



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

### Tikkun-sponsored conference launches progressive campaign

By Cynthia Mann

■ The acting chairman of the Palestine National Council said the body would not discuss amending its charter during its first meeting in Gaza. Under the Israeli-Palestinian accords, the PNC is required to amend the clauses in its charter that call for the destruction of Israel. [Page 3]

■ Competing diplomatic efforts by U.S., Russian and European diplomats may be impeding a resolution of the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said he would not accept an understanding calling for a unilateral end to Israel's military operation in Lebanon. [Page 2]

■ President Clinton is expected to sign anti-terrorism legislation passed by Congress. The bill's provisions aimed at curbing international terrorism were championed by Jewish organizations, but several groups opposed the measure because it placed limits on death-row appeals.

■ Jewish community leaders in Yaroslavl, Russia, believe that those responsible for last Friday's bombing of their Jewish community center will never be apprehended. Local neo-Nazis are suspected to be behind the blast. [Page 4]

■ Meeting with President Clinton in Moscow, Russian Jewish leaders voiced concern about the prospects of a Communist victory in June's presidential election. The meeting, organized by the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, came as Clinton wrapped up a visit to attend a summit on nuclear safety.

■ The Israeli army was investigating its shelling of a U.N. base in Lebanon that killed at least 75 refugees. Israel said its gunners had been aiming at a site near the U.N. peacekeeping base where Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah fighters had fired Katyusha rockets minutes earlier.

■ The European Parliament denounced plans for the construction of a mini-mall across from the former Auschwitz death camp in Poland. According to a recent poll, most Poles object to the project, which was suspended, but not scrapped, earlier this month.

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Some 1,800 people from across the country and the religious spectrum convened here last week to launch a national progressive campaign to counter the Christian right's exclusive claim to spiritual and family values.

The three-day "Summit on Ethics and Meaning," which drew the grass roots as well as the celebrated in politics, academia and religion, issued the Covenant with American Families as "an explicit alternative to the Christian Coalition's Contract with the American Family."

It also produced the Social Responsibility Initiative, which is committed to rebuilding a "spirit of community and mutual respect in our nation."

These initiatives included calls for increasing the minimum wage, a year of paid family and medical leave, full employment, improved housing and child care as well as calls for challenging violence in children's television programs.

The conference was spearheaded by Michael Lerner, the editor of Tikkun magazine, a progressive Jewish journal, and had at its central principle the need for a "politics of meaning," the hallmark of Lerner and his associates.

For a brief period after President Clinton's election, the politics-of-meaning message and its messenger were embraced and touted by the White House, but then seemed to fall into disfavor because of what Lerner has described as a lack of political courage.

Still, Lerner is undaunted, viewing this week's summit as a watershed.

It marked the start of a "national conversation" on the need to change the "fundamental paradigm" of politics and society "from selfishness, cynicism and materialism to idealism, caring and community," he said.

While many Jewish organizations have been actively working to counter the policy goals of the Christian Coalition, what distinguished last week's gathering was the wide-ranging religious representation of the participants.

The conference had strong Jewish components, including a ceremony marking Holocaust Remembrance Day, co-led by Jewish Renewal leader Arthur Waskow.

But only about 20 percent of the registrants were Jewish, Lerner said.

#### Sense of urgency

Lerner, who has been marginalized by many in the Jewish mainstream, said the conference was an important opportunity to have "Torah values" brought into the political arena.

For him, the politics of meaning is a "transformative vision rooted in the Bible" that he hopes will be a "central part of the politics of the 21st century" and help address the despair and alienation that is rampant in the culture.

Indeed, "much of the impetus for this movement stems from the Bible," the social obligations therein and the vision of each person "created in the image of God," he said.

A sense of urgency permeated the conference in the face of recent political gains by the religious right and the Republican Congress.

"This is my 14th year in the Congress," said Rep. Major Owens (D-N.Y.) at the summit news conference, "and if ever there was a time we needed the politics of meaning, it's now."

Owens said he long had preached for a "coalition of caring" and had reason to hope that at the summit he was witnessing the "birth of a caring majority movement."

At the same time, Lerner and others repeatedly called for a halt to demonizing the Christian right and said the new progressive campaign could offer inspiration to people of all political stripes.

Referring to the Christian right, Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center, said, "They're fighting to protect their children" and "they're asking profound questions" about the

breakdown of the family and the community, and about abortion.

"I agree with all of their questions, I just profoundly disagree with their answers," he said.

Traditional liberalism also came under attack by many summit speakers for failing to respond to people's alienation and fears.

That failure has prompted some of its traditional Democratic Party constituency to move to the right, responding to appeals that often include scapegoating of Jews, blacks, homosexuals and immigrants, said speakers.

Liberals traditionally have focused too narrowly on economics and individual rights at the expense of a focus on the "ethical and spiritual crisis" gripping the lives of most Americans, Lerner repeatedly said.

Part of that crisis comes from people's frustrated desire for community, for spirituality and for serving the common good as well as from a sense of not being valued for anything beyond their contribution to the marketplace, according to his theory.

"We are not left or right," said Lerner. "We are critics of the left and the right. We're seeking a different politics."

For Bonnie Cushing of Montclair, N.J., who identified herself as a mother and a psychotherapist, the summit left her with an "inspiration for a new movement and for hopes our deepest needs will be recognized and met."

It also reflected her commitment to Judaism.

"Michael's message is universal, but what fuels it is specifically Jewish," she said. "It's Torah."

A student of the Unitarian Universalist ministry in Chicago, Valerie Mapstone Ackerman, also called Lerner's message both Jewish and "universal."

"If Christians are true to their religion, they have to be open to an understanding of their Jewish roots," she said.

At the summit, she said she felt "a new energy which will sustain us for the long haul."

For Rabbi Arturo Kalfus, originally of Buenos Aires and now of Congregation Beth Emeth in Albany, the summit's vision of a just and meaningful society is one of "radical transformation" and a "radical challenge."

For Kalfus, it was a matter of pride that Lerner, "a clearly identified Jew, a man who wears a kippah," is "the head" of what he termed this new broad-based movement.

"It shows the best face of Judaism to the world," he said. □

## Competing diplomatic efforts fail to end conflict in Lebanon

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Multinational diplomatic initiatives have so far failed to bring an end to the conflict on the Israeli-Lebanese border.

And it remained unclear whether peace was elusive because there were so many potential mediators — some, perhaps, having conflicting visions of what would constitute a meaningful formula for ending the fighting.

Along with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who arrived for talks Saturday in Damascus before flying on to Israel, the foreign ministers of France, Russia, Ireland, Spain and Italy were also in the region this week, attempting to work out a solution to the continued fighting between Israel and the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement.

At a joint news conference Sunday with Christopher, Prime Minister Shimon Peres welcomed the international effort to reach a cease-fire, but stressed his preference for the American line of diplomacy.

"I made it clear. We can have many fronts, but one channel.

"If there will be more than one channel, there will be total confusion," Peres said. "Many agreements will mean no agreement at all."

Peres said all sides were "trying to reach common ground."

But, he added, Israel would not accept a unilateral cease-fire.

Christopher, who met Saturday for more than two hours in Damascus with Syrian President Hafez Assad, told reporters that no agreement had yet been reached, but voiced optimism that "we will ultimately achieve our goals."

The backing of Syria, which maintains some 40,000 troops in Lebanon and which controls Hezbollah's main supply routes, is crucial for any regional truce to hold.

While Christopher was flying between Damascus and Jerusalem over the weekend, Foreign Ministers Yevgeny Primakov of Russia and Herve de Charette of France were taking their own proposals to Syria and Lebanon.

Those proposals reportedly included calls for Israel to withdraw from its security zone in southern Lebanon as part of a cease-fire.

Syria and Lebanon have voiced their preference for those proposals over the American initiative, which is more ambiguous about the future of the security zone.

Lebanese officials, angered by the American refusal to condemn the Israeli shelling of Lebanon, have announced that they would take their case to the U.N. General Assembly.

Christopher's talks in Jerusalem were sandwiched between two stops in Damascus — part of an urgent shuttle mission prompted by Israel's shelling last week of a U.N. post in southern Lebanon that was crowded with hundreds of Lebanese refugees, killing at least 75.

Israel Defense Force officers met with U.N. peacekeepers last Friday to express their regret for the casualties.

The April 18 shelling drew an international outcry and prompted the dispatch of numerous diplomatic teams to the region.

Iran, which provides financing and weapons to Hezbollah, also dispatched its foreign minister to Damascus for talks.

## More than \$10 million in damage

As the diplomatic contacts continued Sunday, Israeli artillery and warplanes rocketed Hezbollah targets southeast of Tyre and around Nabatiya.

Israeli gunships off the coast shelled a coastal road leading south from Beirut to prevent supplies from reaching Hezbollah fighters.

Two Lebanese were reported injured in the shelling.

Despite the Israeli barrage, Hezbollah continued to fire rockets into northern Israel.

In Kiryat Shmona, the northern city heavily pounded by Katyusha rockets, another 150 residents evacuated the city Sunday, joining the more than 16,000 people who have already left.

The remaining 4,000 or so have been staying in underground shelters since Israel launched Operation Grapes of Wrath on April 11.

Hezbollah fired close to 500 Katyusha rockets at northern Israel since the operation began, according to the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

The attacks have caused more than \$10 million in damage, the ministry estimated. □

## Freemen militia group leader bases beliefs on anti-Semitism

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Shortly before their standoff with federal authorities began, Leroy Schweitzer gave his fellow Freemen a pep talk.

"It's a race war," Schweitzer, a Freeman leader, said of the anti-government group's struggle against society. "It's a spiritual war between Satan's seed, Satan's children, the Jews and God's children."

"God tells his people to kill many, many times in Scripture. He doesn't allow murder, but he allows killing. Jews brought the blacks into this country to destroy us and they knew that it would eventually, and it has to this point almost destroyed us."

Morris Dees, a civil rights attorney and founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center, quoted from Schweitzer's invective at a National Press Club briefing last week. He said the center obtained a recording of conversations among the Freemen.

The group, which is holed up on a farm in Jordan, Mont., and which is under FBI surveillance, rejects the authority of the federal and state governments. Several members of the group have been charged with defrauding banks, businesses and public agencies of \$1.8 million, threatening a federal judge and stealing television equipment. They do not, however, view themselves as criminals, but as agents of God engaged in battle against a satanic government, according to experts.

The delusional ideas of the Freemen and similar extremist groups are not new, experts say; many are rooted in white supremacist doctrines such as those of the Christian Identity movement, which subscribes to racism, anti-Semitism and male supremacy.

"These people believe that Aryans are the true children of God, the true Israelites," Dees said. "They believe that Jews are the children literally of the devil, and that blacks are beasts of the fields. Those people in the compound in Jordan, Montana, have these beliefs."

Brian Schnitzer, head of the Montana Association of Jewish Communities, said that even though he believes that the Freemen and other Christian Identity groups would "annihilate all Jews and people of color if they had their way," they have never specifically threatened or targeted Jews in the area. Before the standoff began, Schnitzer said, there had even been a "certain amount of sympathy" for groups such as the Freemen from others who despise taxes and fear government intrusiveness.

"But their support seems to kind of drift away when their bizarre philosophies become known," said Schnitzer, who lives in Billings.

Given their fierce hatred of government and a theology that foretells a final battle between forces of light and darkness, some experts see little promise for a peaceful resolution to the standoff.

The Freemen and other such groups will not talk to the FBI, Dees said, "because they see the FBI as agents of ZOG — the Zionist Occupied Government. And they believe that this national, worldwide and Jewish conspiracy is out to destroy Aryan people." For the Freemen, said Dees, it is a "holy war." □

## PNC appears unlikely to act on charter's anti-Israel clauses

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Palestine National Council was scheduled to convene in Gaza this week — but changing its charter did not appear to be among its priorities.

"In the council's meeting, which won't last less than five days, the annulment or change of the covenant will not be discussed," Salim Zanoun, who is the acting PNC chairman, was quoted as saying in the Al Quds newspaper.

Under the Israel-Palestinian accords, the PNC must revoke the anti-Israel clauses in its charter.

It is not clear whether this would be accomplished by amending the existing charter or by drawing up a new one.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has assured Israel that the PNC would fulfill the commitment to change the charter.

He also said such action would be taken when the Palestinian parliament in exile meets this week for the first time in the self-rule areas.

Recent events in Lebanon, particularly Israel's shelling last week of a U.N. post, which killed at least 75 refugees, have made the atmosphere for changing the covenant combative.

Opponents of changing the covenant said, "The slaughter in Lebanon obliges those who accepted Arafat's position on change to backtrack."

Among the PNC members are representatives of Palestinian organizations that are opposed to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. □

## Shoah survivors in California to get tax-exempt reparations

By Heather Camlot

NEW YORK (JTA) — Survivors of the Holocaust who live in California can now reap a tax benefit from reparations paid to them by the German government.

Legislation signed by Gov. Pete Wilson on April 8 exempts from taxation income received from the German government as reparation for property that was located in the former East Germany and that was confiscated during the Nazi regime.

The Holocaust Victim Compensation Relief Act, co-sponsored by state Sen. Bill Lockyer and Assemblywoman Sheila Kuehl, brings California's state tax law into compliance with federal law.

Under a U.S.-German treaty, reparations are not subject to federal income tax.

"We can't undo the terrible and horrific wrongs, which, although committed long ago, remain a stain on our collective humanity," Lockyer said.

"But at least, all these years later, we shouldn't compound the tragedy by taxing the victims."

According to California's Franchise Tax Board, about 200 Holocaust survivors who live in the state will benefit from the new law.

The loss of tax revenue is estimated at \$250,000 annually, Lockyer said.

The legislation covers reparations received since the beginning of the 1994 tax year.

California residents who received such compensation were able to file amendments with their 1995 income tax returns, said Jesus Arredondo, Wilson's deputy press secretary.

"This legislation will allow for the full benefit and value of compensation awards to be enjoyed by the survivors of the Holocaust," Wilson said.

Barbara Bergen, central Pacific regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, said, "While no amount of money or regained property can erase the atrocities these victims have experienced, the Holocaust Victim Compensation Relief Act is a tangible piece of legislation that helps assure survivors and the rest of the Jewish community that the government acknowledges the pain of their past." □

## No suspects in bomb attack on Jewish community center

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — An explosion ripped through a Jewish community center in the Russian city of Yaroslavl, causing no injuries but seriously damaging the 2-story building housing the center in the city's historic quarter.

The bomb used in last Friday's attack contained a charge equivalent to more than 2 pounds of TNT, a spokesperson for regional police said in a telephone interview.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack.

Some in the Jewish community thought that the perpetrators would never be apprehended.

"I think no one will be arrested and punished," said Inna Davidova, director of the Hesed Charitable Society and member of the community's executive board.

She said she saw no reason for anyone to attack the community, adding, "We have always had a good relationship with the authorities and with the general community."

The community center is located in a synagogue that was erected in 1916. In 1934, the building was confiscated by local Communist authorities. The Jewish community recovered the property in 1994.

Along with a synagogue, the center houses local organizations that serve the needs of the 2,500-member Jewish community in Yaroslavl, about 130 miles northeast of Moscow.

The explosion, caused by a bomb planted outside the center, shattered all the windows in the building and in some neighboring houses.

An office of the Hesed society and a room that served as the community library suffered the worst damage.

The attack came a day after the Israeli army shelled a U.N. base in southern Lebanon, killing at least 75 refugees who had taken shelter there.

Some Russian media reports suggested another connection, noting a possible link between the bombing of the center and the birthday of Adolf Hitler, which falls on April 20 and which is sometimes marked by Russian neo-Nazis with acts of violence.

Citing another possible connection, the Russian daily Moskovsky Komsomolets noted that several members of a neo-Nazi group known as the Werewolf Legion were recently sentenced to jail terms by a regional court in Yaroslavl.

The paper suggested the explosion may have been carried out by supporters of the jailed neo-Nazis. □

## Prosecutor who sued Nazi loses discrimination lawsuit

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — An Argentine judge has ruled in favor of an admitted Nazi who refused to have a Jewish prosecutor handle a case involving her.

In September 1995, lawyer Liliana Bonavonta was notified that her former husband was filing charges against her for not allowing him to visit their son.

Bonavonta asked the judge in charge of the case who the prosecutor would be.

When she was told that the case was to be taken by attorney Daniel Pablosky, she reportedly said: "It had to be a Jew" and "I am a Nazi and refuse to have him in the case."

Upon hearing Bonavonta's remarks, Pablosky excused himself from the case and filed discrimination charges against her.

Last Friday, Judge Gabriel Cavallo ruled in favor of Bonavonta in the discrimination suit.

Cavallo described Bonavonta's remarks regarding Pablosky as "puerile," "offensive" and "highly intolerant," but added that they did not constitute a crime.

"Bonavonta's attitude does not imply calling for a persecution or for racial hatred," Cavallo wrote in his decision.

"The spirit of the remarks is hardly defensible, but is confined to Bonavonta's conscience, outside the reach of the law."

"Being a Nazi is not a crime," the judge wrote, "although it is morally reprehensible."

The Argentine Jewish umbrella organization DAIA is considering an appeal.

Pablosky did not publicly comment on the outcome of the suit. □

## Islamic group says Israelis were intended target in Cairo

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli group was the intended target of a terrorist attack last week that left 18 Greek tourists dead in Cairo.

In a statement sent to a news agency, Egypt's largest Islamic militant group claimed responsibility for the deadly April 18 shooting attack outside Cairo's Europa Hotel.

The statement said the Islamic Group had received information that an Israeli group staying in the hotel was about to board a tour bus.

The statement also said the group "was surprised when after the act was carried out, it was discovered that the Israeli group had been switched with another one."

The organization called it "another step taken by the Egyptian security forces to protect Israelis."

Egyptian police have arrested a number of suspects in connection with the attack.

Meanwhile, another Islamic militant group, the Vanguard of Conquest, urged Muslims around the world to target American and Israeli interests to avenge Israel's ongoing campaign against Hezbollah targets in Lebanon.

It blamed the Israeli campaign on an anti-terror summit held last month in Egypt, and on the peace deals that Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians have signed with Israel.

The Vanguard of Conquest is an offshoot of the Jihad Group, which assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981 and which has targeted senior Egyptian officials in an anti-government campaign since 1992. □

## Plea made to void Amir's citizenship

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Tel Aviv resident has appealed to Israel's Supreme Court to revoke the citizenship of Yitzhak Rabin's convicted assassin.

Petitioner Hila Alroy said the murder of the prime minister struck at the heart of democracy and that Yigal Amir should, as a result, be ousted from Israeli society.

The petition cited remarks made by Amir during his trial in Tel Aviv District Court.

Amir had said he acted for ideological reasons.

Amir was sentenced last month to life in prison for shooting Rabin at a Nov. 4 peace rally in Tel Aviv.

Last week, a second trial opened in which Amir, along with his brother Hagai Amir and a friend, Dror Adani, were charged with plotting to kill the prime minister, conspiring to attack Palestinians and illegally possessing weapons. □