

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The Tel Aviv District Court convicted Yigal Amir of murdering Yitzhak Rabin and sentenced him to life in prison. The court also said Amir had cynically misused Jewish law to justify his actions. [Page 3]

■ Retired Gen. Yitzhak Mordechai, a political newcomer, finished first in the Likud primaries. He was followed by hardliner Ariel Sharon, a former army chief and defense minister. [Page 4]

■ The issue of intermarriage took center stage at the 107th annual convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. [Page 1]

■ Three Saudis reportedly protesting Israel's continued closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip hijacked an EgyptAir plane to Libya. Arab media said the three were sending a message from God to President Clinton and other leaders "on lifting the siege on the Palestinians."

■ Officials from more than 20 countries will gather Thursday in Washington for two days of meetings to follow up on the March 13 Sharm el-Sheik anti-terrorism summit. The meeting is expected to focus on security measures to save the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

■ Buckingham Palace admitted that Queen Elizabeth II had blundered by not mentioning how Polish Jews suffered in World War II in her speech to Polish lawmakers. When plans for her visit were announced last week, British Jews had been angered that she would not be laying a wreath at the Auschwitz death camp.

■ Israel and China signed an agreement for more Israeli firms to participate in Chinese development projects. [Page 4]

■ The World Jewish Congress sent an alert to Jewish communities worldwide that Athens' Hellenikon Airport was cited by the Federal Aviation Administration for not meeting international security standards. The FAA advised Greek officials months ago that there were serious problems at the airport, according to WJC Executive Director Elan Steinberg.

Performing interfaith weddings tops the agenda for Reform rabbis

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

PHILADELPHIA (JTA) — Nowhere are the Reform movement's tensions between cohesiveness and autonomy, between boundaries and inclusiveness and between authenticity and modernity more apparent than in the debate now taking place about intermarriage.

At the 107th annual convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, held this week, discussion of intermarriage occupied center stage.

The conversation among the approximately 500 Reform rabbis gathered at a hotel here was honest and often painful, a discussion that reflected just how central the issue is in the life of the Reform movement today.

It quickly became clear that many other related policy positions adopted by the movement, particularly patrilineal descent and an emphasis on inclusion in synagogue life of interfaith families, have so changed Reform Jewish practice that there is no longer a clear sense of where Reform Judaism stands on the issue of intermarriage.

Patrilineal descent, adopted by the movement in 1983, accepts individuals as Jewish if either their mother or father is Jewish and they are given a Jewish education.

In an effort to clear away the confusion and to refocus Reform Jewry on the tenets central to Judaism, including Torah and mitzvot, which a new generation of leaders views as vital, the movement has begun a new discussion on the implications of intermarriage.

"We have not thought about resolutions, about changes [in our policy], but about talking with each other," Rabbi Simeon Maslin, president of the CCAR, said in remarks introducing the convention's second plenary session, which was devoted to intermarriage.

In his presidential address, Maslin, who opposes interfaith officiation, called on his colleagues to adopt and live by "community standards" and to diminish the "anarchy" in their practices "that is all too often based on ignorance and convenience."

The rabbinical organization brought together for the first time congregants and rabbis to address the issue in a major session, which included two Reform temple members and two rabbis.

"Our people need boundaries," said Rabbi Debra Hachen, who does not, as a rule, officiate at interfaith weddings. She leads Congregation B'nai Shalom in Westborough, Mass.

Rabbi Harry Danziger of Temple Israel in Memphis disagreed. "Having changed so much of the context, nonofficiation sends a confusing message," he said.

"Intentional or not, in our context it says, 'We welcome your marriage, but not your wedding.'"

Reform rabbinate remains deeply divided

The movement intends to replicate the joint discussion at the regional level, said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, incoming president of the movement's congregational arm, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Although the Reform rabbinical association passed a resolution in 1973 formally discouraging officiation at interfaith marriages, the Reform rabbinate remains deeply divided over the issue.

Nearly half — 48 percent — said in a recent survey they are willing to officiate at intermarriages in at least some circumstances. The other 52 percent said they are not willing, though most would refer a couple to a colleague who did officiate.

In some cities, such as Boston, it is nearly impossible to find a Reform rabbi willing to officiate at an interfaith wedding.

In others, mostly outside of the Northeast, it is easy.

Although there are a number of Reform clergy who hire themselves out solely to perform intermarriages, for which they collect sums as high as \$1,500, for the overwhelming majority of Reform rabbis, the issue of whether to officiate is a serious one.

During plenary sessions and small discussion groups, many rabbis

made it clear just how hard they grapple with their own decisions on the issue.

Still, the issue is tendentious within the Reform rabbinate and between Reform rabbis and their congregations, which often bring pressure to bear on the rabbis to perform the ceremonies.

It has become common for synagogue search committees to ask a candidate for the pulpit in the first interview whether he or she officiates at intermarriages.

The issue is often used as a litmus test.

There have been some cases in which contracts have not been renewed because of this issue alone, said Rabbi Elliot Stevens, executive secretary of the CCAR.

Other rabbis here said tenure has been denied or job security threatened over the issue.

One rabbi, who asked not to be identified, said in a discussion group that for 15 years, he did not officiate at intermarriages because he did not feel that it was the right thing to do.

He spent three years looking for a pulpit that would not require him to perform intermarriages.

In need of a job, he finally gave in to the pressure and agreed to officiate in a congregation that "made it clear" to him during the interview process that it was an important issue for it, he said.

Although most of the debate took place between rabbis, the voices of laypeople were also heard at this week's convention.

Jacqueline Guttman is an active member of Temple Emeth in Teaneck, N.J., and has served as the congregation's vice president.

When her son Edward met a Presbyterian woman, Katherine Daniels, at college, Guttman feared that she would never have Jewish grandchildren.

But when Ed and Katie became engaged, they decided that they wanted to have a Jewish wedding, would have a Jewish home and raise their children as Jews, though Katie was not interested in converting, Jacqueline related to the gathered rabbis, her voice cracking with emotion.

Yet even though they fulfilled nearly every requirement that a Reform rabbi might have in order to marry them, they could not find one willing to do it.

In the end, they found a Reconstructionist rabbi to officiate.

'A metaphoric slap in the face'

The experience left Guttman angry.

"It is astonishing that Reform Judaism, which has opened up the tent, simultaneously sets up stumbling blocks to those who agree to live by its rules."

"It was a metaphoric slap in the face," she said, adding that Katie "got a clear message that she is not good enough for Reform Judaism — this woman who makes Shabbos, who makes seder."

Not every Reform Jew feels the same way.

When George Markley, a Bridgeport, Conn., attorney and an executive committee member and trustee of the UAHF, married 27 years ago, his wife, Chris, was not Jewish. They got nothing more than a lecture about the pitfalls of intermarriage from a Reform rabbi whom they approached to perform their wedding, he said.

In the end, they were married by a Unitarian-Universalist minister, but never again set foot in that church. She has since converted to Judaism.

Today, Markley ardently opposes rabbinic officiation over intermarriages.

"It is the responsibility of Jewish clergy to be our spiritual leaders, not our followers," he said in a speech here, which received a standing ovation from about two-thirds of the rabbis present.

No matter what the intentions, "we know that the chances of there being a thoroughly Jewish household and multiple generations of Jewish children issuing forth from that marriage are seriously diminished," he said.

"It is not the rabbi's job to make us feel good all the time; it is to make us feel Jewish," he said. "And that may sometimes mean having to say no." □

Lemrick Nelson to be tried as adult

By Heather Camlot

NEW YORK (JTA) — The man acquitted for the murder of Yankel Rosenbaum during the 1991 Crown Heights riots now will be tried as an adult in a separate case.

Judge David Trager made the decision last Friday regarding the trial of Lemrick Nelson on charges of violating the victim's civil rights.

The judge's decision was "the logical one and the right one," said Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) in a statement. "It's tragic that five years after the Crown Heights riot and the murder of Yankel Rosenbaum, justice has still not been served."

Rosenbaum, a 29-year-old Talmud student from Australia, was murdered Aug. 19, 1991, when black and Jewish residents of the Crown Heights section of New York clashed after a car driven by a Chasidic Jew went out of control and killed a 7-year-old black boy.

Nelson, then 17, was found in possession of a bloody knife. He was the only one to go to trial in connection with the murder.

"This decision says to the world; if you commit a crime, you will do adult time," Schumer said. □

Intel plant gets final approval

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Finance Ministry has given the Intel Corporation final approval for its plan to build a \$1.6 billion semiconductor plant in Israel.

The ministry announced the decision after the two sides resolved months of wrangling over the amount Israel would contribute to the plant's construction costs.

The two sides agreed that Israel would provide what it originally pledged, 38 percent of building costs, or \$608 million. In turn, Intel pledged to buy Israeli goods and services for its local and international branches.

The plant, to be located in Kiryat Gat, located east of Ashkelon, will make computer memory chips.

Finance Minister Avraham Shochat said Intel is expected to provide employment for 2,500 people when the plant is running at full capacity.

Intel is the world's largest producer of microprocessors, holding 75 percent of the market. □

Jordanian baby named after Rabin

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Jordanian farmer has reportedly won approval from his country's Interior Ministry to name his baby son Yitzhak Rabin.

Rajai Saeed told the Jordan Times that he chose the name to demonstrate his support for the October 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty.

The newspaper said the boy had become the first Jordanian to bear the name of an Israeli leader.

The state registrar initially refused to give the infant a Jewish name, but changed its position after the Interior Ministry said the request was legal.

Saeed reportedly lost his job on a farm when he tried to name his son after Rabin. □

Rabin's confessed assassin sentenced to life in prison

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli court has sentenced Yigal Amir to life in prison, saying that he had meticulously planned and carried out the murder of Yitzhak Rabin and misused Jewish law to justify his actions.

The three-judge panel at Tel Aviv District Court also sentenced Amir on Wednesday to six years in prison for wounding Rabin's bodyguard, Yoram Rubin.

In a rare move, presiding Judge Edmond Levy allowed the live broadcast of the proceedings on television and radio.

In issuing the sentence, Levy said Amir was "not worthy of mercy, because he lost all semblance of humanity."

"With premeditation and amazing calm, he decided that the death of the prime minister was the last way to stop the peace process which he didn't like, and he followed this path to its very end," Levy said.

Amir, a 25-year-old religious Jew, was arrested after he shot Rabin on Nov. 4 at the conclusion of a Tel Aviv peace rally.

He later confessed to the slaying, saying that he wanted to cut short Rabin's policy of trading land for peace with the Palestinians, a policy he claimed would lead to the loss of Jewish lives.

Levy, himself a religious Jew, rejected Amir's contention that his act was justified on the basis of a Jewish edict called "din rodef," which permits murder in order to save the lives of others.

Levy called Amir's actions a "cynical misuse" of Jewish law.

The presiding judge quoted statements made by the defendant during his questioning by Israeli police, in which he expressed satisfaction with having caused the prime minister's death.

Levy also said the court had found no reason to ease the sentence.

He cited psychiatric examinations of the accused and other testimony which showed Amir that did not suffer any lessening of his mental capacities.

No remorse

Levy asked Amir to rise before delivering the verdict.

"We have decided to convict the accused of all the crimes he was accused of" — premeditated murder and aggravated assault, the judge said.

Amir, wearing a white shirt and black skullcap, showed no remorse for his actions.

"Everything I did, I did for God, for the Torah of Israel, the people of Israel and the Land of Israel," Amir said from the dock as his mother wept and read from the Book of Psalms in the back of the courtroom.

"I was forced to commit this act, [because] had I not, the damage to the people of Israel would have been irreversible," Amir told the court during his final statement.

He also dismissed the three-month proceedings as a "show trial."

"The State of Israel is a monstrosity," he shouted as police removed him from the courtroom after the sentencing.

Rabin's widow, Leah, said she was unmoved by the trial.

If anything, she said, she was critical of the time it had taken for the proceedings to conclude.

"What was left to prove?" she told Israel Radio.

"He confessed to his actions immediately after-

wards. I have nothing to say about the verdict or the sentence."

Reacting to the verdict, Prime Minister Shimon Peres said, "This punishment pales in comparison to the crime."

But, he told reporters Wednesday evening, "I have no idea how to make it more severe."

"This murder violated everything from the Ten Commandments to the laws of this state."

"I just hope the punishment will deter others from trying assuming the role of God, to decide who can take the life of another man."

In reaching its verdict, the panel of judges rejected the arguments of Amir's lawyers, who had sought a lesser manslaughter verdict.

His lawyers had argued that far from wanting to kill Rabin, Amir had only sought to wound him, thereby taking him out of the political arena and bringing his peace policies with the Palestinians to an end.

Under Israeli law, a finding of premeditated murder carries a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment.

Capital punishment is reserved for convicted war criminals.

The lesser manslaughter conviction that Amir's lawyers sought would have resulted in a maximum prison term of 20 years.

Amir's defense lawyers had also sought mitigating circumstances in what they argued was Amir's impaired mental condition.

They contended that Amir was obsessed with murdering the prime minister and that this had affected his judgment.

Earlier in the trial, the judges had ordered a psychiatric examination of Amir to test the defense's contention.

Prosecutor Prina Guy focused during the proceedings on what she described as Amir's coldblooded remorselessness.

Guy had also argued that psychiatrists who examined the gunman found that he did not suffer any mental disturbances.

When reading the verdict, Levy said that while the court had been called upon to answer a simple question — whether the accused had done what he was accused of — it felt obligated to stress the gravity of what had happened in Israel.

Levy warned against ideologies when murder becomes a means to an end.

Lawyers planning appeal

After the trial, Amir's defense lawyers said they planned to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court.

Defense attorney Jonathan Ray Goldberg dismissed the findings of the court.

He reiterated a defense claim made during the trial: that a second gunman was involved and that his client was innocent.

"It is possible to prove that the bullets fired from Yigal Amir's gun were blanks and that he is innocent," he said.

"But the court was not interested in hearing our arguments, and our evidence. We will bring this all to the high court."

Legal commentator Moshe Negbi said that with all the attention the case had drawn, the judges had made an extra effort to demonstrate that the trial had been conducted properly.

"That is why they proposed the psychiatric examinations, and rightly so, I believe," he told Israel Radio.

The defense has 45 days to appeal the case. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israel's two major parties surprised by primary results

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's two major political parties, Labor and Likud, have emerged from pre-election primaries with their leadership slates markedly more extreme than the images they were each seeking to project in the election campaign.

In Monday's Labor Party primary, a longtime and outspoken dove, Minister of Tourism Uzi Baram, topped the field.

Baram, 59, emerged as the second most popular figure after Prime Minister Shimon Peres in Israel's ruling Labor Party.

In the process, he defeated two self-proclaimed future prime ministerial hopefuls, Foreign Minister Ehud Barak and Interior Minister Haim Ramon.

The Likud primaries, which took place a day later, catapulted Yitzhak Mordechai, former Israel Defense Force general and political neophyte, to an equally unexpected victory.

The results of the primaries could complicate the two parties' respective efforts to appeal in the weeks ahead to Israel's swing voters, whose preferences will decide the May 29 general election.

This sector of the electorate is traditionally identified as centrist.

To attract their support, Labor has been stressing security concerns in its election campaign, while Likud has stressed its support of the peace process.

The main Labor Party slogan is "A Strong Israel with Peres."

Likud's is "Peace with Security."

These platforms hardly fit the trends reflected in the primary results, but the reason for this disparity is clear.

Ideological slant reflected

The primaries are not "open"; they are limited to registered and paid-up party members.

Characteristically, such people are more "ideological" than people who are politically less active and less identified with a specific party.

The primary results reflected this ideological slant of party members, who favored the more radical candidates on each side of the political spectrum.

As a result of the Likud primary, Mordechai will actually appear fourth on the list because of Likud's recent merger with two smaller opposition parties, Gesher, led by David Levy, and Tsomet, led by Rafael Eitan.

Topping the combined list will be Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, followed by Levy and Eitan, then Mordechai.

Following Mordechai on the list as a result of the primary will be arch-hardliner Ariel Sharon, the former defense minister and current Knesset member who successfully brokered the merger with Gesher and Tsomet.

The next two places on the Likud list went to Moshe Katsav and Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, neither of whom is considered a moderate.

Only then do the first two Likud moderates appear: Dan Meridor, a former justice minister, and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert.

According to polls, the combined Likud-Gesher-Tsomet list has about 42 safe seats, positions that are expected to win seats in the next Knesset.

Fourteen of those seats have been allocated to the two smaller parties, leaving only 28 remaining for loyal Likudites.

The Likud primaries produced a number of "new faces," including:

- Gideon Ezra, a former deputy head of the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security service.
- David Re'em, a deputy mayor of Haifa.
- Yisrael Katz, a moshav leader and former aide to Ariel Sharon.
- Zvi Zilker, mayor of Ashdod.

Levy's six handpicked parliamentary colleagues for Gesher's safe seats include his brother, Lod Mayor Maxim Levy; his two longtime aides, Motti Mishani and Yaacov Bardogo; and the just-retired ambassador to France, Yehuda Lankeri. □

Israeli firms to invest in China

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel and China have signed an agreement for more Israeli firms to participate in Chinese development projects.

Finance Minister Avraham Shochat and his Chinese counterpart, Liu Zongli, announced the agreement Wednesday at a joint news conference here.

They added that the two countries would also work together on smaller agricultural, health and infrastructure projects.

During the next 15 years, the World Bank is funding large-scale development projects in China worth \$2.5 billion. □

Palestinians uncover Hamas cell

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian security officials in the Gaza Strip maintain they have uncovered a secret network of the military wing of Hamas that is dedicated to attacking Israel and weakening the Palestinian Authority.

The head of the Palestinian Authority's Preventive Security Service in Gaza, Mohammad Dahlan, was quoted as describing the network as more dangerous than a group of Hamas fugitives wanted by both Israeli and Palestinian police.

Most members of the network were unknown, and some had the right to enter Israel, he added.

He promised additional details when his security service's investigation was completed. □

Israeli population at 5.6 million

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's population has reached 5.6 million, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

The bureau, reporting preliminary results of a 1995 census, said Monday that Israel's population increased by 40 percent since 1983, when the total population stood at 4 million.

The bureau also said that the number of settlers living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had grown to 134,000, compared to 24,000 in 1983, when the last census was taken.

The survey results indicated that the highest rate of growth was in southern Israel, where the population grew by 57 percent since 1983.

The census also indicated there are 1.6 million households in Israel having an average of 3.4 people, compared to 1.1 million households in 1983 with an average of 3.5 people.

The bureau said final results from the census would be published next year. □