



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The trial of Yitzhak Rabin's confessed assassin opened in Tel Aviv. After reading the charges against Yigal Amir, Judge Edmund Levy ordered that the proceedings be continued until Jan. 23 to give the attorneys more time to review evidence. [Page 3]

■ The amateur video of the shooting of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was broadcast on Israel's Channel 2. The lawyer for Rabin's confessed assassin unsuccessfully tried in court to block the broadcast. [Page 3]

■ Convicted spy Jonathan Pollard issued a Chanukah appeal to American Jews to back his attempts to secure freedom. "In the merit of Chanukah, I implore all of us to unite and cause fresh miracles to occur in our time," wrote Pollard from his jail cell, where he is serving a life sentence for spying for Israel.

■ Federal prosecutors filed a motion in Boston against accused war criminal Aleksandras Lileikis. Lileikis, who has lived for years in Norwood, Mass., has refused to answer government prosecutors' questions. [Page 4]

■ A coalition of lawmakers blocked action on anti-terrorism legislation in the House until after Jan. 1. The measure, which had been widely supported by the organized Jewish community, would strengthen the United States' hand in combatting domestic and international terrorism.

■ A Jewish woman was lightly hurt when an Arab attacked her with an ax in the Hebron market. [Page 4]

■ Israeli and Palestinian forces began joint patrols in Kalkilya, the latest West Bank town from which the Israel Defense Force withdrew.

■ The Palestine Liberation Organization and the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas group reportedly agreed to avoid the use of violence in settling their differences. But the two organizations, meeting in Cairo, have not reached a decision on the role of Hamas in the upcoming elections.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Communist resurgence sparks uncertainty among Russia's Jews

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Communist Party's powerful electoral showing this week has generated strong feelings of uncertainty among Russia's Jews about their country's future.

When the returns from Sunday's parliamentary elections first came in, voices of alarm were sounded within Russia's Jewish community, estimated at between 500,000 to 2 million people.

Early returns gave the Communist Party the lead with some 22 percent of the vote and the ultranationalist party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy second place with about 11 percent.

Even before the final results were in, however, a more moderate, albeit cautious note was sounded by Russian Jews, most of whom had supported democratically oriented candidates.

On Monday, for instance, Michael Chlenov, chairman of the Va'ad, the Jewish Confederation of Russia, spoke of the possibility that Russian Jews would panic and seek to emigrate as soon as possible.

But by Tuesday, he said that "in spite of the seeming victory of the Communists, the balance of power" in the incoming Parliament "will be almost the same as now."

Voicing a common concern for the future, however, he added, "We still have reason to be worried before the June 1996 presidential elections."

Although the power of the lower house of Parliament, or Duma, is limited, Sunday's elections are being viewed as an important barometer of the political climate in advance of the presidential elections.

The parliamentary elections were only the second since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

Preliminary results from the voting represented a significant defeat for Our House is Russia, the government party led by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and backed by President Boris Yeltsin. As of Tuesday, the party was running in third place, with nearly 10 percent of the vote.

The Communist victory came as a slap in the face to the reformist policies of Yeltsin, who on the eve of the election made a direct appeal to Russia's voters not to turn back the clock on reforms.

'A great mystery'

Among the nation's Jews, much of the concern arises out of tremendous uncertainty.

As Gabriella Safran, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry's representative in the former Soviet Union, put it: "I don't think anyone has a sense of the Communists' true intentions. It's a great mystery."

As for the Jewish candidates on the ballot, all were believed to be defeated.

Those candidates included Valery Engel, a longtime Jewish activist who serves as vice president of the Congress of Ethnic Unions of Russia; Tancred Golenpolsky, founder of Moscow's Jewish biweekly newspaper Evreyskaya Gazeta; and Alla Gerber, an anti-fascist activist who is a member of the present Duma.

Gerber belonged to the parliamentary faction of Russia's Choice, the party headed by former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar.

According to Russian electoral law, half the seats in the 450-member Duma are distributed proportionally to those party lists that capture more than 5 percent of the national vote.

The other 225 seats go to the winners of a direct vote for candidates in Russia's single-seat districts.

Under this formula, candidates whose party failed to clear the 5 percent threshold were nonetheless capable of being elected to the Duma.

Clearing this threshold was the liberal Yabloko faction, which placed fourth in the vote, with 8.4 percent of the vote. Yabloko is headed by liberal economist Grigory Yavlinsky, who is part Jewish.

Preliminary returns from the single-seat voting indicated further gains for the Communists.

On Monday, Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov suggested

that his party would set up a national patriotic coalition of "allies and fellow travelers" in the new Duma.

Zyuganov said the coalition might include Zhirinovsky's virulently nationalist Liberal Democratic Party.

But the Communist leader was critical of Zhirinovsky himself.

At the same time, however, fears about Zyuganov's true nature surfaced prior to the election when the popular Moscow daily Moskovskiy Komsomolets quoted him as saying: "The world outlook, culture and ideology of the Western world is being more and more tangibly affected by the Jewish Diaspora.

"Its influence is growing by the hour. The Jewish Diaspora that traditionally had [Western] financial life under control, is becoming, as its 'own market' develops, a kind of controlling stockholder of the entire economic system of the Western civilization."

Some Jewish observers, while criticizing the remarks, downplayed them.

"We have to keep this in perspective," said Rabbi Mark Staitman, chairman of the National Conference. "We have to see whether the rhetoric is followed by concrete steps."

During a recent meeting with Zyuganov in Moscow, Rabbi Arthur Schneier of New York said the Communist leader told him that the party had reaffirmed freedom of religion and conscience in its platform in a vote of 500-16.

Although he called Zyuganov's remarks "totally unacceptable," Schneier said they represented Zyuganov's election effort to play to a part of his constituency.

Noting that there has been a resurgent interest in religion in Russia since the fall of communism, Schneier, who was accredited by the Russian government as an international observer to the election, said he believed that the Communist leadership "is much too pragmatic" to adopt steps that would curtail freedom of religion.

Meanwhile, Russia's chief rabbi, Adolph Shayeveich, agreed that now that the voting is complete, the guessing game of what the Communists have in mind begins.

"Whoever comes to power, any political change in Russia is always fraught with dangerous consequences," he said.

"It would be better for the nation if the government and the Parliament are given a possibility to complete the reformist program they have launched," he said.

"Jews are an optimistic people," Shayeveich added, "and I believe that Russia, with God's help, will turn into a democratic power."

Some Jewish voices were less sanguine, saying that the chances for Russia's democratic development were weakened as a result of Sunday's vote.

'Terrifying results'

Among those who found the election results particularly disturbing was Leonid Stonov, the international director of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews' human rights bureau.

"These are terrifying results," he said in an interview. "The situation is very dangerous."

Pointing to a possible coalition of "red and brown forces" involving the Communists and Zhirinovsky's ultranationalists, Stonov said, "It is quite possible they will stop the reforms." He expressed particular concern over the possibility that in the near future, "the Duma will vote against emigration" — once again barring Jews from leaving the country.

Jewish emigration from Russia, once banned totally, has declined dramatically from its peak in 1992. But there are still Jews who want to emigrate.

Although the Duma needs presidential approval for any of its legislative moves, Yeltsin is in a precarious position after this week's elections and he "may move to soothe the nationalist forces," said Stonov, who splits his time between Moscow and Chicago.

"I want to be optimistic," Stonov said. "But we should directly confront events — and events are very bad."

Other observers, both in Russia and the United States, expressed concern about the vote, but were less inclined to see it as a call to return to Russia's Communist past.

"There is no reverting back to the old days," said Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

The Communist victory came because "voters were unhappy with the lack of a tangible improvement in their lot," he said.

For her part, the National Conference's Safran said Russia's Jews are "not seeing this election as a big factor in their decision to stay or leave Russia."

"The June elections will be a larger factor," she said, speaking from St. Petersburg during a conference call Monday with Jewish journalists in the United States.

She also said Jewish activists in Russia view the "vote for Zhirinovsky as the vote of someone who is very angry" and wanted to cast a ballot "for the most visible anti-establishment figure."

"A lot of Jews are disturbed by the size of Zhirinovsky's vote," she said.

"But they see it as a protest vote rather than a vote against Jews."

Alluding to reports that surfaced in the West last year that Zhirinovsky is part Jewish, Safran said those reports are now widely known in Russia.

As a result, she said, "people who voted for him are not the real anti-Semites."

Addressing the fears expressed by some Russian Jews after the vote, Martin Wenick, executive vice president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, said, "What you are hearing now is a clarion call from those living there that things are going badly" in Russia's reformist era.

Noting that the election "raises concerns for minority rights" in Russia, Wenick said it was "significant that well over a third of the votes went to parties that look backward instead of forward." □

(JTA foreign editor Mitchell Danow contributed to this report.)

Baby-smuggling accusation causes blood libel to surface

NEW YORK (JTA) — The blood-libel myth surfaced in Romania after police there held an Israeli and three Romanians accused of smuggling babies to Moldova and Israel, police said.

A Romanian police spokesman identified the Israeli citizen as Mahmud Asadi, a Palestinian who converted to Judaism and claims to have been a personal secretary to slain Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, according to the World Jewish Congress.

Resurrecting the centuries-old anti-Semitic blood libel, the Bucharest weekly Baricada reported last month that there was no chance of ever seeing the smuggled children alive because "as is well-known, Jewish matzah demands kosher, young Christian blood."

But "as long as the Jewish mafia" involved in "collecting kosher blood" is protected by the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, it is "unlikely" that proof of the horrible deed can be produced, the weekly said. □

Judge grants continuance in trial of confessed assassin

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The trial of Yitzhak Rabin's confessed assassin opened Tuesday in Tel Aviv District Court amid heavy security and extensive media coverage.

However, the plea will be submitted and the deliberations will begin Jan. 23, after presiding Judge Edmund Levy agreed to give Yigal Amir's lawyers a month to review the evidence in the case.

Amir, a 25-year-old religious law student, has confessed to shooting the prime minister at a Nov. 4 peace rally in Tel Aviv.

Amir, who said he killed Rabin because he believed that the peace accord with the Palestinians endangered Jewish lives, has been charged with premeditated murder, a charge which carries a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Before the proceedings began, Levy told the journalists crowded into the courtroom that he would have preferred not to have such extensive coverage, but recognized the "public importance of the case."

He criticized the media for already convicting Amir, and said his role was to ensure a fair trial and preserve of the rights of the accused.

Hours later, much of the nation was glued to the television watching a broadcast of the assassination, captured by an amateur photographer.

Wearing a white shirt and chewing gum, Amir smiled periodically as the charges against him were read.

Amir is being represented by two lawyers, Mordecai Offri and Yonatan Goldberg, an American immigrant who lives in the West Bank settlement Emanuel.

After granting a continuance, the three-judge court rejected a request to postpone the trial until the Shamgar commission investigating the assassination presents its findings.

The court also rejected the request that it issue a restraining order against Tuesday night's television broadcast of the videotape that shows the assassination. The commercial station Channel 2 broadcast the video Tuesday night, after purchasing the rights with the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, for a reported nearly \$400,000.

'I just had a bad feeling'

The videotape, submitted to police after the assassination, is included in the prosecution's evidence.

In the footage, Cabinet ministers Ora Namir and Shimon Shetreet are shown speaking to bystanders.

At one point, police direct Kempler to leave the site. He moves to the roof of a supermarket overlooking the parking area, where he continues to film people coming down the stairs.

Amir is for the first time seen sitting on the edge of a concrete rim of a large potted plant, located between the stairs and Rabin's parked car.

Shimon Peres comes down the stairs, and turns off to the right. The video follows Peres as he moves past Amir, his back exposed. In what is perhaps the eeriest section of the segment, the camera pans back and forth from Peres to Amir, stopping on him for several seconds, returning to Peres, and back to Amir.

The special broadcast included an interview with the photographer, Roni Kempler, at the Tel Aviv site of the murder. "I don't know why I focused on him," Kempler said, referring to Amir.

"I guess I just had a bad feeling that something could happen. I told myself I was just being stupid," Kempler said.

At one point in the video, Amir is seen standing next to two police officers, who later told the Shamgar commission they had spoken to him briefly about the performer Aviv Geffen, who was appearing at that moment at the rally. Then, the officers abruptly leave Amir, apparently having been informed of Rabin's departure.

The video shows Rabin coming down the stairs and walking to his car. Amir steps back. As Rabin walks past him, Amir is seen lifting his right arm, and following.

His face falls out of the frame, as his hand is seen coming forward. The three shots are heard as Amir fires, falling back into the frame. Rabin falls and immediately a crowd of security people surrounds him.

At this point, the videotape ends. Kempler was leaning against a concrete barrier on the roof. He said he dropped down, and after one more shot of the chaos below, stopped filming.

"I don't know how to explain it," he said. "I was angry. I felt somehow fate had chosen me to film this. At that moment, I was just so upset, I didn't want to film anymore."

Kempler, 37, an accountant in a state office, gave police a copy of the tape days after the assassination.

Earlier in the day, dozens of Israelis waited in a line outside the courtroom, hoping to get a chance to see some of the proceedings inside the 80-seat room.

Among the people waiting was a woman who traveled from Kiryat Shmona, in the north.

"I have been saving clippings from the newspaper about the case," she told Israel Radio. "This was the prime minister. I am interested."

Another person at the trial was Eitan Haber, Rabin's longtime aide. He told Army Radio that after the hearing, Amir's father approached him and tried to ask for his forgiveness. "I told him, politely, that I want nothing to do with him," Haber said.

"Then I heard his wife telling him, 'Forget about it, you don't want to have anything to do with that monster.' I'm the monster?"

"She's the one who raised two monsters in her own home," Haber said, referring to Amir's brother Hagai, who is suspected of being involved in the plot to assassinate Rabin.

Hagai Amir and a friend, Dror Adani, are to be tried separately on conspiracy and weapons violations.

Haber, who at Rabin's funeral read the lyrics of "The Song for Peace" from the bloodstained page that was found in the prime minister's pocket, said he planned to follow the trial to its conclusion. □

Dinner in Damascus, anyone?

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Call them optimists, but Israeli tour operators have already begun examining prospects of sending tourists to Syria.

Israelis may be able to vacation in Syria two weeks after the opening of the border between the two countries, which would occur after a peace agreement is signed, Israel Radio reported recently.

The report indicated that representatives from an Israeli travel firm, the Ne'ot Hakikar Geographic Society, met with Syrian tour operators during a recent conference in Jordan. "No arrangements have been made yet. We are just in the progress of preparing the infrastructure and all the details," Moshe Savir of Ne'ot Hakikar told Israel Radio. "It will come only after a breakthrough in the political process."

Savir thought that once such visits were made possible as a result of a peace treaty, Israeli visitors would find the Syrian people welcoming. □

U.S. renews effort to deport accused war criminal to Lithuania

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Federal prosecutors have filed a motion in Boston asking a court to find that an accused war criminal admitted to taking part in destroying the Jewish population of Vilnius, Lithuania, during World War II.

Prosecutors said this week that the motion was filed because Aleksandras Lileikis, 88, who has lived for years in Norwood, Mass., has refused to answer government prosecutors' questions about his wartime activities, according to the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations.

Lileikis, who has acknowledged that he is the former head of the Lithuanian security police — known as the Saugamas — in Vilnius, is accused of signing orders that sent at least 40,000 Jews to Nazi death camps.

A U.S. district judge ruled last month that Lileikis could not invoke his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

"We remain absolutely committed to a speedy resolution of the charges against Mr. Lileikis," said U.S. Attorney Donald Stern. "He should not be permitted to hide any longer behind a privilege which the court has now determined is inapplicable to him. By his outright refusal to answer the charges, we contend he has, in effect, admitted them."

In September 1994, the United States sought to strip the accused Nazi of his citizenship, charging him with concealing his wartime activities. The United States wants to deport Lileikis to Lithuania. Lileikis came to the United States in 1955 and sought citizenship in 1976.

At least 55,000 Vilnius Jews and 220,000 Lithuanian Jews were killed during the Holocaust.

In another development, Wasyl Lytwyn, an American citizen who admitted to having participated in the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, voluntarily deported himself to Ukraine, according to a release from the World Jewish Congress.

His flight from the United States, which had been agreed upon with the OSI, took place after he had signed an admission to having played a role in war crimes.

Lytwyn, 73, will soon have his U.S. citizenship revoked. After World War II, he fled to Canada, where he became a citizen in 1955. In 1957, he moved to the United States, where he was naturalized in 1994. □

Vatican maintains position: Jerusalem an international city

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Vatican has reaffirmed its position that Jerusalem should be an international holy city for Christians, Muslims and Jews.

Both before and during a visit to Israel this week, the Vatican's foreign minister, Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, said the Vatican had not changed its position.

Although the reaffirmation of the Vatican position was tied to Tauran's trip, it also appeared to be a response to a report by Leah Rabin that Pope John Paul II had told her he considered Jerusalem as "the capital of Israel and as the capital of three faiths."

Leah Rabin, the widow of slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and their two children had a private audience last week with the pontiff.

The reference to Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish state — though not an official recognition — would mark a sharp change in official Vatican policy, which does not recognize the city as Israel's capital.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls later attempted to downplay the significance of the remark.

"The position of the Holy See has been known for years," he said. Navarro's statement, however, did not refer to Rabin or her report of what the pope told her.

At the meeting with Rabin, the pope also repeated his intention to visit Jerusalem, but no date was mentioned.

Tauran said while he was in Israel that if the pontiff visited, it would be as a pilgrim. In Israel, Tauran met with Israeli religious and political figures, including Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert.

The Vatican and Israel established full diplomatic relations last year. □

(JTA correspondent Ruth E. Gruber in Rome contributed to this report.)

Ax attack among incidents keeping security forces busy

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Palestinian threw an ax at a Jewish teen-age girl Tuesday in Hebron, slightly wounding her in the head.

The girl, identified as Tirza Daniel, was released after being treated on the spot.

The assailant fled the scene, and security forces closed off the area. A number of suspects were detained.

After Tuesday's attack, Jewish residents from the Hebron area caused disturbances in the market. Some were detained on suspicion of trying to attack Arabs, Israel Radio reported.

Jewish settlers also called on Israel to crack down on violence. Last week, two elderly Jews were stabbed outside the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron.

Meanwhile, the head of the Israeli army's central command issued orders Tuesday to 12 Jewish settlers from the Nablus area, restricting their movement. The settlers, all of whom study at the religious seminary at Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, were ordered to remain in the settlement Yizhar, where they live, and to register daily with police.

The orders were signed after the army received information that the 12 settlers could cause disturbances if allowed in the area of the yeshiva in Nablus, the Israel Defense Force spokesman's office said. Nablus has been under Palestinian self-rule as of last week.

The students set up a temporary yeshiva outside the Nablus city limits, Israel Television reported.

In another development, Israeli and Palestinian security forces in Kalkilya began joint patrols, after Sunday's IDF redeployment from the West Bank town.

The mayor of Kalkilya sent a letter to the council head of the nearby settlement Alfe Menashe, saying that he hoped that the two communities could develop peaceful and neighborly relations. The council head had cabled a congratulatory message to the Palestinian mayor. □

Wife of settler leader convicted

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Miriam Levinger, wife of Jewish settler leader Rabbi Moshe Levinger, was convicted here Sunday of attacking a police officer in Hebron two years ago.

On Monday, she was sentenced to three months in prison. Earlier, when Miriam Levinger refused to appear in court, police forcibly removed her from her home in Hebron.

Earlier this month, Moshe Levinger was found guilty of causing a violent disturbance in the Hebron market four years ago, destroying Arab property and firing his gun. □