



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The head of the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security service, resigned over the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The move came against a backdrop of severe criticism directed at the Shin Bet for allowing a series of security lapses that contributed to the assassination. [Page 3]

■ U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry said the United States would be willing to help guarantee an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement by putting U.S. troops on the Golan Heights. Perry was speaking after talks with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres in Jerusalem on U.S.-Israeli security cooperation.

■ A third bomb that Palestinian terrorists planned to use in the Beit Lid Junction suicide bombing a year ago was discovered near the site of the attack. The Islamic Jihad terrorist who planned the attack near Netanya directed Israeli security forces to the site where the explosive was hidden.

■ China reportedly will continue its nuclear cooperation with Iran. Israel and the United States have accused Iran of sponsoring "state terrorism" and said that Iran might use the technology obtained from China to develop nuclear arms.

■ Israel is seeking to deport an American citizen living in Jerusalem because he allegedly was involved in a plot to blow up the Al-Aksa Mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City. The suspect reportedly belonged to a group that seeks to rebuild the Jewish temple at its original location. [Page 3]

■ Israeli troops shot and wounded two Palestinian youths during clashes near Hebron. Soldiers on patrol chased the two youths, who pelted their jeep with stones, and opened fire after being surrounded by dozens of Palestinians.

■ The Palestinian businessman who provided the booby-trapped cellular phone that killed Hamas terrorist Yehiya Ayash had apparently believed that the phone was being used as a wiretap by the Israeli secret service. The whereabouts of Kamal Hamad were unknown.

A CUBAN REVIVAL [Part 2]

Communities reclaim property as local Jewish needs multiply

By Kenneth Bandler

HAVANA (JTA) — On a Saturday morning in early December, about a week before Chanukah, Sephardi Jews here gather to celebrate what they consider their own miracle.

For the first time in many years, Shabbat services are being held at the Sephardic Jewish Center.

The event marks the culmination of two years of negotiations to regain possession of the building.

Unable to maintain the building after the mass exodus of thousands of Cuban Jews after the 1959 revolution, most of the building was rented to cultural organizations.

Sephardi Jews were left with only a small chapel and an office.

"The situation was not easy, but being Jewish we had the courage to go forth in any situation," says Yosef Levy, president of the Sephardi center.

Unlike the experiences of Jewish communities in European Communist countries, communal property here was not seized by the government, Cuban Jewish leaders point out.

And, they say, the government is supportive of efforts to reclaim property for communal use.

Nonetheless, such efforts are difficult when the current occupants are reluctant to move or need time to find alternative quarters.

The recovery of the Sephardi center occurred room by room over two years.

Also last year, in Santiago de Cuba, a five-hour bus ride from Havana, the municipality returned the synagogue to the 100-member Jewish community.

The transfer relieved Rebecca Botton, president of the Santiago Jewish community, of the burden of hosting 50 people in her home every Shabbat for services.

Encouraged by these successful efforts at property restitution, Jewish communities across the country are pursuing claims as well.

Before the revolution, a large building adjacent to the Ashkenazi-dominated Patronato, Havana's main synagogue, housed a Jewish community center and day school.

It was rented to the Cuban Ministry of Culture in the 1960s and was sold in 1987.

Now, with the community forced to use the sanctuary's balcony for renewed Sunday school classes, the Jews here would like to see the synagogue's annex returned.

"I thought that before I die this part of the building would be recovered by the Jewish community," says Adela Dworin, vice president of the Jewish community here.

The rush to reclaim property is seen as a necessity as Jewish life is once again flourishing here.

The community, numbering about 2,000 people, has nearly tripled in size since the enactment of a 1991 law allowing Cubans to be members of the ruling Communist Party and participate in religious associations.

Some choosing aliyah

As the community rebuilds its institutions, one of the primary services functioning since 1991 is a pharmacy at the Patronato.

Created with the assistance of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the pharmacy dispenses medication to Jews weekly. It also cooperates with a Catholic-run pharmacy to provide some medications to non-Jews.

The pharmacy, however, could not stock medicine requiring refrigeration because the community could not afford to purchase a refrigerator.

Donations from participants in a recent JDC board mission here will be used to make that purchase.

As the community has expanded, the deepening of Jewish identity has led some Jews to choose aliyah. After a recent Kabbalat Shabbat service at the

Patronato, two young Cubans asked an American visitor questions about life in Israel.

The two Cubans were preparing to leave within weeks.

Emigration to Israel happens discreetly, and those who are familiar with Cuban aliyah will not discuss precise numbers.

However, one source estimated that as much as 20 percent of the community probably would leave for Israel in the near future.

Officials of the JDC, which has maintained a presence here during the past four years, will not comment on aliyah.

They stress that their work in Cuba, as in other countries around the world, focuses on community development and leadership training aimed at ensuring the future of Cuban Jewry.

Dworin is more forthright.

"Leaving is a national problem," she says, adding that a sizable minority of the general Cuban population wants to emigrate.

Economic hardship is one primary motivation.

Cubans have the highest literacy rate in Latin America, and in the Jewish population, professions such as doctors and engineers are dominant.

"In the 1960s, my father said, 'One day you will wait in line for a piece of bread,'" says Dworin.

"I did not believe him then, but now I have to do that."

In a country where even the mayor of the capital city admits that more than half of the buildings are in urgent need of repair, where public transportation is sporadic and overcrowded, where food and household supplies are rationed and where the average monthly salary is about \$12, the allure of the revolution's goals to realize a better society has faded.

Cubans openly joke about it.

"Cuba has the best ice cream in the world and the worst spoon" is one of the widely used idioms.

It refers to Copellio, the island's sole producer of ice cream, which is available in limited quantities and therefore difficult to eat.

For members of the Jewish community, however, there is one distinct exception to the ration list — access to kosher meat.

In a society where any meat is scarce, this accommodation is arranged by Castro's government, whose officials allow the country's one kosher butcher to select the cows to use for ritual slaughter, according to Jewish communal leaders.

Absence of anti-Semitism

However, because of limited supplies, not every family in the growing community can take advantage of this arrangement.

The list of those entitled to kosher meat is limited to only 140 families out of 400 in Havana, says Sephardi Jewish leader Levy.

Still, the kashrut accommodation as well as the openness to property restitution are seen as clear examples of the absence of anti-Semitism in this society.

The butcher, housed in a storefront with Jewish stars on its gates, is located in Old Havana amid the decaying buildings where many of the city's poorest live in severely overcrowded homes.

At one time, the area was populated by Jews, most of whom either emigrated or moved to such middle-class neighborhoods as Vedado, where the Patronato stands.

A short walk from the butcher is the country's oldest synagogue, Chevet Achim.

Founded in 1914 by a Turkish Jewish barkeeper —

the bar still stands in the front room at the top of the staircase leading to the synagogue — Chevet Achim was closed last summer because the roof leaks and the adjoining building is in danger of collapsing.

Because most Jews do not live in this area, the community has all but given up on the idea of restoring the building for daily use as a synagogue.

But community leaders are eager to make sure that Chevet Achim, like other communal properties being reclaimed, is preserved for future generations.

"Inside these walls, the Sephardic Jews lived the best years of their lives," says Levy, expressing the hope that the building would be transformed into a museum of Jewish life in Cuba.

Community leaders, as well as JDC officials, are confident that the majority of Cuban Jews will remain, and they are looking ahead to continue the work of rebuilding and organizing Cuban Jewry.

"They started from scratch and are really building up a society in every sense of the word," says Ambassador Milton Wolf, president of the JDC, who is a former U.S. envoy to Austria.

"This community that was almost dying is alive and strong in its potential," says Jorge Dinier, who recently completed a two-year posting here as the coordinator of JDC programs in Cuba.

During the past four years, Cuban Jewry has experienced a "change from a culture of survival to a culture of community," he says.

Plans are under way to reinforce the spirit of community by connecting all Cuba's Jewish communities via an electronic information-sharing network.

Such technology, Dinier says, would be used to connect Cuban Jews with other Jewish communities around the world. □

Pope to beatify German priest who denounced Nazis, WJC says

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Pope John Paul II said last week that he would announce the beatification of an anti-Nazi German priest during a summer visit to Germany, according to the World Jewish Congress.

The Rev. Bernhard Lichtenberg, who died in 1943 en route to Dachau, would denounce the Nazis from his Berlin pulpit and would close his service with a prayer for the persecuted Jews.

Beatification is a step toward sainthood.

Lichtenberg is a "true hero of the Holocaust," said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJC.

Lichtenberg was an "exception to the silence" of the Vatican during the World War II period, Steinberg said.

As early as 1935, Lichtenberg protested against the atrocities in the concentration camps.

In 1942, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

After serving his time, Lichtenberg, who was 68 years old, was moved to Dachau, but died on the way.

Leon Klenicki, the director of international affairs at the Anti-Defamation League, pointed to the Vatican's controversial past choices for sainthood.

The Vatican has canonized Polish priest Maximilian Kolbe, who volunteered to die at Auschwitz so another man could live. Kolbe had edited an anti-Semitic magazine.

Another controversial choice was Edith Stein, a Jewish convert who became a nun and died during the war.

Lichtenberg "helped the Jews" and "died like a hero," Klenicki said. □

Shin Bet head resigns in wake of shakeup after Rabin killing

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In a shakeup of Israel's security establishment in the wake of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the head of the Shin Bet resigned this week.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres accepted the resignation of the head of Israel's domestic security service on Monday, after asking him a day earlier to reconsider his request to step down.

The move came against a backdrop of severe criticism directed at the Shin Bet for allowing a series of security lapses that contributed to the Nov. 4 assassination of Rabin after a peace rally in Tel Aviv.

The decision of the Shin Bet head — who for security reasons is identified only as "Kaf," the first Hebrew letter of his name — was dramatic, but not unexpected.

Along with five other Shin Bet officials, he had recently received a warning letter from the state commission of inquiry investigating the assassination that any testimony he gave before the panel could be used against him.

Immediately after Rabin's assassination, the Shin Bet head asked to resign.

However, at the time, Peres would not accept the request.

In the letter he submitted after the assassination, Kaf reportedly said he believed that the security service bore most of the weight for the failures that led to Rabin's murder, adding that his resignation was therefore called for.

But Peres refused the request, saying that the security service still had a great many challenges before it, not the least of which was the ongoing battle against Islamic terror.

Peres also stressed the security service's role in ensuring that the political process move forward in the wake of the assassination.

The Shin Bet head raised the issue two more times before presenting another request Sunday to the prime minister to be released from his duties, according to Israel Radio.

Peres rejected the latest request, asking him to reconsider.

But on Monday, the Shin Bet head said his decision was final, and the prime minister accepted it.

Time of recent successes

Israel Radio quoted excerpts from the Shin Bet head's letter of resignation, in which he said he felt that he was leaving the service at a time when the agency was "ready to take on all tasks it is assigned."

In accepting the resignation, Peres praised the work the security service head had done since taking on the post last March.

"It is with much regret and a heavy heart that I received your letter" of resignation, the prime minister wrote.

Although Kaf's decision to resign was directly connected to Rabin's assassination, some commentators noted how it came at a time of recent successes in Israel's battle against Islamic terror.

Israel has refused to comment on whether it was responsible for the death last Friday of Hamas terrorist Yehiya Ayash in the Gaza Strip.

But the general assessment has been that Israeli security operatives had been involved.

It was also reported this week that the security service had arrested the Islamic Jihad terrorist who planned

the January 1995 suicide bombing at the Beit Lid intersection near Netanya in which 21 people, most of them soldiers, were killed while waiting for buses.

Knesset members from across the political spectrum expressed regret over the resignation.

But the Knesset members said it was the right thing to do in light of the circumstances surrounding Rabin's assassination.

"I must say in his praise, that with great courage, he took responsibility for all that happened," Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban told Israel Radio.

Internal Security Minister Moshe Shahal said the security service was losing a talented and a sensitive leader.

He called for the immediate appointment of a replacement and added the hope that the current head would remain in his post until one is found.

Israel Television reported that Peres would begin seeking a replacement immediately.

In the wake of Rabin's assassination, and the security lapses that made it possible, a debate has already been raging over whether the next Shin Bet head should come from the within the ranks of the service.

One of the names recently floated was Ami Ayalon, who retired as commander of the Israeli navy last week.

Ayalon had previously turned down an offer to become the security service head.

Israel Television reported that there was the possibility of bringing back Kaf's predecessor, Ya'acov Perry, who served in the post for seven years.

Kaf, 45, was born in Jerusalem.

He is a fifth generation Israeli and a father of three.

He joined the security service in 1970.

He wrote a paper on the threat of Jewish extremism, and during his career uncovered the right-wing Jewish underground.

Ironically, the self-confessed assassin of Rabin, Yigal Amir, was a Jewish extremist of the sort that Kaf wrote about during his career with the Shin Bet. □

Israel may deport American linked to mosque bomb plot

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's internal security service has requested that a U.S. citizen living in Jerusalem be deported because he was involved in a plot to blow up a mosque here.

The American, identified as 35-year-old David Ben-Ariel of Ohio, was reportedly detained for questioning last week by Shin Bet officials.

He was released several hours later, but his passport was confiscated and he was ordered to report regularly to police.

News reports indicated that Ben-Ariel — and several others who remained at large — allegedly planned to blow up the Al-Aksa Mosque on the Temple Mount complex in Jerusalem's Old City.

Ben-Ariel strongly denied the allegations and said he was being unfairly treated.

Security sources reportedly preferred that he be deported, and not brought to trial because they lacked hard evidence to convict him.

Ben-Ariel reportedly belonged to the Temple Mount Faithful, a group that seeks to rebuild the Jewish temple at its original location, where two mosques, including Al-Aksa, stand.

Ben-Ariel is said to have arrived in Israel about nine months ago and recently applied for citizenship. □

NEWS FOR ON-LINE JEWS

Jewish.Community, new site on America Online, casts wide net

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Log onto the new Jewish.Community site on America Online and a synthesized male voice welcomes you with a breathy "Shalom."

It seems a fitting way to enter the Jewish.Community site, which is trying hard to be warm and welcoming in a medium that is inherently impersonal.

In existence since mid-December, the Jewish.Community cybersite is attracting a remarkable number of Jews to its varied offerings on Jewish culture, tradition, religion, cooking and lifestyles.

It seems to be drawing Jews of varied interests and ideologies, who — in the site's third week of existence — are logging on for a total of more than 500 hours a day.

"We're doing damn well after two weeks," Marc Klein, publisher of the new venture, said in an interview from his office at the Jewish Bulletin of Northern California, the San Francisco area weekly at which he is editor and publisher.

Only subscribers to America Online can access Jewish.Community, but Klein estimated that about 10 percent of AOL's 4.5 million subscribers are Jewish.

He wants Jewish.Community to be "the central address" for the on-line Jewish community, he said, adding that the project does a good job of casting a wide net.

It offers specialized bulletin board discussion groups for Jewish singles, youths and parents; Reform Jews; Orthodox Jews; gay, lesbian and bisexual Jews; Jews in "local communities"; and people who work in Jewish education, Jewish federations or Jewish journalism. Discussion groups also exist for rabbis and cantors.

And there are separate discussions dedicated to news of particular Jewish interest.

With photos and text, the site also offers tours of Jewish museums, such as the Museum of the Diaspora, in Ramat Aviv, Israel.

Jewish.Community is also offering Jewish virtual courses, similar to the kind someone could find in synagogue adult education.

After two weeks, nearly 400 people had downloaded the first course, an introduction to Judaism that is taught by Rabbi Danny Horowitz, the spiritual leader of a Conservative synagogue in Prairie Village, Kan.

Girl has moniker 'Moon Petal'

Within the Jewish youth area, a discussion of interdating elicited posts from teens who made clear their struggle with the issue.

A girl with the on-line moniker "Moon Petal" wrote, "I recently started dating a guy. He is not a Jew and from a German background. His father was born and raised in Germany and has German symbols up all over his house. Do I have a right to feel uncomfortable?"

Dan Horowitz wrote that "a lot of the girls in my school are such japs it's hard to find someone Jewish. Any Jewish girls from the Philadelphia suburbs interested in a relationship with a 17-year old Jewish guy? E-mail me!"

News stories from Reuters and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency are available, as are articles from several Jewish weekly newspapers from across the United States and a handful of magazines, including The Jerusalem Report, Hadassah, Lilith and Moment.

A feature called "This Day" mentions the Jewish holiday on that date, if there is one, a historical tidbit and a Jewish trivia question.

A survey queries visitors each week.

The first survey of whether religious symbols

should be permitted on public property got 605 responses. Slightly more than half — 53 percent — said they should not. The rest thought they should.

The second survey question, on whether Israel should turn the Golan over to Syria as part of peace negotiations, prompted a heated debate from respondents.

Some wrote of the need to make painful concessions for peace.

Many wrote of their love for the Golan, after having hiked or camped there during trips to Israel.

The singles real-time chat groups are less heated — politically, anyway. On one a woman posted only this line: "Hi! I'm in Chicago and I wear a 38D."

Most of the singles chat is more sedate. One, ostensibly for 20-somethings from the Midwest, included 18 participants from Southern California to Atlanta.

Each night of the week, the singles chat is tailored to people from different areas of the country and different age groups.

As in any singles bar, there are spurts of small talk that sometimes do not get much past the weather and a few forays into Jewish geography.

The site wants to be all things to all people. To be a place where Jews of every ideological and religious stripe can feel comfortable expressing themselves is a good goal.

But doing all things well for all people is difficult to achieve and, in so doing, Jewish.Community is not provocative. It is trying to serve the Jewish organizational establishment the same way that it serves Joe Jew out in cyberspace. So far, most of the discussion groups designated for a range of disparate Jewish groups, from the Jewish Fund for Justice to the Jewish War Veterans, have no messages.

Still, Jewish.Community is casting the wide net for which many Jews, particularly those who are not otherwise connected to Jewish life, seem to be grateful.

One visitor to the site sent Klein and his staff a message: "Thank you, thank you, thank you. Just as I am struggling with my Jewish identity, you came along and offered this wonderful opportunity for information and contact with others."

Klein said, "This is something Jews have needed and we never realized just how much, but the e-mail is telling us. We feel we've done a real mitzvah." □

3 Israelis killed in mine blast

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Three Israelis were killed and one moderately injured last Friday when their jeep ran over and detonated a land mine in the Sinai.

The victims were all relatives or friends of the Nimrodi family, known for its ownership of the Israeli daily Ma'ariv and other business enterprises.

A group of 13 Israelis had flown down to Sharm el-Sheik, where they rented four jeeps for a desert outing in the dunes of the Sinai.

Shortly after leaving the main road, one of the jeeps drove over an old land mine and detonated it.

The dead were identified as Ruth Weissberg-Nimrodi, 35; Zvi Shayevitch, 47; and Ariella Korman, 38. Korman's husband, Yohanan Korman, was injured in the explosion.

The charge, apparently from a minefield laid by the Egyptians before the 1967 Six-Day War, had apparently been washed into the popular jeep route during flooding. Mines strewn by both Egyptian and Israeli forces remain in the area. Popular jeep routes skirt the mapped fields.

Military experts have said unexploded mines from earlier conflicts represent one of the greatest threats to civilian populations around the world. □