



NEWS AT A GLANCE

Islamic election victory in Turkey boosts fear in Jewish community

By Alev Bracha

■ The victory of Turkey's pro-Islamic Welfare Party in the country's parliamentary elections boosted concerns in the country's tiny Jewish community. Two secularist parties that each won slightly less than 20 percent of the vote have been called on to form a new coalition government. [Page 1]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres drew widespread criticism from opposition leaders after he said that Israel would give up its nuclear capability in exchange for regional peace. "Give me peace, we will give up the nuclear capability. That's the whole story," Peres told Israeli newspaper editors. [Page 2]

■ Jewish and black leaders are struggling to find common ground in the aftermath of the massacre at a Jewish-owned store in the Harlem neighborhood of New York. Police are continuing to investigate the role of race-baiting protesters in the violence. [Page 4]

■ Thirty-one Israeli paratroopers were given jail sentences of nearly two months apiece for leaving their post on the Lebanese border to protest what they claimed was harsh treatment by their commander. The operations of the unit they belonged to were suspended as the army launched an investigation into their claims. [Page 3]

■ Israel is reportedly investing \$100 million to give the town of Nazareth a facelift in preparation for celebrations at the turn of the century marking the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus. The project would represent the largest investment Israel has made in the country's Arab economic sector.

■ An Israeli soldier was listed in moderate condition after being wounded in a shooting attack on the edge of the Gaza Strip. The incident occurred when unknown gunmen opened fire on an Israel Defense Force patrol near the Karni Crossing separating Israel and Gaza.

■ The Israeli shekel was devalued by 1.05 percent, for an exchange rate of 3.174 shekels to the dollar. Israel made a similar devaluation last month.

ISTANBUL (JTA) — The victory of Turkey's pro-Islamic party in the parliamentary elections here has led to fears of political instability and has raised questions about the future of the secular yet overwhelmingly Muslim country.

The religious-based Welfare Party won slightly more than 21 percent of the vote in Sunday's national elections, the first time the Islamic party came in first in a general election since the secular Turkish republic was formed in 1923 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I.

The Welfare Party wants to strengthen Turkey's ties with Muslim countries, to pull Turkey out of NATO and to make Islamic principles the basis for the country's social system.

The conservative True Path Party of Prime Minister Tansu Ciller received slightly under 20 percent — a fraction of a percentage point more than its bitter conservative rival, the Motherland Party.

Under Turkey's system of proportional representation, this translates into an expected 158 seats for Welfare, 135 seats for the True Path Party and 132 seats for the Motherland Party. Two social democratic parties received a total of 125 seats in the 550-member Parliament.

The rise of the Welfare Party — albeit with a narrow margin — has raised some fears among Turkey's small Jewish community, which has reacted with worry to the tirades of the party's leader, Necmettin Erbakan, against "Zionist domination."

During the election campaign, Welfare Party officials often led crowds in chants to free the Palestinians and to help Muslims in other parts of the world.

They also promised to break the hold of the "Christian West" by joining with other Muslim nations.

Sami Kohen, foreign affairs columnist for the daily Milliyet newspaper, said there was "some concern in the Jewish community here" because of Erbakan's use of anti-Semitic comments, such as his talk of Zionist control in world affairs.

"But I don't think this is a priority issue with him. It's more rhetoric," Kohen added.

Turkey's population of some 25,000 Jews — out of an overwhelmingly Moslem population of about 60 million — has lived relatively well since arriving here 500 years ago after their expulsion from Spain in 1492.

Political analysts this week called on Ciller's True Path Party and on the Motherland Party to join together in a coalition to block the religious-based Welfare Party.

"About 80 percent of the Turkish people used their vote for a Turkey that is oriented toward secularism, modernism and the West. Now, it is necessary for the conservative parties to form a coalition," wrote Ertugrul Ozkok, political columnist for the daily Hurriyet.

Jewish candidate wins parliamentary bid

Both Ciller and Motherland leader Mesut Yilmaz have ruled out forming a coalition with the Welfare Party.

But it was unclear whether they could put aside their personal differences to agree to govern together.

Analysts appeared convinced that ultimately the two parties would strike an agreement.

Such a coalition would require the support of one of the two social democratic parties, raising fears of another conflict similar to that within Ciller's right-left ruling coalition, which collapsed in September, prompting Sunday's election.

In Sunday's voting, a Jewish candidate won a seat — for the first time in decades. The candidate, industrialist Jefi Kamhi, was elected to Parliament on the True Path ticket.

Despite the relatively good relations Jews here have had with the broader community, there have been some disturbing incidents during the past few years.

In November, a Jewish businessman was murdered in Izmir.

Anonymous callers to security forces were reported as saying that the slaying was in retaliation for the killing of Islamic Jihad leader Dr. Fathi Shakaki in Malta.

Although police later discounted the call, the murder of Nesim Malki occurred on the 40th day after Shakaki's slaying — for which Islamic Jihad put the blame squarely on Israel.

In June, the leader of the Jewish community in Ankara narrowly survived an assassination attempt when his car was blown up.

A pan-Turkic Islamic group claimed responsibility for that incident.

In 1992, Israeli embassy chief Ehud Saden was assassinated.

In 1993, the father of the Jewish industrialist who won a seat on Sunday was the target of a failed assassination attempt, which was blamed on radical Islamists.

The Welfare Party, with its appeal to restoring Islamic principles, has seen steady growth in its base of support.

In 1994 local elections, Welfare was swept to power in Turkey's main cities of Ankara and Istanbul, albeit with a fraction of the vote.

But this proved that divisions between conservative and social democratic parties could open the way for victories on the part of Welfare.

Most analysts blame the growing support for the Welfare Party on Turkey's economic ills — including an 80 percent annual inflation rate, unemployment unofficially estimated at 15 percent and a nearly bankrupt social security system.

While the mainstream parties stress integrating with the West and rapid privatization of the state-heavy economy, Welfare promises bread and jobs.

"Nobody has the right to defend the policies that brought us to this point. The people need a pill to help save them from their problems," Welfare Party leader Erbakan said in a news conference on Monday.

Erbakan also promised other things, like renegotiating Turkey's hard-won trade pact with the European Union and getting rid of the U.S.-led force stationed in Turkey to protect Iraqi Kurds from attacks launched by Baghdad.

The party's platform also speaks of breaking the power of "world imperialism and Zionism," and of freeing the Muslim world from outside domination.

But observers believe that Welfare's platform will be watered down because of the necessity of forming a coalition government — assuming the party can find a partner.

Analysts like Kohen say that the difficulties of governing a country, along with Turkey's secular history, make it unlikely that Erbakan will be able to put his rhetoric into action.

"I don't think these issues are much in his actual plans," said Kohen.

Kohen played down the possibility that Erbakan would engage in racial policies.

But, he added, "the question is whether if he were in office, some small town official would start advocating racist policies in this atmosphere." □

Peres criticized for offering to give up nuclear capability

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Shimon Peres drew widespread criticism from opposition leaders after he said that Israel would give up its nuclear capability in exchange for regional peace.

In remarks to Israeli newspaper editors last Friday in Tel Aviv, Peres said that Israel would be willing to

"give up the atom" if it were able to achieve peace with its Arab neighbors.

"Give me peace, we will give up the nuclear capability. That's the whole story," he said.

Peres refused to say whether he was referring specifically to Israeli nuclear weapons.

Israeli officials have repeatedly refused to confirm or deny reports that the Jewish state possesses a nuclear capability.

But he added that Israel wanted to keep its neighbors guessing whether it had nuclear weapons, saying that this in itself served as a deterrent.

"As long as the suspicion itself can serve as a deterrent weapon, let them suspect," he said.

Opposition leaders, along with some media commentators, criticized Peres for what they said was careless talk, and for going too far to appease the Arabs.

The Likud Party issued a statement saying, "The ease with which Peres volunteers to dismantle Israel's nuclear potential is additional testimony to his illusion of a new Middle East in which this government is imprisoned."

Knesset member Rehavam Ze'evi, of the far-right Moledet Party, lashed out at Peres for endangering national security in the face of what he said were ongoing nuclear development programs in Iraq, Iran and Libya.

Egyptian-Israeli tension over the nuclear issue reemerged over the weekend, when Foreign Minister Ehud Barak paid an official visit to Cairo to meet with Egyptian officials.

During a news conference on Sunday, Barak and Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa openly sparred over the issue.

Barak, who was in Egypt for discussions about the resumption of peace negotiations with Syria, said that Israel's potential nuclear arsenal was not relevant to current developments in the region.

Moussa, in turn, said the issue was crucial to the future of the Middle East.

Moussa threatened that Egypt would boycott multilateral talks on regional disarmament and security if Israel's nuclear program was not included in the agenda, Israel Television reported.

The matter came up despite an agreement reached earlier this year between Egypt and Israel to put the issue aside for at least a year.

Egypt has in the past protested Israel's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. □

Likud MK faces corruption trial

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Likud Knesset member is to be tried for allegedly misusing Jewish Agency credit cards when he was the organization's treasurer.

Meir Shetreet's parliamentary immunity was lifted Monday by the Knesset House Committee.

Shetreet supported the move.

His lawyer requested that the legal proceedings be expedited, to enable Shetreet to participate in internal Likud party primaries, Israel Radio reported.

Shetreet allegedly used Jewish Agency credit cards for personal expenses when he served as treasurer of the body.

Israel Radio reported that he spent up to \$6,000 on personal purchases, and wrote off a family vacation to the United States as a business trip, for which the agency paid \$8,000 in airfare.

Former Jewish Agency Chairman Simcha Dinitz resigned earlier this year amid charges that he had misused agency credit cards for personal use. □

Palestinians host Christmas gala in Bethlehem, as settlers protest*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Thousands of Palestinians and pilgrims celebrated Christmas in Bethlehem — the first ever coordinated by the Palestinian Authority — as Jewish demonstrators protested Israel's withdrawal from the town.

Israeli troops pulled out of the city on Dec. 21, and Israeli officials handed power over to the Palestinians in a brief ceremony.

In his traditional address to worshippers at Christmas eve mass, Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah issued a call for reconciliation, saying that "the beginning of Palestinian freedom is the beginning of reconciliation between Jews and Palestinians."

Alluding to Palestinian Christian concerns that the majority Muslim population in this city of 55,000 would dominate under self-rule, Sabbah urged Arab Muslims and Christians "to be brothers in the Holy Land."

Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat, who was guest of honor at the mass, earlier assured church officials that their rights would be preserved under autonomous rule.

Outside the church, thousands of Palestinians gathered in a joyous street festival, a sharp contrast to the subdued celebrations that prevailed during the years of the Palestinian uprising and the Israeli occupation in general. With Christmas decorations intermingled with Palestinian flags and pictures of Arafat, the event was as much a political Palestinian celebration as a religious holiday.

Meanwhile, about 1,000 Jewish demonstrators gathered on the outskirts of the city to protest the Israeli government's peace talks with the Palestinians. Leaders of the Yesha Council, representing settlers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, said the demonstration was the first by Israeli settlers in a month.

Rally organizers had originally hoped to hold the gathering outside Rachel's Tomb, but were prevented from doing so by Israeli security forces. □

Australia condemns Holocaust denial*By Jeremy Jones*

SYDNEY (JTA) — In response to a recent parliamentary review of its human rights record, Australia has affirmed its condemnation of Holocaust denial.

"The Australian government continues to condemn the thesis which denies the existence or extent of the Holocaust committed by the Nazis during World War II," said the response to the parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade's "Review of Australia's Efforts to Promote and Protect Human Rights."

"The government will continue to guard against this aspect of contemporary European racism gaining adherence in Australia."

The committee had made 63 recommendations, most of which were accepted by the government.

Other recommendations relating to the Australian Jewish population included the need for:

- additional anti-racism legislation;
- regular human rights reporting from abroad;
- the investigation of Iraq's human rights performance;
- and the monitoring of anti-Semitism in the former Soviet Union.

Diane Shteinman, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, said the Jewish group was "intimately involved" in formally submitting its ideas to the government.

"We are particularly grateful when recommendations which we advocated and supported have now been accepted by the federal government," she said, adding that "human rights are important to all Australians." □

Israel to cut grants for industry*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has decided to reduce grants for industrial investment.

During the next two years, the government will cap government grants at 30 percent of the total investment. Now, the government issues grants of up to 38 percent of the total investment.

The move follows a push by Finance Minister Avraham Shochat to reduce government grants for development projects in northern and central Israel.

Trade Minister Michael Harish had strongly opposed the idea, saying that any reduction would result in a drop in foreign and local investment.

Two weeks ago, the German automobile-giant Volkswagen threatened to pull out of a project to build a joint magnesium plant with the Dead Sea Works if the government scaled back its investment. As a result, no cuts were made.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres had suggested that the grants be reduced to 30 percent over two years, instead of one year, as initially recommended by the finance minister. □

Paratroopers sentenced to prison*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli army has handed out prison sentences to 31 paratroopers who briefly abandoned their post on the Lebanese border to protest what they claimed was harsh treatment by their commander.

An army spokesman said that the paratroopers were tried by their acting commander and were each sentenced to 56 days in prison.

The unit in which they served was also expected to be disbanded, Israel Radio reported.

The army said the soldiers had walked off the base because of what they described as "serious complaints" against their commander.

They returned minutes later, but the incident caused an uproar in the security community.

A reserve army lieutenant colonel told Israel Radio the maximum penalty under military law for abandoning a border post is 15 years in prison. □

Canada, Israel pursue free trade*By Gil Kezwer*

TORONTO (JTA) — Canada and Israel are planning a new round of talks aimed at reaching a free-trade agreement.

David Berger, Canada's ambassador to Israel, announced last week that the two sides plan to hold three days of negotiations starting Jan. 6 in Tel Aviv.

Berger said it is uncertain if a free-trade agreement would include agricultural as well as industrial products.

Israeli Agricultural Minister Ya'akov Tsur opposes a resumption of the talks, arguing that a free-trade accord with Canada would harm Israeli farmers without bringing them substantial benefits.

But Berger said an accord could be reached despite Tsur's opposition.

Appointed to the post in July, Berger is Canada's second Jewish ambassador to Israel. □

Black-Jewish tensions linger after attack at Harlem store

By Adam Dickter
New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK, Dec. 25 (JTA) — Even as police officials investigate the role of race-baiting protesters in the violence at Freddy's Fashion Mart, and as Jewish and black leaders struggle to find common ground in the aftermath, some of the protesters involved in the incident have yet to cool their rhetoric.

Morris Powell, chairman of the 125th Street Vendors Association, held a memorial service Dec. 17 at the charred ruins of the Jewish-owned store in Harlem for Roland Smith Jr., the man police said opened fire on customers and employees before setting Freddy's ablaze and shooting himself Dec. 8.

Seven people, in addition to Smith, died in the carnage.

Powell also led a group of protesters one day after the massacre to Bargain World, another Jewish-owned store on 125th Street.

Powell could not be reached for comment.

"I was astonished with the bad taste these folks have to protest while the bodies were still in the morgue," said Kenneth Stern, the American Jewish Committee's program specialist on anti-Semitism and extremism.

"These are ideologues and haters [who] see the world in that particular way because they're so invested in their hatred of white people and Jews."

Michael Meyers, the executive director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition, predicted, "The rhetoric is not going to calm down, not going to go away because these people are so mesmerized by their own rhetoric.

"They believe in their cause, and they believe there is a conspiracy among whites to deprive them of their status as blacks."

The Rev. Al Sharpton, a local activist whose role in the protests against Freddy's preceding the attack is being investigated by police and Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau, offered to meet with Jewish leaders for a dialogue.

"I don't think there's anything to be gained by such a dialogue," said Martin Begun, president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.

"What could come out of such a meeting, a different degree of anti-Semitism, that you can hate the Jews on Wednesdays only?"

Sharpton did not return calls.

For months, demonstrators had gathered outside Freddy's to protest the store owner's expansion plans that reportedly would have displaced a record store that is black-owned.

The landlord for both stores is the United House of Prayer, a predominantly black church.

'A statement against exclusion'

Meanwhile, Jewish and black leaders continued to push for cooperation last week, emphasizing that the views of Sharpton, Powell and their supporters were an aberration.

At a joint press conference Dec. 18, Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League and Hugh Price of the National Urban League outlined what they called an "agenda of work" to reduce racial tensions.

The agenda includes calling on political and community leaders to speak out against bigotry regardless of the religion and race of the perpetrator.

It also called for an intensification of community-based harmony programs; encouraging the prosecution of perpetrators of bias-motivated crimes using

penalty-enhancing hate crimes statutes and creation of multi-ethnic coalitions for public policy.

"Our standing together is a statement against exclusion, against separation," said Foxman, ADL's national director, at the offices of the National Urban League here.

Also joining the healing effort was New York Councilman Noach Dear from Brooklyn, who said he has reached out to Councilwoman C. Virginia Fields from Harlem to arrange an exchange program of business and community people.

"If we had done this after Crown Heights," said Dear, "maybe we wouldn't have seen Freddy's happening," referring to the violence between blacks and Jews in Brooklyn four years ago.

But even as black and Jewish leaders coalesce for joint damage control, some leaders are pushing to ensure that the anti-Semitic overtones of the Harlem conflagration are not lost in vague denunciations of violence and racism.

Many black leaders have hesitated to label the attack an anti-Semitic crime.

Shortly after the fire, Harlem business and community leaders quickly labeled the matter a landlord-tenant dispute that got out of hand.

"Before we have a process of healing, you first have to have an admission of guilt," said Rabbi Marc Schneier, chairman of the World Jewish Congress' Commission on Intergroup Relations.

"We have to spell it out, and we are awaiting this type of condemnation."

In response to a request by Rabbi Schneier, New York State Sen. David Paterson, who represents Harlem, wrote a letter stating his "abhorrence for the acts of anti-Semitism and bias that have been attributed to escalating the 125th Street tragedy."

The murders were "committed by a madman, whose act was surely anti-Semitic," Paterson wrote.

Not since the Crown Heights riots of 1991 has the Jewish community's introspection on its role in race relations taken on such intensity.

Marvin Schick, a Brooklyn-based consultant on Jewish affairs, called the plethora of black-Jewish dialogue and interaction programs that have sprung up since the riots "worthless," insisting that "in the programmatic sense, there is nothing that can be done to bring people together given the current climate of opinion."

'We'd be up in arms'

Michael Miller, director of the Jewish Community Relations Council, said that "more can be done by the leadership of the African-American community to root out anti-Semitism and racism in their ranks."

But he defended continued efforts on both the grassroots and official level to open dialogues between blacks and Jews.

"Extremists need to be condemned and marginalized through these dialogues," he said.

"The respective communities can sensitize their counterparts to the dangers of verbal violence and volatile rhetoric."

Meanwhile, some leaders have observed that overall Jewish reaction to the Harlem incident has not matched the intensity of other recent events involving violence against Jews.

"If this was Crown Heights, we'd be up in arms," said the ADL's Foxman, who suggested the full effect of the incident did not hit home since the murder victims weren't Jewish and the setting was not an area where Jews frequent.

"But the same ingredients are there: unchecked words of hate that eventually led to violence." □