



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Jewish organizations played a key role in getting provisions aimed at curbing international terrorism reinstated in the counterterrorism bill. But three agencies oppose the bill because it would impose new limits on appeals by death row inmates. [Page 3]

■ Jews living in areas of the United States where militia groups are situated say they feel no imminent threat to their security. But Jewish organizations still watch the militia movement with trepidation. [Page 1]

■ Prime Minister Shimon Peres announced that Israeli and Palestinian officials would start the permanent-status negotiations on May 4. Peres' announcement came as he and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat were scheduled to meet at the Erez Crossing.

■ The House of Representatives approved a resolution condemning Holocaust deniers. The measure was timed to coincide with Holocaust Remembrance Day. [Page 3]

■ A Knesset law mandates employers to pay women the same salaries and benefits as men. According to surveys, the gap has risen as high as 32 percent in recent years. [Page 4]

■ In Britain's first Nazi war crimes case, an 85-year-old retired carpenter will stand trial on charges of murdering Jews during World War II. A magistrate ruled that there is enough evidence to try Szymon Serafimowicz on charges of killing three Jews in Belarus in the early 1940s.

■ The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations issued an advisory to its members to increase security. Although no U.S. Jewish agency has been directly threatened, the advisory came in the wake of a declaration by the militant Hezbollah movement that it would target Jews worldwide.

■ The first of three submarines built in Germany for the Israeli navy was unveiled in a ceremony there. The Dolphin sub is expected to begin operating by October 1997.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jews wary of militia groups, but no immediate threat seen

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — One year after the Oklahoma City bombing blew the lid off the paramilitary movement and its anti-Semitic undercurrents, American Jews continue to eye the militias with trepidation.

But as Jewish defense organizations work to monitor and expose the armed white dissidents who make up the militias, Jews living in the movement's back yard say they feel no imminent threat to their security.

"I'm not very concerned about the militia movement at the present time, but that's probably what they want us to think," said Al Lerner, a Jewish attorney who lives in Kalispell, Mont.

To date, there have been no reports of attacks perpetrated by militia groups specifically against Jews.

Nor is there evidence to suggest that Jews are living in explicit fear of these groups.

"These groups by and large do not target Jews or blacks as their prime organizing principle," said Kenneth Stern of the American Jewish Committee, a specialist on anti-Semitism and extremism.

The movement, however, revolves around a virulently anti-government ideology that borrows from age-old anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.

"The basic political premise of the militias is that found in the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion,' but recast by most as anti-governmentalism instead of anti-Semitism," Stern said, referring to the notorious anti-Semitic tract.

Still, with people in the leadership and ranks of militia groups who have long-standing ties to the racist movement, militia experts warn of the potential for violence against Jews.

An estimated 800 militia and militia support groups are active in at least 40 states, with between 10,000 and 40,000 members. Not all subscribe to extremist views.

Only one-quarter of the groups have racist ties, according to the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

The movement's main breeding ground stretches from eastern Washington across the Idaho panhandle into Montana — an area of the country where fewer than 1,500 Jews account for less than 1 percent of the region's population.

Jews living in the region say that while they remain wary of the militias' conspiratorial ideology, they have never been individually targeted.

"I'm very concerned, but not for those of us living here," said Billings resident Brian Schnitzer, president of the Montana Association of Jewish Communities.

"I'm very concerned about those living in larger communities. It's much more likely that a spokesperson for a major Jewish organization would be a target than someone in Montana."

'Rather be a Jew than a federal official'

Still, most observers remain less concerned about the threat to Jews than they are about the threat to federal officials, who have been shunned in some communities and have even been threatened and refused service in stores.

"If I were living next door to a militia and if I had to choose who to be, I'd much rather be a Jew than a federal official," Stern said. "On the other hand, I'd prefer to be an Episcopalian."

Although anti-Semitism is not a driving force in the movement, with the militias viewing the world through a prism of conspiracy, many observers see inherent danger.

"Whenever you're dealing with an environment of obsessive conspiracy, we've found that it ultimately finds its way to focus on Jews," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Similar concerns prompted Dan Yurman of Idaho Falls to begin monitoring militia activities in Idaho in 1994.

As director of community relations for Temple Emanuel in Pocatello, Idaho, Yurman set out to determine what kind of threat they posed to the 150

Jewish families living in the area. "When it became clear that the Aryan Nation and other neo-Nazi groups and known extremists were involved" in the militia movement, "we began to pay attention," he said.

After monitoring the groups' literature, media accounts and the Internet for two years without encountering any reports of anti-Semitic incidents, Yurman said, "At this time I would have to say that they do not constitute a threat. But that could change."

Schnitzer said that while there is "no question" the militia groups are anti-Semitic, their bigotry does not necessarily fly in the face of Montana residents.

"Their worldview, their historical view, is that Jews are a seed of Satan," he said.

But when they come to gun shows, "they talk about government bureaucracy and taxes and the difficulty of making a living as a farmer and as a rancher."

Lerner had a similar take, saying, "Their anti-Semitism is more a wink-wink type of thing."

Although anti-Semitic rhetoric may be absent, Schnitzer said he had little doubt that the militias would "annihilate all Jews and people of color if they had their way."

At the same time, he is careful not to overstate the danger they pose.

"Are they a threat to us? Without question. Do I feel physically threatened? No."

Ultimately, it is not individuals, or even an individual community against which the militias are mobilizing.

Their approach — driven by far-flung paranoid conspiracy theories involving black helicopters and a government plot to enslave and kill loyal Americans — constitutes a much broader assault on American democracy, militia experts say.

In addition, the militias have attempted to mainstream their message by tapping the vein of widespread discontent with government.

They have shied away from traditional hate activities and organized through issues that dovetail with mainstream concerns, finding supporters who oppose gun control, hunting laws, restrictions on land use and high taxes.

"The white hoods, the swastika — it doesn't really cut it for America," said Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

"It doesn't speak to the anger that's out there. But the trappings of patriotism — its virulent anti-government message, the notion of empowerment — does."

'Funnel moving through space'

Stern, author of a new book about the militia movement titled "A Force Upon the Plain," sums up the forces behind the militia movement by borrowing the image of "a funnel moving through space," suggested by Ken Toole of the Montana Human Rights Network.

"At the large end are mainstream issues such as gun control, the environment, federal intrusiveness," Stern said in recent testimony before Congress.

"A little further in are the racist and conspiratorial ideas. At the small end are those who would act on their belief that they need to be at war with America."

The militia's anti-government message has resonated with various segments of the American population. Ideological echoes can even be heard in some quarters of Capitol Hill.

One Republican lawmaker, explaining his opposition to anti-terrorism legislation, told a colleague that he trusted the Islamic militant group Hamas more than he trusted his own government.

"One of [the] dangers that's easily overlooked is how much of the thinking has become acceptable in

popular culture," said Steven Gardner, research director of the Portland-based Coalition for Human Dignity.

While the movement's actual numbers remain small, its capacity for violence and terror looms large in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing.

"Oklahoma City has proven that people motivated by the values and politics of the militia movement are capable of incredible violence and that if they're willing to kill 160-odd people in Oklahoma, they're just as willing to kill millions if given the means and opportunity," Yurman said. □

Two Argentine sergeants to be charged in AMIA blast

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Two sergeants in the Argentine army will soon be charged in connection with the July 18, 1994, bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association, or AMIA, that left 86 dead and 300 wounded.

Sources close to the AMIA investigation confirmed that the official in charge of the probe, Judge Juan Jose Galeano, is ready to press charges against the two.

The two sergeants were arrested in December along with 10 other soldiers and civilians on charges of selling weapons and explosives on the Argentine black market.

Those arrested included extreme rightists, drug dealers and traffickers of assault weapons.

The arrests came after a widespread search of military bases in suburban Buenos Aires in which police found 75 hand grenades, 110 detonation caps, seven rocket-propelled grenades, 60 blocks of plastic explosives, handguns and more than 2 pounds of marijuana.

The 12 detainees spent the past five months in jail, but have not yet been connected to the AMIA case until now.

Galeano is also putting together a case against two Buenos Aires police officers who the judge believes may have delivered the van used in the car bombing of AMIA, according to media reports here.

In February, the Argentine government said it was creating a special police team to investigate the AMIA blast.

Earlier this week, the Argentine Supreme Court said it was ordering a full re-evaluation of its investigation of another terrorist attack, the March 17, 1992, bombing of the Israeli Embassy, which left 29 dead and some 100 wounded. □

Diplomat foils police relations

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's ambassador to London made headlines in British tabloids last week after exposing two undercover police officers who were having sexual relations behind a screen in a VIP lounge at London's Heathrow Airport.

Ambassador Moshe Raviv had asked his bodyguards to remove the screen after he heard strange sounds coming from behind it.

He had suspected a terrorist attack.

But the sounds turned out to have been made by the amorous officers, whose inhibitions were loosened after they had helped themselves to some libations at the lounge's bar.

Raviv subsequently filed a complaint with the Airport Authority.

A spokesman at the Israeli Embassy in London would neither confirm nor deny the incident, saying only that Raviv had been in the airport last week. □

Terrorism bill strengthened after Jewish groups intervene

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When the House of Representatives voted last month to gut anti-terrorism legislation, Jewish activists went head-to-head with the measure's loudest critic in Congress to protest the move.

A meeting with Rep. Bob Barr (R-Ga.) proved to be a turning point in the 18-month quest to win congressional support for counterterrorism legislation.

"The terrorism bill can now be called a terrorism bill once again," said an official from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby.

After meeting with AIPAC and the Anti-Defamation League, Barr dropped his opposition to key provisions of the legislation, aimed at curbing international terrorism. The provisions had been championed by Jewish groups and the Clinton administration.

"We told Barr about our concerns and showed how they can be accomplished without damaging civil liberties protections," said Jess Hordes, Washington director of the ADL.

Barr, who led the fight last month against the measure on the House floor, did not object to a proposal by House and Senate negotiators to reinstate a ban on fund raising by foreign terrorist groups, expedited deportations of terrorists and barring suspected terrorists from entering the United States.

In addition, activists say, pressure by Republican presidential hopeful and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) played a key role in resurrecting the legislation.

"They realized that what happened went too far," Hordes said, referring to the House's decision to strip the measure of its counterterrorism provisions.

Anniversary of Oklahoma blast

Congress is expected to pass the compromise measure this week to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the April 19 Oklahoma City bombing.

President Clinton has said he would sign the measure.

But not all Jewish groups are supporting the legislation.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee have asked members of Congress to vote against the measure because the bill would impose new limits on appeals made by death row inmates.

While many Jewish groups oppose the provisions known as habeas corpus reform, only the UAHC, AJCongress and AJCommittee are opposing the bill.

"This is an aspect of such significant importance for us that we can't sacrifice for terrorism legislation," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center.

Although the measure is a dramatic improvement, it still falls short of legislation once championed by the White House and Jewish groups and includes some "troubling provisions," said Richard Foltin, legislative director of the AJCommittee's Washington office.

In addition to limiting appeals by death row inmates, the bill allows immigration officials to ban entry to those applying for asylum if they cannot prove on the spot that they are fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution.

"This has nothing to do with anti-terrorism," Foltin said.

But virtually all activists agree that the measure is a "good, solid first step," Hordes said. □

Capitol ceremony marks 50 years after Nuremberg

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Dignitaries and Holocaust survivors gathered under the Capitol Rotunda this week, marking Holocaust Remembrance Day with a somber ceremony that also celebrated the triumph of justice over vengeance in the Nuremberg war crimes trials 50 years ago.

More than 800 people, including members of Congress, five Supreme Court justices, Jewish leaders and Nuremberg prosecutors, joined together for the 15th Rotunda ceremony Tuesday to mark Yom Hashoah.

"At Nuremberg, the Allies recognized that the only true antidote to the savagery of the Nazis was justice," said Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), whose father, the late Sen. Thomas Dodd, was an associate U.S. prosecutor for the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.

Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, delivering the keynote address, noted the important role former Justice Robert Jackson played as a prosecutor at the 1946 Nuremberg trials.

It was Jackson's goal, Breyer said, to compile such a solid base of evidence against the 21 high-ranking Nazi officials on trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity that no one could ever challenge the existence of the Holocaust.

"We think: There are no words. There is no compensating deed. There can be no vengeance. Nor is any happy ending possible," Breyer said.

"It is at this point, perhaps, that Nuremberg can help, for it reminds us that the Holocaust story is not the whole story; it reminds us of those human aspirations that remain a cause for optimism.

"It reminds us that after barbarism came a call for reasoned justice."

The ceremony included the presentation of the flags representing some 30 American infantry groups that helped liberate concentration camps in 1945.

Strains of "Ani Ma'amin" (I Believe) reverberated in the Rotunda as members of Congress and the surviving Nuremberg prosecutors joined Holocaust survivors in lighting memorial candles.

'Halt mingling of bones'

Miles Lerman, chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, used the occasion to urge Croatian President Franjo Tudjman to halt plans to mingle the bones of Croatian Nazi collaborators with the bones of Jews murdered and buried in mass graves at the Jasenovac death camp in the former Yugoslavia.

He also commended Polish authorities for canceling plans to build a shopping center adjacent to the Auschwitz concentration camp.

"The Nuremberg trials teach us that we cannot remain indifferent. We cannot look the other way when evil plans are in the making, when atrocities take place and the truth is distorted," Lerman said.

"We must always be ready to speak out against evil no matter where it takes place — and no matter who the victims are."

The House of Representatives Tuesday also unanimously adopted a resolution deploring individuals who deny the historical reality of the Holocaust.

The resolution also commended the vital, ongoing work of the Holocaust museum.

The resolution, sponsored by Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), stated that those who deny the Holocaust do so "out of profound ignorance or for the purpose of further anti-Semitism and racism." □

Knesset directs employers to pay women same as men*By Michele Chabin*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As a result of legislation passed by the Knesset, many Israeli women will for the first time receive the same salaries and benefits as their male counterparts.

The "Equal Pay for Equal Work" law mandates that men and women who work for the same employer at the same place of work are entitled to equal salaries for essentially similar or equivalent work.

The law also stipulates that men and women in comparable jobs must receive the same benefits.

According to several surveys conducted by Linda Efroni, an economist and employment expert, the salary differential between men and women in Israel has risen steadily over the years.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the salary gap in the public sector stood at 22 percent.

By the end of the decade, that number had climbed to 28 percent.

In the early 1990s — the last time a survey was conducted — the gap had risen to 32 percent.

Much of the discrepancy, the surveys found, was because employers tended to give valuable benefits to male employees, but not necessarily to their female counterparts.

In Israel, it is commonplace to supplement a worker's salary with telephone, car and clothing allowances, as well as with other benefits worth thousands of shekels.

The surveys indicated that even when women earned the same base salary as their male counterparts, they were often forced to pay for their own work clothes, gasoline and car insurance.

Praising the new legislation, Orit Sulitzeanu, spokeswoman for the Israel Women's Network, said, "It goes a long way in redressing past discriminatory practices against women in the workplace.

"By acknowledging that benefits like telephone and car allowances constitute a component of a worker's salary, it will help prohibit employers from favoring one employee over another."

While the network and other organizations are hailing the law as a breakthrough for women's rights, they are concerned about its loopholes.

Said Sulitzeanu: "It allows for too many 'special cases' by permitting an employer to set salaries on the basis of seniority, education and other criteria.

"Seniority can be affected when women go out on maternity leave, giving an employer an excuse to pay her an unequal salary."

Another problem, she said, is how the workplace is defined.

"The law only applies to work within a single workplace, meaning that employees in two separate government offices, or even within two branches of one office, are not necessarily entitled to equal pay."

Despite these potential drawbacks, "the law is quite good and we look forward to it being enforced," Sulitzeanu said. □

Europeans urge civility by fans at sports events*By Henriette Boas*

AMSTERDAM (JTA) — The organized sporting world should take effective action against the increasing violence and racism at sports events, Dutch Crown Prince Willem Alexander said last week.

His remarks came at an international conference

held here April 11 seeking to ban expressions of racism by fans at sports events.

An increasing number of fans exceed the boundaries of normal rivalries, particularly when national pride changes into blind nationalism, said Alexander, the gathering's main speaker.

The conference, called "Sports, Tolerance and Fair Play," drew some 240 attendees from the Council of Europe.

The council's 39 member states from Western, Central and Eastern Europe seek to promote democracy and human rights.

Also attending the meeting, which in particular addressed racist displays at European soccer matches, were representatives from the International Olympic Committee and the European Football Association.

The conference took place in the wake of several recent incidents at Dutch soccer matches at which anti-Semitic and other racist epithets were shouted by some fans.

As part of the plan of action adopted at the meeting, famed Dutch soccer player Ruud Gullitt was named a roving ambassador of fair play.

He will travel in that capacity to various countries during the next four years to urge greater decency among fans. □

Israel to U.S.: Speed up Nautilus plans*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The State of Israel has asked the United States to speed up an anti-missile project between the two countries that is aimed at intercepting short-range rockets.

David Ivry, director general of Israel's Defense Ministry, raised the subject during a visit to the U.S. State Department and Pentagon.

The Jewish state offered to invest about \$20 million for the rapid development of the anti-missile project.

The project is in an early stage of development and has had financial difficulties, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Sunday.

The project targets such rockets as the Katyushas, which the Islamic fundamentalist group Hezbollah has fired routinely on northern Israel.

Recent Katyusha barrages provoked the latest Israeli offensive on Hezbollah bases in Lebanon.

Ivry's recent trip precedes Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres' visit at the end of the month. □

Israeli air force trains in Turkey*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli jets have arrived in Turkey to begin training flights there under the terms of a military exchange accord signed in February by the two countries.

Israeli pilots had already begun training flights in Turkish air space, diplomatic sources said.

The sources said eight Israeli F-16 training jets and their crews arrived this week in Turkey, adding that the planes were unarmed and lacked any surveillance equipment.

Israel wanted its pilots to be able to train in Turkey, whose air space is less limited than the Jewish state's, according to the sources.

In return, Israel said it would upgrade some 50 Turkish F-4 bombers under the terms of the pact.

Syria, Egypt and Iran have criticized the accord, describing it as a threat to regional stability. □