



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The Knesset approved the creation of an Infrastructure Ministry for Ariel Sharon, ending a three-week effort to bring the Likud hard-liner into the government. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was under intense pressure to find a position for the former general. [Page 2]

■ Likud Knesset member Eliahu Ben-Elissar is set to become Israel's next ambassador to the United States. He will succeed Itamar Rabinovich, who is to serve in the post until September.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Golan Heights leaders hours before his departure for the United States. Meanwhile, Syria urged President Clinton to press Netanyahu not to reject the land-for-peace formula in Israeli-Arab negotiations.

■ Churches for Middle East Peace, a coalition of major Protestant and Catholic groups, called on the Clinton administration to press Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to hold to commitments Israel made in the peace process.

■ Finance Minister Dan Meridor said the Israeli government showed courage in approving spending cuts in defense, social welfare and education. [Page 2]

■ The Buenos Aires City Council blocked a proposal by the families of the victims of the AMIA and Israeli Embassy bombings to unveil a memorial sculpture across the street from the Argentine Supreme Court. [Page 3]

■ The Islamic-led government of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan won a vote of confidence in Turkey's Parliament. Since forming his government two weeks ago with the help of True Path, the center-right party of ex-Premier Tansu Ciller, Erbakan has toned down his anti-Western rhetoric.

■ Israel's attorney general asked the High Court of Justice to lift the parliamentary immunity of a Shas Knesset member. Raphael Pinhasi, the acting head of the Knesset House Committee, was allegedly involved in a series of financial irregularities.

50 years later, Poland atones for massacre of Jews in Kielce

By Ruth E. Gruber

KIELCE, Poland (JTA) — "The heavens are weeping on our ceremony," New York Rabbi David Blumenfeld told a crowd of about 2,000 people who gathered this week outside a white building in the center of this southern Polish city.

As rain fell, Blumenfeld lit a memorial candle and held it before the crowd.

Fifty years ago, on July 4, 1946, a Polish mob, inflamed by anti-Semitism and rumors that Jews had kidnapped a Christian child, besieged the building and during a day of bloody violence, slaughtered 42 Jewish Holocaust survivors.

Sunday's emotional ceremonies were held at the site where the pogrom took place, as well as at the Kielce Jewish cemetery and at the former Kielce synagogue, now used to house city archives.

The commemorations marked Poland's official atonement for the pogrom and its request for forgiveness for the slaughter.

Attended by Polish, Catholic and Jewish leaders, local dignitaries and townspeople, and Holocaust survivors from Kielce and their children, the commemoration was marked by solemn speeches as the ceremonies — and crowd — moved from site to site.

Among those in the crowd was a Polish survivor of Auschwitz, who wore a concentration camp uniform and bore a sign calling Kielce the shame of Polish Roman Catholics.

Alongside a Chasidic man in a frock coat was a group of local teenagers wearing tank tops.

A survivors group from the United States distributed yarmulkes specially imprinted with the commemoration date.

According to Polish Prime Minister Wlodzimierz Cimoszewicz, the ceremonies represented a hoped-for stepping stone toward better Polish-Jewish relations as well as toward a more honest Polish re-examination of Polish behavior during and after the war.

"Half a century after the tragic Kielce events, which have left a bloody imprint on Polish-Jewish relations, we owe ourselves words of truth and moral evaluation," Cimoszewicz told the crowd.

"We see the need to work toward true Polish-Jewish reconciliation and brotherhood, which we truly believe is possible in a world on the threshold of the third millennium," he said.

The Kielce pogrom, the worst of a series of Polish attacks on Jewish survivors returning to their homes after the Holocaust, became a landmark in Polish anti-Semitism, sparking the mass emigration of some 100,000 Polish Holocaust survivors.

A festering and divisive memory

Although nine people were hastily tried and executed for the Kielce murders by Poland's Communist authorities, the pogrom has been a festering and divisive memory over the years.

Many Poles refused to accept that ordinary people could have carried out such carnage and blamed the attack on provocation by Soviet-backed secret police. Public discussion of the affair during the Communist era was virtually taboo.

In January, Polish Foreign Minister Dariusz Rosati wrote a letter of apology to the World Jewish Congress for the pogrom.

His letter elicited angry responses from Polish rightists as well as a highly critical open letter from Edward Moskal, head of the Polish American Congress, who called Rosati's apology "unfortunate and unnecessary" and accused the Polish government of catering to the Jews.

On Sunday, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel thanked Cimoszewicz for what he called his courageous words and praised the current Polish government for its efforts toward better relations with Jews.

But he raised the issues and questions that have blighted the memory of Kielce for half a century — and that still, despite recent official investigations into the pogrom, remain largely unanswered.

"True, the killing was perpetuated by hoodlums," he said. "But what

about the soldiers who reportedly took part in them? And what about the others, the onlookers, the bystanders?"

"What happened in this place showed that normal citizens could be as cruel as the killers of any death camp," he said.

"The history of the Polish people is filled with suffering and glory," Wiesel added. "Be worthy of that history, citizens of Poland. And face the recent past which is also yours. To forget is to choose dishonor. Honor without memory is inconceivable."

Kalman Sultanik, vice president of the World Jewish Congress and president of the Federation of Polish Jews in America, echoed Wiesel's call for a thorough examination of the past.

"Only when a complete and truthful historical account of Polish Jewish history has been recorded shall Poles and Jews be able to engage in an open constructive dialogue that will bear fruit for the future generations," he said.

In his remarks, Sultanik recalled his own experiences.

"From 1945 to 1946, more than a thousand Jews were killed in various places by Poles; taken off trains, they were hunted down in small towns and killed," he said at the ceremony in the Jewish cemetery.

"I was one of those Jews on a train from Kielce to Ostrowiec when the train stopped and hooligans entered to hunt for Jews — and I hid my face, so therefore I speak to you today — and I remember that I was frightened to death."

Jews who attended the ceremonies expressed appreciation for the efforts by the Polish government and local Kielce officials to be open about the past.

Blumenfeld said in an interview that he was gratified at the number of local Poles, particularly young people, who attended the ceremonies.

"They came up to me to shake my hand," he said. "I can't speak Polish, but I saw in their eyes that things will be better."

"What was disturbing, though, was that I could see that behind the crowd at the ceremony, in the park, were people who were just there having fun. It was testimony that they didn't care."

'The scar has not healed'

Holocaust survivor William Mandell, leader of an association of Jews in the United States from Kielce, said in an interview that he appreciated the efforts of the Polish authorities to atone for the pogrom, but that it was too long in coming.

"The wound has healed, but the scar has not healed," he said. "We hope that today's events bode well for the future, but for us older generation, it is tough to forgive."

"Today opened up some discussion, but I would not say forgiveness."

Some Jews expressed disappointment with some facets of the occasion. Polish Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, secretary general of the Polish Episcopate, was faulted for giving a bland speech in which he cited church statements condemning anti-Semitism without talking of the ambivalence demonstrated by some senior church figures.

"He said the right things, but clearly he was not trying to face the totality of the church's attitude at the time," Stanislaw Krajewski, Polish consultant to the American Jewish Committee, said in an interview.

During the ceremonies, side-by-side monuments were dedicated at the former synagogue to commemorate the 27,000 Jews deported to Treblinka from Kielce and to remember a number of local Righteous Gentiles who saved Jews during the war.

"Both are meaningful and needed monuments," Krajewski said, "but I am a little unhappy they are juxtaposed."

"And also, the monument to the Righteous Gentiles is much more elaborate; its inscription is so much larger. The Jews are commemorated as a number, 27,000, an anonymous mass," he said.

"Those who helped them are commemorated as individuals with names. An anonymous abstraction vs. individuals about whom we care." □

Sharon joins government as infrastructure minister

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's premier averted a potential crisis in the Cabinet this week by bringing Likud hard-liner Ariel Sharon into the government as minister of infrastructure.

Benjamin Netanyahu made the move just before he left Monday for his first official visit to the United States as prime minister, delaying his departure by two hours to get Sharon's position finalized by the government.

The Knesset approved the appointment Monday in a 58-33 vote, with one abstention.

The possibility that Sharon would remain outside the government while Netanyahu was abroad could have created some problems back at home.

At the top of the list was Foreign Minister David Levy's threat to leave the government if Sharon was not appointed prior to Netanyahu's departure. Sharon had forged Levy's political alliance with Netanyahu.

The appointment of the former general will likely displease both the Arabs and Israel's main ally, the United States.

As defense minister in 1982, Sharon led Israel's forces into its costly war in Lebanon. In 1983, he was forced to quit after an Israeli inquiry committee found him indirectly responsible for the killing of hundreds of Palestinian civilians at the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps during the invasion.

In the early 1990s, as housing minister, Sharon spearheaded a Jewish settlement drive in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Sharon's portfolio in Netanyahu's Cabinet was created after other ministers reluctantly gave up some of the responsibilities that had been under their control.

The new ministry will oversee the water rights issue, a highly sensitive subject in the Middle East.

The Energy Ministry, which was held by Transportation Minister Yitzhak Levy, was disbanded. Its functions were transferred to the new Infrastructure Ministry.

Other ministries that relinquished some of their duties include housing, agriculture, interior, and industry and trade.

Late Sunday, the Cabinet approved a Finance Ministry economic program calling for cuts totaling some \$1.6 billion in the 1997 budget. The program calls for cuts in such areas as social welfare, health, defense and education.

The cut in the defense budget of some \$240 million was less than the Finance Ministry originally demanded. Senior defense officials expressed concern that the cuts would prompt career officers, who would be most affected by the cuts, to leave.

Netanyahu described the budget-cutting measures as "a painful operation a sick person must undergo in order to get well." He blamed the previous government for the economy he inherited, saying that it "gave us no choice but to take these one-time measures to restore stability." □

Federal judge in Canada halts actions against accused Nazis

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — A Canadian federal judge has halted denaturalization and deportation proceedings against three accused Nazi war criminals.

Leaders of Canada's Jewish community criticized last week's ruling.

Judge Bud Cullen halted the proceedings July 4 because of what he said was a breach of judicial independence. The breach allegedly involves an assistant deputy justice minister asking Chief Justice Julius Isaac to speed up the pace of the proceedings against the accused Nazis.

Eventually, the alleged request became public, and Judge James Jerome, who was presiding over the case against the accused Nazis, stepped down and a judicial inquiry was called.

The three accused war criminals are Johann Dueck, Helmut Oberlander and Erichs Tobiass, all Canadian citizens living in southern Ontario.

"This is an appalling decision and a moral outrage," said Bernie Farber, national director of community relations for the Canadian Jewish Congress.

"We agree that this discussion [between the minister and the judge] was inappropriate and misguided, and that it shouldn't have occurred. But we believe the remedy by the judge far outweighed what was necessary."

Irving Abella, a past president of the congress and the national chairman of its war crimes committee, said, "To end these proceedings is to deny natural justice to the thousands of Jews who were allegedly murdered by these three individuals, and that's obscene." He added, "These cases should be decided on the evidence. They should not be halted on a procedural issue."

Dueck, 76, a retired mechanic, is accused of taking part in the killing of Jews and other civilians as a member of the Selidovka district police in German-occupied Ukraine from 1941 to 1943.

Oberlander, 72, is accused of having been a member of a commando unit that massacred hundreds of thousands of Jews in Ukraine and Crimea after the German army's advance into the southern Soviet Union in the summer and fall of 1941.

Tobiass, 84, is accused of participating in the execution of civilians in Latvia from 1941 to 1943 as a member of the Latvian security police, an SS auxiliary unit responsible for the deaths of 30,000 Latvian Jews.

Despite a 1987 federal war crimes commission that urged the government to act quickly against dozens of alleged war criminals here, the government has continued to move slowly.

The setbacks in Canada's attempts to prosecute or deport Nazi war criminals reflects "a failure of public will," said David Matas, senior counsel for B'nai Brith Canada.

John Simms of the attorney general's office said the government would continue going after accused war criminals. "We're still committed to ensuring that Canada is not a haven for war criminals from WWII," he said. □

Buenos Aires dislikes location of memorial for bomb victims

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — The Buenos Aires City Council has blocked plans by the families of the victims of the AMIA and Israeli Embassy bombings to unveil a memorial sculpture in the plaza across the street from the Argentine Supreme Court.

The Peronist majority in the council nixed the idea,

saying that it objected to the location for the monument, not the memorial itself.

The victims' relatives, members of what is known as the Active Memory group, wanted to unveil the memorial in a July 15 ceremony.

The formal presentation of the monument — a 1,000-pound slab of marble bearing the names of the bombing victims — was scheduled to be the central event in a week of ceremonies and services in memory of those killed.

The Argentine government has failed thus far to find the terrorists that destroyed the Israeli Embassy in March 1992 and the Argentine Mutual Aid Association building in July 1994.

The bombings left a total of 115 people dead and more than 400 wounded.

Council member Juliana Marino, acting as spokeswoman for the Peronist majority, said, "Such a memorial in front of the Supreme Court and Central Courthouse building would be embarrassing to our government."

She added that the group had no problem with erecting the monument in another city plaza.

The victims' families have insisted on the location near the courthouse because they have gathered there every Monday since the AMIA bombing to demand justice for their loved ones.

"After all we have been through, it is incredible that we have to fight to put up a memorial," said one woman who lost her husband in the bombing.

The Active Memory group is worried that a permit will not be issued in time for a July 15 ceremony, one member said. □

Rabin's assassin tells court he is happy that leader died

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Yigal Amir, serving a life sentence for assassinating Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, said this week that he was pleased that the Israeli leader died.

Amir, a religious Jew who had confessed to the Nov. 4 fatal shooting of Rabin, made the remarks Sunday as he appealed his murder conviction to the Supreme Court.

"I am not sorry he is dead," the 26-year-old Amir said.

He also said he believed that the peace policy of the Rabin government had endangered Jewish lives.

Amir added that he was permitted under Jewish law to kill the prime minister.

The appeal requested that the murder charge be reduced to manslaughter.

Amir asked to address the court after his lawyers had argued that he was not psychologically stable.

But Amir maintained before the court that he was "balanced."

A court-ordered psychiatric exam had found that Amir had no mental disturbance.

The lawyers also said a second gunman at the Nov. 4 Tel Aviv peace rally had shot and killed Rabin.

When asked why there was no evidence about a second gunman, one of the defense lawyers said, "Because no one tried to investigate this angle."

The court will issue a ruling at a later date.

Amir was convicted in March.

He was also separately charged, along with his brother Hagai Amir and friend Dror Adani, with conspiracy to assassinate the prime minister.

That trial is now under way in Tel Aviv District Court. □

Arab-Jewish ties in U.S. may revert to divisiveness

By Shawn Cohen

Washington Jewish Week

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The stern rebuke of the new Israeli government by several Arab American groups has upset many in the organized Jewish community who fear that new ties between the two communities may suffer as a result.

"I have seen some of the statements and writings [of Arab American leaders] and frankly, I find them disturbing," said Jess Hordes, Washington representative of the Anti-Defamation League.

"They are reverting to the old style of propagandistic rhetoric. It has a danger of undoing all of the positives that have been achieved over the last few years."

Many Arab Americans have accused the organized Jewish community of not speaking out against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's stated policies that they say threaten to derail the Arab-Israeli peace process. Such complacency, say these Arab American leaders, does not bode well for Arab-Jewish relations in the United States.

"It would be sad if the change of government in Israel produces a retrenchment on the part of the mainstream Jewish community in the United States, the signs of which are already visible to us," said Khalil Jahshan, executive director of the National Association of Arab Americans.

"That could derail whatever little progress we have achieved between the two communities," added Jahshan, whose organization has established cooperative efforts with several Jewish groups in recent years, including the American Jewish Committee and National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

Many in the Arab American community see Netanyahu's election as a serious blow to the peace process. Arab American leaders have attacked Netanyahu's pledged policies and warned him to follow through on Israeli commitments to Palestinians and the concept of trading land for peace.

"I understand how some points in the government's policy guidelines raise concern in the Arab American community," said Martin Raffel, associate executive vice chairman of NJCRAC. "But we need to give the government more time to see how these guidelines play out in the real world of diplomacy. Our main message now is not to prejudge the government."

'Just rolled over'

NJCRAC has established close ties with Jahshan's group in recent years, an outgrowth of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Last year, the two groups issued an unprecedented joint statement denouncing terrorism and pledging support for the peace process. With a new Israeli leadership, "there is a reasonable likelihood that this will complicate relations between American Jews and Arabs," Raffel said. "This is a relatively new relationship and, in that sense, it's somewhat tentative."

James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, said, "The majority of the Jewish community has just rolled over" by backing the new government and abandoning policies pursued by former Prime Minister Shimon Peres. As for the claim that Arab groups are "prejudging" the new government, Zogby said: "One thing I have learned about the Likud Party is that you can count on their word."

Jewish concerns arose due to recent statements by prominent Arab American leaders, including Zogby and Jahshan.

Jahshan urged participants in last month's Arab

summit in Cairo to "freeze, for a specific period of time, all normalization with Israel in order to ascertain whether the new Israeli government will fully abide by its predecessor's assurances, commitments and agreements regarding the peace process."

In a letter distributed the day before the summit, Jahshan reaffirmed the National Association of Arab Americans' support for the peace process.

But he said the Netanyahu government is being disingenuous when it offers to negotiate with Arab neighbors "without preconditions" and then sets "unacceptable restrictions" on future talks, such as refusing to allow a Palestinian state or withdraw from the Golan Heights.

"The new Israeli government has made it clear that it wants to fundamentally change the rules of the game at half time, thus derailing the peace process altogether," Jahshan wrote. "It must not be allowed to do so while making it appear that the Arabs are at fault," he also said.

Summit leaders opted against freezing normalization with Israel; still, Jahshan said, "In a way, they did, but they used more diplomatic wording."

The Arab American Institute hosted another conference in mid-June for dozens of Arab American leaders at the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee's headquarters in Washington. The ADC was criticized by Jewish leaders for organizing a series of anti-Israel protests during the Israeli conflict in Lebanon in the spring.

In a written statement, Zogby called on President Clinton to apply sanctions against Israel if Jewish settlements are expanded in the territories.

Arab American groups hope to convene a larger conference later this month in Washington, said ADC President Hala Maksoud, who is on the planning committee along with Jahshan. "We need to be more active in pushing the peace process that might be faltering as a result of the Israeli elections," Maksoud said.

'Madrid is dead'

Jahshan expressed grave doubt that the peace process could go forward. "I think Madrid is dead in light of what the new government is saying," he said. In 1991, an Arab-Israeli peace conference took place in the Spanish capital that launched the current peace process. "I'm afraid we have to go back and renegotiate Madrid. Whether there are any takers on the Arab side, I am doubtful," he said.

As for relations between American Arabs and Jews, Jahshan also foresaw difficulties on the horizon. "The relationship today is more focused and more mature but not as deep and well-founded as it should be," Jahshan said, adding, "The Madrid conference brought us together, with both communities producing a constituency that accepted the basic premises of land for peace. Now we have a government that questions that premise. It will be difficult for American Jewish groups to oppose the current policy."

"If there is a reversal [in Israel], then we will probably see a pulling away from these types of encounters where we have cooperative efforts," he said.

Jahshan said he wants to meet with Jewish leaders soon to discuss the Israeli elections and the maintenance of relations between the U.S. Arab and Jewish communities.

In the statement last month, Zogby also said: "We will be inviting you (the Jewish community) to meet with us, to define a common vision and to recommit ourselves to a common quest for a peaceful resolution to the Middle East conflict based on the principles of Madrid."

Several Jewish groups expressed similar aims.

"It is important to see whether we can maintain this dialogue," said Hordes of the ADL. "It would be unfortunate if the progress that has been made is dissipated without making an effort to understand each other and move forward." □