



NEWS AT A GLANCE

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■ **Several grocery stores in Quebec received warning letters that Passover products imported from the United States broke a law that requires products to be labeled in French and English.** "We didn't tell them to remove the food. We just informed them it was against the law and asked them to correct the situation," said a spokesman for the French Language Office. [Page 2]

■ **Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Ora Namir was appointed Israel's new ambassador to China.** The appointment will take effect after the country's May 29 national elections.

■ **Some 100 extremists marched at Auschwitz to protest a ban on building a mini-mall at the site of the former death camp.** The demonstrators reportedly carried a banner reading, "Jews, Thieves, Away from the Government."

Because of the Passover holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published April 11 and 12.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

One year after Oklahoma blast, local Jews feel more connected

By Daniel Kurtzman

OKLAHOMA CITY (JTA) — As Oklahoma City struggles to bounce back a year after a bomb tore through countless lives, the bonds forged by the tragedy continue to give strength to this city.

The city's small Jewish community — they number 2,500 people out of a population of nearly 1 million — has played an important role in helping the community heal and rebuild.

The general community, in turn, has reached out to the city's Jews.

"Out of an incredibly tragic event, our Jewish community now feels much closer to the community at large," said Edie Roodman, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Oklahoma City.

No Jews were killed or injured in the April 19, 1995, blast that claimed 169 lives and injured at least 500, but that did not stop the Jewish community from jumping into the rescue and recovery effort.

As the city's Jews did what they could — donating blood, volunteering to feed rescue workers, hosting community forums to help in the healing process — contributions totaling nearly \$500,000 came pouring in from Jews across the country.

In addition, B'nai B'rith International launched its own aid campaign, raising more than \$500,000 in contributions from more than 10,000 people nationwide.

When the rebuilding process began, the Jewish community made one of its most significant contributions by stepping in where the Federal Emergency Management Agency stepped out.

FEMA said it could not provide financial assistance for damaged churches in the area, so the Jewish community wrote three churches \$10,000 checks each for repairs.

While the bulk of the funds have gone to victims' families, the community's most visible contribution can be seen by everyone who visits the bomb site.

Together with the Muslim community and the First Methodist Church, the Jewish federation helped construct a small open-air chapel across from the demolished Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

"The rest of the community saw the Jewish community here as a strong, important group of people who live right among us, who are pulling together just like the rest of us," said Louis Price, a native Oklahoman whose family was among the first Jews to settle here about the turn of the century.

The bombing also helped Oklahoma's Jews develop closer ties with the American Jewish community.

Within two hours of the bombing, Roodman said she received 50 calls from Jewish federations across the country offering assistance.

"There was a huge outpouring from the American Jewish community to our local Jewish community in dollars and letters, in Sunday school projects, pictures, arts and crafts," said Rabbi David Packman of Oklahoma City's Temple B'nai Israel.

'A real tremendous sense of bonding'

The outpouring brought Jews here a sense of connection to a larger whole that they said had long been missing.

"Jews in the heartland are a little bit isolated, but this shattered that sense," Packman said. "This gave us a real tremendous sense of bonding with Jews throughout America."

As Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, defendants linked with right-wing extremist groups, await trial in Denver, Oklahomans continue to talk of losing their innocence and their sense of security.

But they say newfound vulnerabilities have also fostered greater sensitivity to suffering around the world.

In a community that has never been highly attuned to developments in the Middle East, the recent string of suicide bombings in Israel received extensive coverage in the local media — far more than it would have in the past, people here said.

As a result, once-remote and abstract events in Israel have taken on

an all-too-familiar resonance. The connection with Israel was driven home recently when six Israeli teen-agers who survived Hamas suicide bombings in Afula and Tel Aviv visited Oklahoma City to share stories of survival, hope and healing.

In January, Oklahoma City's Jewish community, joined by Gov. Frank Keating, traveled to Israel to dedicate a forest of trees memorializing the city's bombing victims.

"When the governor and his family planted memorial trees in Israel in memory of the bombing victims, the kids from Afula participated in that tree planting," said Eli Roodman, a surgeon who helped attend to injured people coming out of the Federal Building.

When the same Israeli kids came to Oklahoma City, "they lit memorial candles at the chapel across the street from the Murrah Federal Building," said Roodman, who along with his wife, the federation executive, hosted the teens.

"There seems to be a full circle closed now," he added.

One year after tragedy brought out the best in Oklahoma City's Jewish community, the Jewish response to the bombing is not likely to be forgotten.

"We were an example to our community of what Jews do in times of crisis, and that is we try to repair the world," Price said. "We did what we could, and it didn't matter that there weren't any Jews directly involved." □

Trial of Priebe for massacre by Nazis near Rome set for May

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Former SS Capt. Erich Priebe will go on trial for his role in Italy's worst Nazi massacre on May 8, the 51st anniversary of the end of World War II.

A Rome military judge formally indicted Priebe last week for "multiple homicide aggravated by cruelty" stemming from his involvement in the March 24, 1944, mass execution of civilians — including 75 Jews — in the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome.

The 82-year-old Priebe, who was extradited to Italy last November from Argentina, expressed no emotion as Judge Giuseppe Mazzi read the indictment April 4 at the end of a closed-door preliminary hearing.

Priebe, who during the Nazi occupation of Rome was an aide to SS commandant Herbert Kappler, escaped from a POW camp after the war and fled to Argentina, where he lived peacefully until he was discovered there by an ABC News team in 1994.

"I think it is a just ruling, both in form and in substance," Tullia Zevi, the president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, said after the decision was announced to put Priebe on trial.

"The decision was very well thought out and will now give the possibility of contributing to the ascertainment of the facts in a spirit of equity and of justice. It was not a condemnation, but the initiation of a process."

Paola Severino di Benedetto, a lawyer representing the interests of Rome's Jewish community in the case, issued a statement expressing "great appreciation and satisfaction" with the judge's decision.

The Nazis ordered the Ardeatine Caves massacre in direct reprisal for an attack the day before by Italian partisans that had left 33 German soldiers dead. Ten Italians were ordered killed for each German, but five more Italians were killed than required by the arithmetic of reprisal.

The mass execution is considered Italy's worst World War II atrocity, and the Ardeatine Caves are a national shrine.

Most of the victims were anti-fascist prisoners taken from Nazi-run Roman jails, but others were rounded up from their homes or on the streets.

The victims were trucked to the Ardeatine Caves, where they were led inside in groups of five with their hands tied behind their backs. There they were shot in the back of the neck. Many had to kneel on the bodies of those killed before them.

Priebe has admitted to drawing up a list of victims, checking them off at the caves and personally shooting two people.

But he has defended his actions, saying he was following orders.

He told the court last week that killing the civilians had been a legitimate reprisal for the partisan attack.

"I am sorry for what happened," the Italian news agency ANSA quoted Priebe as saying. "I lived all this time with this weight in my heart, but the revenge was legitimate."

"The order came directly from the Fuhrer, and if we hadn't obeyed it, we would have been killed. To think about it now, it was a terrible thing, but at the time, you couldn't do anything else." □

Warning on Passover products draws ire of Jewish community

By Bram D. Eisenthal

MONTREAL (JTA) — The Quebec government agency responsible for ensuring the use of the French language has raised the ire of the Jewish community.

The French Language Office sent letters last week to several grocery stores informing them that kosher for Passover products imported from the United States were displayed illegally.

The English-only labels on the products contravened the law that requires retail items to also bear labels in French, the agency said in the letters.

"We didn't tell them to remove the food. We just informed them it was against the law and asked them to correct the situation," said Gerald Paquette, a spokesman for the Office.

While Paquette acknowledged that the Passover products have been sold in Quebec stores for years, he said this year his office "received about 10 complaints that the packaging wasn't in French."

Many of the complaints came from members of Montreal's French-speaking Sephardi community, which comprises 21 percent of the Jewish population, he added.

However, one Jewish community leader who is Sephardi expressed skepticism about Paquette's assertion.

"It doesn't make any sense" because Sephardi Jews "buy the food as well," said David Sultan, director of community relations for Canadian Jewish Congress' Quebec region. "Why would they do something that would prevent the products from being sold here?"

Sultan said he would ask officials at the government's French language office to invoke a provision of the province's French Language Charter that permits certain specialty foods an exemption from the label rule if they are not produced in Canada and if they are sold for limited periods annually.

Paquette said his agency would consider such a request, but added that every effort would be made to persuade the U.S. companies to print their labels in French as well as English.

Sultan was decidedly dubious about influencing U.S. firms.

"The market here is so small. It's unrealistic to expect them [Americans] to label things in French," he said. □

AJCommittee official behind settlers' secret talks with PLO*By David Landau*

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Top figures in the Israeli settler movement met secretly during the past two years with senior figures in the Palestine Liberation Organization to discuss future coexistence.

The director of the American Jewish Committee's Israel office, Joseph Alpher, has been the moving spirit in the meetings, according to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, which reported the story Sunday.

Alpher, appearing on Israel Television later in the day, said the disclosure of the talks was "embarrassing," but voiced the hope such talks could one day be held publicly.

The settlement issue — as well as the status of Jerusalem, borders and security arrangements — is scheduled to be among the topics of official discussions in May, when the two sides begin holding their final status talks.

Alpher launched the meetings soon after Israel and the Palestinians agreed in 1993 on the Declaration of Principles, which outlined the steps and timetable for their subsequent agreements.

Alpher, who was at the time deputy director of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, said the common denominator that brought the settler leaders and Palestinians together was their recognition that they needed to talk in order to avoid bloodshed between them in the future.

Among the settler representatives were Uri Elitzur, editor of the settler weekly "Nekuda"; Yisrael Harel, a commentator and onetime chairman of the Yesha Council, which represents settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and Rabbi Eliezer Waldman of Kiryat Arba, a former Knesset member from the right-wing Techiya Party.

Yesha officials condemned the secret talks, according to news reports.

The Palestinian conferees included Hassan Asfour, one of the original negotiators of the Declaration of Principles, and Gen. Mohammed Dahlan, head of the Palestinian security service in Gaza.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres was aware of the substance of the meetings, *Ha'aretz* reported.

Last week, the newspaper reported that Peres and his close ministerial aide, Yossi Beilin, are involved in secret negotiations with settlement leaders over the shape of a permanent peace agreement with the Palestinians.

Beilin has repeatedly argued that a deal can be arrived at which would enable most of the settlers to remain in their present homes. □

Labor decides to add Russian to list of Knesset candidates*By David Landau*

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Israel's Labor Party has decided to include a Russian immigrant in its list of Knesset candidates for the May 29 elections.

The decision Sunday by the party's Central Committee came after polls indicated that the lack of a Russian immigrant on the list would seriously damage the party's prospects of attracting voters from the former Soviet Union.

Voting for the Russian candidate will take place among Labor's 17,000 registered immigrant-voters later this week.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres has indicated his own preference, Ashkelon City Councilwoman Sophia Landwer, who served in the past as his Russian-language tutor.

Labor leaders resolved to include a Russian

candidate after Ethiopian activist Adisu Massala won in the March 25 Labor Party primaries the position on the list that had been reserved for an immigrant representative.

The decision to include a Russian representative came despite Massala's protestations both before and after his primary victory that he would regard himself as the voice of all immigrants, regardless of their origin.

Massala's position on the list will not be affected by the inclusion of a Russian immigrant; in effect, Labor will have two immigrant representatives on its list of "safe seats" — positions on the party list expected to win seats in the next Knesset.

Meanwhile, in another move to placate ruffled feathers after the primaries, Foreign Minister Ehud Barak and his top ministry officials convened last Friday to announce the appointment of Minister of Labor and Social Welfare Ora Namir as Israel's new ambassador to China.

The appointment will take effect after the elections.

Namir, who is abroad, was defeated in the primaries for the top woman's spot on the Labor list by Knesset member Dalia Itzik, chairwoman of the Education Committee in the outgoing Knesset. □

Israel joins European Union's non-nuclear research program*By Joseph Kopel*

BRUSSELS (JTA) — Israel has become the first non-European country to be associated with the European Union's non-nuclear research program.

Israel's new status became official after Israel's ambassador to the European Union, Efraim Halevy, recently signed a scientific and technological cooperation accord with E.U. officials here.

The agreement is part of a broader association accord signed in November in Brussels by Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and the union's 15 member states.

Under the terms of the scientific agreement, Israeli scientists will participate in 16 research programs now financed by the European Union.

European scientists will in turn be allowed to become involved in Israeli-initiated projects. The accord also calls for Israel to contribute about \$37.5 million annually to a program of jointly financed research projects.

The scientific accord reflects a "deepening of Israel's relations with the European Community and a recognition of its high level of research," Israel's Mission to the European Union said in a statement.

Edith Cresson, a former French prime minister who now serves as European commissioner in charge of research, voiced a similar sentiment at the March 25 signing ceremony. "This agreement will allow European scientists to work in close cooperation with top-level scientists in many of the advanced sectors where Israel has a leading position," she said. □

Vanunu wants to share more secrets*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Mordechai Vanunu, the nuclear technician jailed for selling classified material from one of Israel's nuclear plants, has said he would reveal more classified information at the first opportunity.

Vanunu's claims were conveyed by Justice Minister David Libai, who met recently with him.

Libai made the comments during a meeting with the Committee for Vanunu's Release while explaining the security establishment's objections to an early release.

Vanunu was apprehended in 1986 after he leaked the information to a British newspaper. He was sentenced in 1988 to serve 18 years in prison. □

NEWS ANALYSIS**End of Rabin killing inquiry leaves open wounds in society***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The publication of the findings of a state commission that investigated the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, coupled with the sentencing of Rabin's killer, revived some still-painful memories.

But from a political standpoint, the two events were an anti-climax.

It is now clear that the Nov. 4 assassination of Rabin will not, as was thought immediately after the slaying, provide the basis for a resounding electoral victory for his successor, Shimon Peres.

The Labor Party and its allies can now hardly invoke the assassination, which was carried out by right-wing religious fanatic Yigal Amir, to issue a condemnation-by-association of the parties and ideology of the right.

Certainly not, after the judges in the Amir trial and the members of the Shamgar Commission pointedly declined to do so.

By the same token, the Likud and its allies can now redouble their vehement protests against any such attempts at tarring the right.

Indeed, on the far right, voices already have been raised criticizing the commission, which on March 28 issued its findings on the circumstances surrounding the Rabin assassination.

In a report made public one day after Amir was convicted of premeditated murder and sentenced to life imprisonment, the commission said lax security measures on the part of the police and the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security agency, had given Amir the opportunity to carry out the assassination.

Voices on the far right criticized the Shamgar Commission for failing to deal exhaustively with the issue of the agents planted by the Shin Bet within right-wing fringe groups.

One such agent, Avishai Raviv, was a personal friend of Amir's and was closely involved with him in political activities directed against the Rabin government and its peace policies.

These far-right critics now argue that Raviv, and others like him, deserve most of the blame for the ominous atmosphere of threats and political violence that enveloped the country in the weeks before the prime minister's assassination.

Among the mainstream forces of the right, the trial's end and publication of the commission's report were greeted with relief.

The murderer himself, in his final statements to the court, talked mainly about the religious motives for his deed.

Judges deliberately stopped short

He gave no help to those who have sought to link his act to his broader political milieu or to the rabbis, teachers, yeshivas and universities that shaped his education.

The judges in turn handed down a ringing rebuttal of his twisted interpretation of the Jewish sources that he said led to his crime.

But they deliberately stopped short of extending that rebuttal to the national-religious circles that openly debated in the period before Rabin's death whether the prime minister, by pursuing his peace policies with the Palestinians, was a traitor to his people.

Justice Meir Shamgar and his two colleagues on the state commission — in their 214 pages of published

findings that accompanied a 118-page classified appendix — were even more circumspect in their conclusions.

They decided from the outset on a minimalist reading of their mission.

As a result, they gave a technical examination of the security breakdown that resulted in the Rabin assassination.

But they refused to be drawn into the political, educational, social and psychological aspects surrounding Amir's personality and his act.

The commission's approach was starkly criticized by the most senior "victim" of the panel's findings — the former head of Shin Bet, Carmi Gilon, whose earlier resignation the commission roundly endorsed.

Addressing reporters on the steps of the building where the commission met in Jerusalem, Gilon warned that there were still many others "out there" who were plotting political assassinations.

"They serve with us in the Golani Brigade," he said, "in the paratroop brigade."

The implication was obvious: Gilon was referring to young men of the religious ultraright, of Amir's political and religious persuasion, who were serving in even the most prestigious units of the Israel Defense Force.

Commentators have preferred not to focus on Gilon's remarks.

Some cite the rabbinic adage that a man ought not to be "caught out in his grief."

But even without embracing Gilon's dire warnings, many leading Israeli commentators have found fault with the Shamgar Commission's insistence on reading its brief narrowly, on steering clear of the major political and social issues highlighted by the assassination.

"Where then is the heart-searching?" one writer asked, recalling the guilt that swept through large sections of the religious Zionist community in the aftermath of the murder.

The commission had been widely expected to encourage that process of introspection.

Instead, there was silence.

And the process, already fading with the passage of time, is now uninhibitedly declared *passe* in broad religious Zionist circles.

Sense of missed opportunity

The National Religious Party itself, at first afraid that the assassination would lead to wholesale defections from its ranks, recently voted for an even more hardline slate of Knesset candidates than those now serving.

There is a certain sense of missed opportunity.

Some critics, moreover, assert that for Shamgar, the recently retired president of the Supreme Court, this is the second such missed opportunity.

He previously served as head of another commission of inquiry that also bore his name which looked into the February 1994 Hebron massacre, in which Kiryat Arba settler Dr. Baruch Goldstein killed 29 Palestinian worshippers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

In that inquiry, too, Shamgar preferred to look into the laxness of security measures at the site rather than consider the broader sociological and political realities that furnished the backdrop to the killings.

Shamgar, still a judge to his fingertips, will not reply publicly to his critics now, just as he declined to do so after the previous commission issued its findings.

His defenders suggest that his minimalism is grounded in a wise belief that for him to speak to the inevitably divisive issues of politics, ideology and religion would be to court a backlash that Israeli society, still raw and reeling from the trauma of the prime minister's slaying, is not yet ready to grapple with. □