



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Underlying the violent confrontation between Ethiopian Israelis and Jerusalem police is deep anger over what the Ethiopian community views as a pattern of government discrimination. Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres issued an apology to Israel's Ethiopian community, calling the policy to destroy its blood donations for fear of AIDS "stupid" and "irresponsible." [Page 1]

■ The U.S. Justice Department may require Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan to register as a lobbyist for Libya. During a meeting last week in Tripoli, Farrakhan secured a pledge from Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi to spend up to \$1 billion to increase the influence of American minorities in U.S. elections.

■ First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton in a White House ceremony honored 30 nongovernmental organizations, including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for providing humanitarian relief in the former Yugoslavia.

■ U.S. Rep. Kweisi Mfume (D-Md.), president-elect of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Peter Edelman, counselor to the secretary of Health and Human Services, received the Israeli Embassy's 12th annual Civil Rights Leadership Award commemorating Martin Luther King Jr.

■ As Israeli and Syrian negotiators resumed peace talks at the Wye Plantation in eastern Maryland, Israeli sources said this round would determine the chances for making real progress. In an attempt to speed up the pace of the talks, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher was planning to intervene in the current talks for a second time.

■ The U.N. Security Council unanimously approved a six-month renewal of the peacekeeping force in Lebanon. The U.N. Interim Force was dispatched to southern Lebanon after Israel's 1978 incursion.

■ The Israel Defense Force said a car bomb detonated near an Israeli-backed militia post in southern Lebanon had been planted by terrorists.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Ethiopian anger over blood bank reveals community's deep agony

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Although Israelis, including many in the Ethiopian community, were shocked by the intensity of Sunday's violent confrontations between Ethiopian Jews and Jerusalem police, perhaps they should not have been.

For more than a decade, after Israel airlifted tens of thousands of Jews from famine-ridden Ethiopia from 1984 to 1985 and again in 1991, community leaders have been complaining about inferior housing, jobs and education.

"If Israelis don't know about our problems, they haven't been listening," Adiso Masala, one of the community's most vocal activists, said during Sunday's rally outside the Prime Minister's Office.

Those problems — which include what Ethiopian community leaders consider a longstanding pattern of discrimination by Israeli government authorities — have long been simmering.

But revelations last week regarding how Ethiopian blood donations were routinely being handled brought emotions to the boiling point.

Leaders of Israel's Ethiopian community organized the demonstration after the Israeli daily Ma'ariv revealed that Magen David Adom, which operates the country's nationwide blood bank, routinely discards blood donated by Ethiopian olim out of fear that the blood is contaminated with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Israeli Health Minister Dr. Ephraim Sneh said last week that his ministry would continue its policy on blood donations from high-risk groups in order to protect public health.

According to the ministry, Ethiopians are 50 times more likely to be HIV carriers than other Israelis. Of the 60,000 olim from Ethiopia — a country where AIDS is widespread — 520 have been identified as HIV positive, according to the ministry.

"The blood bank has the right to discard blood if necessary, and all countries screen high-risk groups," said Dr. Shlomo Maayan, an AIDS researcher at Hadassah Hospital.

"The difference is that while other Israelis, including homosexuals and those who have had hepatitis or malaria, are given a questionnaire and asked to pre-screen themselves, Ethiopians have not been given that opportunity," he said.

"This is extremely condescending and patronizing," he said. "Israelis must stop patronizing Ethiopians."

Although the Ethiopian community's elders dealt with community problems back in the towns and villages of Ethiopia, in Israel it is the young people — educated in Israel and fluent in Hebrew — who organize rallies and address Knesset members.

During Sunday's demonstration, which lasted most of the day, some of the 10,000 demonstrators clashed with scores of Israeli police armed with riot gear. At least 50 Ethiopians and police were injured in the demonstrations. Two police officers were severely injured when stones and other objects were thrown at them.

Critical of decision to use water cannons, tear gas

Although rally organizers and police blamed each other for the escalation of tensions, many eyewitnesses were critical of the police department's decision to bring in water cannons and tear gas.

Several demonstrators, many of them elderly, as well as dozens of police officers, became ill when the wind changed direction and blew clouds of tear gas directly over them.

In a statement, a Jerusalem police spokesman defended police actions, saying that far more demonstrators had turned out than the 1,000 authorized in the original permit. The spokesman indicated that even stronger measures than water cannons and tear gas were employed.

"In order to maintain the integrity of the perimeter around the Prime Minister's Office, a limited number of rubber bullets were fired along with three shock grenades," the statement said. "These actions were taken as a

last resort to prevent the mob from actually entering the Prime Minister's Office."

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres apologized for the events leading up to Sunday's demonstration. "I don't think that what has happened was a matter of a policy, but of a mistake," he said, referring to the way Ethiopian blood donations were handled.

"I regret" the recent developments, he said, adding that Israel's Ethiopians "were hurt, they were insulted."

During Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting, Peres invited Ethiopian community leaders into his office to discuss their grievances.

Peres, Sneh and Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban promised to form a committee to examine the Ethiopians' demands.

While Ethiopian leaders initially called the demonstration to protest the national blood bank's practice of discarding blood donated by Ethiopians, the violence that ensued was spurred by something far deeper.

According to Micha Odenheimer, director of the Israeli Association of Ethiopian Jews, this week's demonstration "was years in the making. It was an expression of the Ethiopians' outrage that, over the years, they have not really been absorbed into Israeli society."

The community "feels pushed into the margin of Israeli society," Odenheimer said.

"Despite some efforts by the government," he said, "many Ethiopian children still learn in largely segregated classrooms. Unemployment is high, and Ethiopians are the poorest ethnic group in Israel today."

Odenheimer warned that unless something is done quickly to reverse these negative trends, "Ethiopian Jews will become a permanent black underclass. We need to stop the cycle of poverty, and that involves providing the children with a good education."

In any discussion with Ethiopian activists, their first concern tends to be education.

Fellow students from 'problem homes'

For many years, at least two-thirds of Ethiopians in primary school attended segregated "absorption classes."

An even larger percentage of teen-agers were — and still are — sent to religious boarding schools, where many of the other students are from "problem homes."

Although no one denies that the boarding schools were a good stopgap measure, because many youngsters arrived in Israel without their parents, Odenheimer said both the boarding schools and segregated classes actually hurt the very children they were supposed to help.

"Segregating kids prevents them from integrating, and the level of education tends to be lower," he said. "Sending teen-agers away from home hurts the fabric of the family and the parents eventually lose their authority over their children."

After numerous demonstrations by Masala and other Ethiopian activists, the government decided to change the policy on education about three years ago.

The Ministry of Absorption, which gradually assumed responsibility for absorbing new immigrants from the Jewish Agency for Israel in the early 1990s, called on the government to mainstream schoolchildren.

Preferring to see the cup half full rather than half empty, Amnon Be'eri, spokesman for the Ministry of Absorption, said, "I wouldn't say there haven't been problems or mistakes, but we are doing the best we can."

As proof, Be'eri points to the housing plan for Ethiopian immigrants. Unlike other immigrant groups, which receive discounts on home mortgages, Ethiopian families are entitled to grants that cover 85 percent of the cost of an apartment, up to \$110,000.

Thanks to this measure, the vast majority of Ethiopians have been able to move out of caravan parks and into permanent housing.

Ethiopian activists do not deny that the government is trying, but they regard the efforts as too little, too late.

"The government is making an effort, but it hasn't been systematic enough or serious enough," said Masala.

"About a year ago, the Ministry of Education created a task force to find solutions to these problems, to help the children advance and give them the help they need," he said. "Instead of funding the task force's suggestions, the government gave only \$5 million of the \$18 million needed to see the project through."

The feeling runs deep among Ethiopian immigrants that they are victims of discrimination in Israel.

"I'm here today because the government blood bank doesn't want my blood, and this has hurt me personally," said Estie Hananya, a 15-year-old from Rishon Lezion, who was among the protesters Sunday.

"Today they don't want my blood because I am black. Tomorrow they may not want my brain. People have called me a 'kushit,' a nigger."

Trying to avoid the tear gas soldiers were discharging into the air, Hananya added, "We came here because we are Jews and we had a dream. A lot of people died in the Sudan on their way to Israel. We thought we would be welcome. The decision not to use our blood, to give us inferior education — I call this racism." □

Confessed assassin's new lawyer considers manslaughter defense

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A second attorney, appointed to defend Yigal Amir on charges of assassinating Yitzhak Rabin, indicated this week that he is considering a manslaughter defense for his client.

Avraham Pachter, a former deputy district attorney in Tel Aviv, was appointed Monday by the court to represent Amir after one of Amir's lawyers, Mordechai Ofri, announced a day earlier that he would resign from the case.

Pachter told Israel Radio that Amir's statements in court and to investigators would indicate a manslaughter plea, not murder.

Amir previously said in court that he had intended only to paralyze Rabin in order to force him out of the political arena.

"There was no intent to kill," Pachter said.

Amir, who admitted in court that he had shot Rabin after a Nov. 4 peace rally in Tel Aviv, has not entered a formal plea, even though the court has considered his remarks to be a plea of not guilty. The 25-year-old religious Jew also said in court he believed that Rabin's peace policy put Israelis in greater danger of Palestinian attacks.

After the accused's other lawyer, American immigrant Jonathan Goldberg, displayed difficulty with his knowledge of the Hebrew language, the court ordered that a second lawyer be appointed for Amir after Ofri withdrew. Ofri said his resignation was a result of his and Goldberg's differences over defense strategies.

Amir conducted most of the defense questioning Sunday and Monday, while Goldberg watched. Also Monday, the deliberations included a re-enactment by Amir of the Rabin assassination. Amir, who was wearing a sweat shirt, showed how he had pointed his gun at Rabin, fired the pistol and then was overpowered by a police officer, who wrestled him to the ground.

Appearing for the prosecution Monday was Yoram Rubin, one of Rabin's security guards, who was wounded in the arm in the shooting. □

**After four-month delay,
Israel gets U.S. foreign aid***By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Israel will finally receive its \$3 billion 1996 foreign aid package from the United States, albeit four months late and at a cost of more than \$25 million to the Jewish state.

A compromise during the debate last week on a stopgap spending measure designed to avert a third federal government shutdown freed the \$12.1 billion foreign aid bill from legislative limbo.

Israel received about 12 percent of its aid in two previous continuing resolutions passed to keep the American government functioning during the federal budget impasse.

The measure, known formally as the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, was held hostage for almost six months while lawmakers sparred over pro-life provisions that were passed by the House and rejected by the Senate.

House and Senate negotiators struck a compromise last week and folded the entire package, including \$2.1 billion for Egypt and \$75 million for the Palestinian Authority, into the continuing resolution signed last Friday night by President Clinton.

Steven Grossman, president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, said he welcomed the bill's passage "because so many aspects of the peace process are inextricably linked to this bill."

In addition, the measure has a "record number of pro-Israel provisions," he said, citing as an example a provision that gives Israel discounted prices on American goods.

Since the early 1980s, Israel has received its foreign aid Oct. 1, at the start of the American fiscal year. Through the same "early disbursement" procedures, Israel will receive its money within 30 days.

But the delay has cost Israel an estimated \$6 million a month.

The Jewish state has dispensed money from its own coffers from October 1995 to February 1996 to repay foreign debts customarily paid by using the \$1.2 billion in U.S. economic aid.

An additional \$1.8 billion in military aid comes back to the United States to pay for new hardware, maintenance and research.

In addition, Israel began its own fiscal year Jan. 1, showing a higher budget deficit because the aid had not arrived.

'Best deal we could get'

Fears that the imbalance would impact Israel's standing on Wall Street and in the international financial community did not play out.

After an initial push to get the measure passed by the start of the year, Israeli officials and pro-Israel activists took a low-key approach waiting for Congress to strike a compromise on the pro-life language.

Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), who tried in vain to prod Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) to remove the pro-life language from the measure, hailed the bill's passage but decried the measure's "awful pro-life provisions."

"This is the best deal we could hope to get," she said.

In the end, Congress agreed to withhold funds until the summer to overseas population control programs that include abortion counseling.

They would then receive only 65 percent of the funding they were slated to receive.

The measure also includes an 18-month extension of the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act, which allows U.S. aid to flow to the Palestinian Authority and diplomatic contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

While the measure beefs up some requirements the Palestinians must meet to receive American aid, some hardline Jewish activists said the provisions do not go far enough.

Instead of requiring the Palestine National Council to amend its covenant, which calls for Israel's destruction, the measure requires that the PLO "submit" the changes to the PNC.

In addition, the newly elected Palestinian Council — the legislative body for the self-rule areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip — must "disavow" and "nullify" the covenant if the PNC has not done so.

The requirements fall short of Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres' charge linking final-status talks with amending the covenant.

"This leaves a very large loophole which would allow [Palestinian leader Yasser] Arafat to not change the covenant and continue to receive American taxpayer dollars," said Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America.

With this in mind, Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) last week began to gather lawmakers' signatures on a letter to Arafat calling on the Palestinian leader to work toward amending the covenant.

"It is inconceivable that the harsh anti-Israeli language contained in the covenant remains in effect at the very time that you are negotiating with the government of Israel and attempting to live together in peace," the letter states.

According to agreements with Israel, the PNC has 60 days after the newly elected Palestinian Council takes office to amend the covenant.

The council is expected to begin functioning after the end of the monthlong Muslim festival of Ramadan, which ends in late February.

Although the measure may explicitly require the PNC to amend the covenant, AIPAC's Grossman said that "there is absolutely no doubt that there will be total unanimity in AIPAC, the Jewish community, Congress, the administration and Israel that failure to abrogate the covenant will be cause for a cessation of continued funding to the Palestinian Authority." □

Israeli-Syrian talks plod along*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Israeli and Syrian negotiators this week resumed talks in Maryland after a weekend break, Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak downplayed the chances for a serious breakthrough in the current round of negotiations.

Speaking to reporters in Jerusalem, Barak said the recent discussions had seen "modest progress" in atmosphere but no movement on issues of substance.

In an attempt to speed up the pace of the talks, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher was planning to intervene for a second time.

Barak also said it was too early for the United States to put forward any proposals on security arrangements to bridge gaps between the two sides.

The current round of talks, which are taking place with the participation of Israeli and Syrian military experts, are focusing on security issues.

Last week, Barak was criticized by colleagues in Israel who charged him with putting too pessimistic a spin on the state of the negotiations when discussing them during a trip to New York. □

Leah Rabin, on U.S. visit, criticizes political opponents

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Twelve weeks after the assassination of her husband, Leah Rabin proved in public appearances here over the weekend that time has not diminished her grief.

Nor has time lessened her bitterness toward the political and religious opponents she holds responsible for the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Speaking in a trembling voice at a dinner Saturday night hosted by the Friends of Sheba Medical Center in Israel, Rabin said the personal vacuum left by her husband's murder "is constantly growing."

She recalled that as she departed the Nov. 4 peace rally in Tel Aviv, minutes before her husband's assassination, a bystander called out, "Leah, take good care of him."

Rabin added sadly, "I guess I didn't take good care of him."

With obvious anger, Rabin recalled the weekly street demonstrations outside her home, with people shouting at the "traitor" Rabin and promising to give him "a trial, a Nuremberg trial."

She described confessed assassin Yigal Amir as "a Jew who defines himself as a God-lover."

Wherever she has gone in the last two months, Rabin said, "I have found an immense need to commemorate Yitzhak." Rabin, who serves as international president of Friends of Sheba Medical Center, received the organization's first Yitzhak Rabin Award. Two projects at the hospital, the largest in the Middle East, were announced at the dinner, both honoring the late prime minister.

One is the construction of an International Wall of Peace. The other is the establishment of a rehabilitation center with pediatric, geriatric and psychiatric facilities.

After Rabin visited the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance on Sunday, Rabbi Marvin Hier, the center's dean, said the center's film division hoped to produce a documentary on the life of Yitzhak Rabin.

Another possible project is the creation of a Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem, focusing on the 21st century and whether Jews can live peacefully with each other in the absence of an external enemy. □

Israeli court rejects petition to lift Netanyahu's immunity

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's High Court of Justice this week rejected a petition to remove Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu's parliamentary immunity so that he could face charges of endangering national security.

The petition was submitted by Meretz Knesset member Ran Cohen, who sought to bring the charges after Netanyahu brought before the Knesset a classified Israeli army document in June.

The document detailed security arrangements with Syria that would form the basis of a peace agreement between the two countries. The document also seemed to back away from Israel's demand to maintain an early-warning station on the Golan Heights and also presumed a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan as part of a peace agreement with Syria.

Netanyahu claimed before the Knesset that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had ordered the army to prepare the document to be used in discussions with Syria.

Rabin at first denied all knowledge of the document; in subsequent days, he termed it a "stolen document."

Netanyahu said the document proved that the Rabin government was willing to compromise Israel's security needs to reach a peace agreement with Damascus.

This week, the court ruled that Netanyahu's actions were sheltered by his parliamentary immunity. But at the same time, the court instructed Minister of Internal Security Moshe Shahal and Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair to explain why it had not ordered an inquiry to determine how the document was leaked to Netanyahu.

Cohen said he was satisfied with Sunday's court ruling.

"The fact that the court ordered the attorney general to investigate how such a document got into a politician's hands is an achievement in itself," he told Israel Radio. □

Wannsee exhibit in 4th year

By Miriam Widman

BERLIN (JTA) — Four years since the opening of a exhibit at the Wannsee Conference House, about 184,000 visitors have seen a presentation on the Nazis' plans for the extermination of the Jews.

At the January 1942 Nazi conference, the logistics for killing Europe's Jews were discussed. The conference was held at what was then the central office of Interpol.

At a recent news conference marking the anniversary of the exhibit, Gerhard Schoenberner, director of the house, said 20 percent of those who visited were not German.

He added that most of the foreign visitors were from the United States, Israel and Western Europe.

After much controversy with the local Berlin government, which initially wanted to house the exhibition elsewhere, the house was opened in January 1992, 50 years after the conference.

Last year, 310 groups participated in study groups and seminars held at the house. □

Israel, India pen trade agreement

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel and India have signed a trade agreement aimed at significantly boosting commerce between the two countries.

At a ceremony this week in New Delhi, Israeli Finance Minister Avraham Shochat initialed an agreement granting India most-favored nation trading status.

The same day in Jerusalem, Israeli Trade and Industry Minister Michael Harish signed cooperation agreements with his Indian counterpart.

Since diplomatic ties were established in 1991, trade has grown between the two countries.

Israeli exports to India last year totaled some \$300 million dollars, while imports were about \$125 million. □

Canada accuses man, 89, of war crimes

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO (JTA) — A blind 89-year-old resident of Hope, British Columbia, has been accused of war crimes by Canada's Justice Department.

A deportation hearing will be held for Antanas Kenstavicius, who was named in documents filed with the Immigration and Refugee Board, spokesman Paul Hardy said this week.

Canada claims that Kenstavicius gained permanent-resident status here through misrepresentation.

The specifics of the allegation against the Lithuanian-born Kenstavicius will not be made public until the board holds an inquiry, Hardy said. □