■ Some 600 Palestinian police officers arrived in the West Bank city of Nablus after Israeli troops withdrew a day ahead of schedule. Withdrawal from the largest West Bank city drew no protest in Israel. [Page 3]

■ About 100 American Jews joined the Cuban Jewish community to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Patronato, the main synagogue in Havana. Most of the Americans were part of an American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee delegation.

■ Canadian Justice Minister Allan Rock said he would review what he termed the "shocking remarks" of Superior Court Judge Jean Bienvenue, who said Jews had not suffered during the Holocaust. Bienvenue later met with Jewish leaders in Montreal to apologize for his remarks.

■ The Rev. Henryk Jankowski, a prominent Roman Catholic priest in Poland, created a new furor with reported anti-Semitic remarks. [Page 4]

■ Dozens of would-be Israeli astronauts contacted the country's space agency in an effort to become the first sabra to lift off into space after President Clinton said the United States was considering sending an Israeli astronaut on a space mission. But an agency official said that Israel has no current plans to open an Israeli space-travel training program.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Despite his ties to Farrakhan, Jews hope Mfume will heal rifts**

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As Rep. Kweisi Mfume prepares to take on the daunting task of rebuilding the NAACP, Jews are hoping that the former leader of the Congressional Black Caucus can play a healing role in black-Jewish relations.

The appointment of Mfume, a Maryland Democrat, to the helm of the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization comes at a pivotal time for black-Jewish relations.

Historically supportive of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People — indeed, Jews joined with blacks to found the association — Jews have been alarmed in recent years by the group's overtures to Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, who is openly anti-Semitic.

Mfume himself has reached out to Farrakhan in the past, and even though he has moved to distance himself, his association with the NOI leader continues to trouble many Jews.

At a news conference Monday, Mfume called for the NAACP to respect the Nation of Islam, saying that the "African American community is not monolithic."

Because of that relationship, Jewish leaders have been cautious in praising Mfume's selection. For now, however, Mfume's ties to Farrakhan remain an issue on which he and Jews have agreed to disagree.

"While Mfume is someone with whom we don't always agree, he's always been available for discussion and rational disagreement," said Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress.

Indeed, Jewish leaders say Mfume's accessibility and skills in coalition-building may prove to be one of his most valuable attributes, particularly when it comes to forming new partnerships with the Jewish community.

"I believe it's an excellent move for everybody," said Art Abramson, executive director of the Baltimore Jewish Council, who has established "long-standing ties of friendship" with Mfume and hailed him as a leader who has recognized the need to work with the organized Jewish community.

A Jewish board member of the NAACP, Rabbi David Saperstein, said, "He has a solid track record as a very adroit coalition-builder, forging relations with the Jewish community in his district."

"In the long run, this is going to be a very positive step" toward strengthening black-Jewish relations, said Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center.

Faced with a \$3.2 million deficit and deep internal divisions as it struggles to define its role in the modern civil rights movement, the NAACP on Saturday unanimously appointed Mfume to serve as president and chief executive officer.

The post has remained vacant since August 1994, when Benjamin Chavis was fired amid revelations that he paid more than \$330,000 in NAACP funds to a former aide to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit.

Taking aim at 'punitive' policies

Jews have welcomed Mfume as a dramatic improvement over Chavis, whom many said shunned the Jewish community and alienated whites and blacks alike in his attempts to align the NAACP with Farrakhan and his black separatist ideology.

A five-term representative, Mfume will resign from his seat in Congress and assume the leadership post Feb. 15.

Chief among his goals is increasing black political and economic power, while promoting racial inclusion and greater tolerance in society.

Speaking to reporters after his appointment, Mfume took aim at what he called the "Draconian and punitive" policies of the far right-wing in America — policies that "punish the elderly, restrict the poor and deny opportunities to children."

The best way to counter the assault, he said, is "by reinvigorating the age-old concept of coalition, where people work together for the common

good. "Racism, sexism, anti-Semitism cannot and will not be allowed to enjoy a comfortable and quiet existence. If anything propels me, it is the desire to chip away at those things that hurt all of us and polarize us."

An influential voice in Congress, Mfume served as chairman of the black caucus from 1992 to 1994, but his tenure was not without controversy.

When he announced in late 1993 that the caucus would "enter a sacred covenant" with the Nation of Islam on legislative concerns, Jewish groups and some members of the caucus soundly lambasted him.

Stung by the criticism, which escalated after a highly publicized hate speech delivered by Farrakhan aide Khalid Abdul Muhammad, Mfume disavowed any formal association between the caucus and the Nation of Islam.

"It is clear that the Congressional Black Caucus' ability to work for change with the Nation of Islam [is] severely jeopardized as long as there remains a question by some of our membership about the Nation of Islam's sensitivity to the right of all people and all religions to be free from attacks, vilification and defamation," Mfume said in early 1994, as he sought to distance himself from his overture to Farrakhan.

But he has since continued his association with the Nation of Islam leader, sharing the podium with Farrakhan at the first African American Leadership Summit in Baltimore last year, and at October's Million Man March in Washington, an event organized by the Nation of Islam.

"The basic concern we've had is that apparently he has not been sensitive enough to the danger that extremists in the black community represent," said Baum.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said Mfume's ties to Farrakhan should not necessarily be used as a "litmus test" that disqualifies him from working with Jews.

"I have no problem when he says that he wants to reach out to everybody — and that of course means Farrakhan," Foxman said. "I will have a problem if he looks to Farrakhan for leadership. I hope and believe he will not."

Abramson of the Baltimore Jewish Council agreed.

"I think we're way beyond the point that Jewish leaders should be telling African American leaders where they should or should not be and who they should or should not meet with," Abramson said.

Mfume, he added, "does not share the abominable views of Farrakhan and he understands how vital it is that we participate with the African American community on matters of great concern to both of our communities."

Grass-roots cooperation sought

Although Mfume stands poised to emerge as a leading partner for the Jewish community, Saperstein of the Religious Action Center emphasized that Jews and blacks must go beyond forging ties between leaders.

Coalition-building, to be truly effective, must also occur at the grass-roots level, with Jews and blacks standing on common ground to defend shared interests, Saperstein said.

"We're both threatened today by the far right," he said. "The values we've worked to establish in the last 50 years are now under attack, the values of tolerance and civil rights and equal rights for minorities and women."

Jews and blacks, he added, have an imperative to work together in pursuit of common goals, such as fighting for civil rights, combating anti-Semitism, building better schools, creating job opportunities and guaranteeing a social safety net for the nation's poor.

In that respect, Jews and the NAACP's new leader appear to be on the same page.

"We can all be quiet and sit in comfortable

perches," Mfume told reporters this week, "but I guarantee you, when they put us in the ground and shovel that last piece of dirt on us, the world will not change on its own. It will only change when we find ways to reach out toward each other." □

Peres appeals for broader peace in emotional speech to Congress

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres capped off his first visit to the United States as Israel's new leader with an emotional appeal for Israeli-Syrian peace and a call for a continued strengthening of U.S.-Israeli relations.

"Without forgetting the past, let us not look back. Let fingertips touch a new hope. Let each party yield to the other, each giving consideration to the respective need of the other, mutually so," said Peres in an address Tuesday to a joint meeting of Congress.

"Without illusion but with resolve, we stand ready to make demanding decisions, if you are. We stand ready to work relentlessly until all gaps are bridged, if you are," he said, referring to Syrian President Hafez Assad.

Peres got a thunderous three-minute standing ovation when he entered the chamber. The applause continued for another minute when he was introduced.

Members of Congress interrupted Peres 12 times with applause during his address, the loudest coming after his appeal to Assad.

Peres said that thanks to the support Congress has "given and to the aid you have rendered, we have been able to overcome wars and tragedies thrust upon us and feel sufficiently strong to take measured risks to wage our campaign of peace."

Alluding to congressional skepticism about the possibility of U.S. troops monitoring a future Israeli-Syrian peace accord, Peres said, "Let me assure you that never shall we ask your sons and daughters to fight instead of ours, just as we have never asked you to do so in the past."

Peres recalled his fallen partner, the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in the efforts to achieve Middle East peace during his remarks: "Two weeks and 20 years ago, Lyndon Baines Johnson stood on this very spot and said, 'All I have I would have given gladly not to be standing here today.' Mr. Speaker, all I have I would have given gladly not to be standing here today. My senior partner is gone."

Peres, who was referring to a speech Johnson made to Congress after the 1963 assassination of President Kennedy, misstated by 12 years the date of Johnson's remarks. He also rededicated himself to peace with the Palestinians during his address.

"As far as we are concerned, democracy, and that includes Palestinian democracy, is the best and probably the only ultimate guarantee for a durable peace," he said.

Peres praised Palestine Liberation Organization head Yasser Arafat during his speech for being "engaged in the new realities of his people" and for his "solemn promise to intensify his fight against terror."

Congress received Peres as a virtual celebrity. Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) had Peres autograph a bound copy of his speech that was distributed to members of Congress, which she proudly displayed to other members as they left the chamber.

After addressing Congress, Peres met with more than 300 American Jews taking part in National Peace Process Advocacy Day.

He hailed their activity on Capitol Hill as "a need for us and for you. The task is not over." □

NEWS ANALYSIS

With nary a peep from Israelis, withdrawals ply full-steam ahead

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Nablus, the largest city in the West Bank, turned over to Palestinian self-rule this week with barely a peep from Israelis.

This makes one wonder: Where have all the demonstrators gone? Where are the strident voices of opposition to the handover, after 28 years of Israeli administration, of the major Palestinian population centers in the West Bank?

Before dawn Tuesday, the last Israeli soldiers drove out of Nablus, protected by Palestinian police from the boisterous celebrations of the town's residents.

In Sunday's pre-dawn hours, Palestinian autonomy came to Tulkarm; in mid-November, it was Jenin's turn; and before the month's end, similar Israeli withdrawals are scheduled for Kalkilya, Ramallah and Bethlehem. The withdrawals are part of the latest Israeli-Palestinian accord, which extends Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank.

In the Israeli media, the withdrawal from Nablus vied for attention with Prime Minister Shimon Peres' visit to Washington and with the ongoing strikes that have all but crippled France.

The redeployment from Nablus took place a day earlier than planned, reportedly because of intelligence warnings of terror attacks on the departing Israeli troops.

For 28 years, Israel ruled Nablus and the rest of the West Bank, having conquered it or liberated it — depending on one's politics — in the 1967 Six-Day War.

For almost that entire period, controversy has raged over the future of the West Bank.

Then, a month ago, as a direct result of that controversy, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated.

Now, momentous steps go forward, ending both the controversy and the Israeli administration of the area. And the atmosphere in Israel is one of apparent apathy.

The only real protest occurred in Nablus itself, when, hours before the withdrawal, a group of some 50 yeshiva students and settlers were taken into custody when they clashed with Israeli security forces in an attempt to gain access to the Tomb of Joseph in Nablus.

In the wake of those clashes, the Israel Defense Force announced that Nablus, as well as the tomb, would be closed to Israelis until Monday.

Shot in the legs

But inside Israel, all was quiet.

Would-be demonstrators would not have had to look far for appropriate slogans: By coincidence, this week's Torah portion recounts Jacob's sojourn in Nablus.

For its part, the parliamentary opposition makes its points with none of the anguish and fury that were its stock-in-trade in the recent past.

Even a series of terrorist incidents this week — granted, nonfatal ones — failed to elicit a vigorous outcry from that considerable section of the political spectrum that continues to oppose the peace process. On Tuesday, two grenades were thrown at a vehicle carrying soldiers in the West Bank town of Hebron. There were no injuries in the incident, which took place at an army checkpoint near Beit Hadassah, a Jewish settlement within the town.

And Saturday night, a civilian was shot in the legs and his daughter grazed when terrorists sprayed his car with submachine-gun fire near Neveh Daniel, a West Bank settlement near Bethlehem. The spot where the attack occurred, on the main Jerusalem-Hebron road, is passed by thousands of Israelis each day.

So why the silence? Is Israel still so stunned by Rabin's slaying? So stunned that the normal dialogue and rivalry between government and opposition remain paralyzed?

Or has the assassination engendered so radical a shift in public opinion that opposition to the government's peace policies with the Palestinians is no longer a major element of public life?

The answer is probably a bit of both. And Peres, the consummate politician, is moving confidently to take advantage of both aspects of the opposition's current weakness.

The fact that Yigal Amir, Rabin's confessed assassin, is a religious right-winger, mouthing the rhetoric of the religious right at his every court appearance, has naturally inhibited the political outspokenness of that camp.

Moreover, a backlash against religious Zionists and against the right wing in general, reflected in much of the media, serves to strengthen that inhibition.

As the prime minister himself noted this week in an interview from Washington with CNN, some on the Israeli right "feel they went too far" in the stridency of their opposition to Rabin.

For instance, the hawkish National Religious Party, in negotiations with Peres' Labor Party, has offered to accept Israel's accords with the Palestinians and not to harass the government about their implementation in the months leading up to next year's general elections in Israel.

Within the main opposition Likud Party, there is also a discernible groping for a new policy line that would not imply any desire — barring a major security crisis — to reoccupy the main West Bank towns now being evacuated by the Israel Defense Force.

Beyond the shifts within the opposition parties, the dramatic shift in public opinion in the wake of the assassination continues. Weekend polls still showed Peres trouncing Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu in the race for prime minister, and the Labor Party winning comfortably, though by a lesser margin, over the Likud.

'Shimon Peres, not Bibi'

Rabin's death — and especially the fact that he was killed because of his peace policy — has apparently brought a substantial number of middle-of-the-road voters to lend their support to that policy, which is now being implemented by Peres.

Confirming the significance of this shift, former Likud member and government minister David Magen this week declared that "Shimon Peres, not Bibi [Netanyahu], will be the next prime minister." Magen announced that he was quitting Likud and joining the new party led by Netanyahu's longtime rival, David Levy.

Peres, perhaps typically, is not content to enjoy the favorable tide and let this election year go by without further drama. His determination to strike a deal with Syrian President Hafez Assad — which he repeatedly underscored during his visit to Washington — will test the validity of Magen's prognosis and the depth of the change in Israeli public opinion.

The Golan Heights settlers, unlike those on the West Bank, have given notice that they do not intend to remain on the defensive for much longer.

Logically, the West Bank, teeming as it is with Palestinians, and the largely empty and strategically important Golan are not linked.

One can favor a Palestinian state in the West Bank, yet still oppose total withdrawal from the Golan.

But clearly Peres is counting on the political and psychological momentum generated inside Israel and throughout the world by the assassination of Rabin to support his energetic new drive on the Syrian track. □

Polish priest again attacks Jews at a church gathering

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — A prominent Roman Catholic priest in Poland who is a close friend of outgoing President Lech Walesa reportedly has again made anti-Semitic statements in his Gdansk church.

The Rev. Henryk Jankowski created a furor in June, when he made anti-Semitic remarks during a service at the church while Walesa was in attendance.

The Warsaw daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* reported last week that on Dec. 3, Jankowski said, "Why shouldn't we talk about such things as the murder of Germans by Jews? Why may we not talk about the Jewish-Communist administration that governs Poland today?"

"The reason is that they have banks, and everything, in their hands."

"I have nothing to repent for and none to whom I should apologize for my words," Jankowski added.

Jankowski made his latest remarks during a meeting in his church to mark the publication of a new book praising his controversial statements in June, according to *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

The book, titled "Father Jankowski Has Nothing to Apologize For," was written by Peter Raina, a Hindu who studied in Poland in the early 1960s and who now lives in Berlin.

Stanislaw Krajewski, a consultant for the American Jewish Committee in Warsaw, said in a telephone interview that in recent years, Raina "has been increasingly adopting an extreme Polish nationalist Catholic line and an explicit anti-Semitism."

Raina's new book reportedly claims that the original text of the controversial sermon Jankowski delivered June 11 was manipulated by *Gazeta Wyborcza* in order "to discredit the church and the nation."

In that sermon, Jankowski said, "Poles, bestir yourselves. We can no longer tolerate being governed by people who have not declared whether they come from Moscow or Israel."

"The Star of David is implicated in the swastika as well as the hammer and sickle," Jankowski said.

Jewish organizations in Poland immediately condemned the priest's remarks and expressed surprise that Walesa had not opposed Jankowski's statements on the spot.

Three days after the sermon, Jankowski reiterated his statements in even stronger language.

Krajewski rejected Raina's claim that *Gazeta Wyborcza* had misquoted Jankowski's sermon, noting that the full text was published soon after the event "and it is clear that *Gazeta* gave an accurate account."

Gdansk Archbishop Tadeusz Goclawski, interviewed by *Gazeta Wyborcza* about the latest incident involving Jankowski, called Raina's book "profoundly bad," adding that it was written by someone who "does not understand Polish conditions."

"I regret that Father Jankowski allows rallies in the church," the archbishop added. □

47 percent would be offended if called a Jew, says Italian poll

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Nearly half of those questioned here in a public opinion poll said they would consider it an insult to be called a Jew and nearly 12 percent said they thought of Jews as "unpleasant."

The survey, whose results were reported in the media Saturday, was commissioned by the Italian Federa-

tion of Psychologists on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the synagogue in the northern Italian town of Casale.

Titled "Those who are Different," the survey was carried out during the past six months.

Some 1,050 Italians between the ages of 14 and 60 were questioned.

The survey showed that 53 percent of the respondents said they would be offended if called a Negro, 47 percent said they would be offended if called a Jew; and 44 percent would be offended if called gay.

Fully 39 percent regarded the label "handicapped" an insult, the poll found.

According to survey results, some 11.7 percent of respondents considered Jews to be "unpleasant."

Respondents found dark-skinned immigrants (24.5 percent), Gypsies (18.2 percent) and homosexuals (13.3 percent) to be more unpleasant than Jews.

However, in the same survey, more than 75 percent of the respondents said they did not consider themselves racist. □

Report shows Australian Jews better off than rest of country

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — A government report here has concluded that Australia's Jewish community is older, better educated and wealthier than the general population.

The report, "Judaism in Australia," was produced by the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research.

The recent study, which used data from the 1991 population census, is the first of a series of profiles on Australia's religious communities.

Nick Bolkus, a senator and federal minister for immigration and ethnic affairs, said, "It is particularly appropriate that we start the series with Judaism this year — the International Year of Tolerance — because this is the year in which we mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the liberation of Nazi concentration camps and the beginning of Australia's postwar, planned migration program."

More than 85 percent of the estimated 105,000 Jews in Australia live in Melbourne or Sydney, the study said.

The Jewish population in Australia grew by almost 8 percent between 1986 and 1991, according to the government survey.

In addition, the percentage of Jews older than 65 years is close to twice the national average, according to the data.

The report found that "Jews tend to marry later," "are more likely to marry" and "are less likely to be separated" than non-Jews.

Australian Jewish men and women are better educated than their non-Jewish counterparts, the report also said.

And in terms of family income, 21.2 percent of all Jewish families earned \$60,000 in 1991, compared with 6.1 percent of all Australian families, the government study found.

"The report suggests that Judaism is likely to continue as a strong force in Australia, partly because of the large percentage of Jews sending their children to Jewish day schools," Bolkus also said.

In addition, the report showed that 9.8 percent of the spouses of Jewish respondents declared themselves members of other religions, a finding significantly lower than most communal estimates. □