

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan preached a familiar message at a rally he held near the United Nations, which was attended by some 30,000 people. In addition to blaming the U.S. government and faulting whites in general, Farrakhan singled out the Jews, Israel and the Anti-Defamation League as having special responsibility for black oppression.

■ Israeli and Palestinian negotiators resumed formal talks in Taba, Egypt, amid mutual accusations that a lack of good faith was holding up the conclusion of an agreement on the redeployment in Hebron. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, speaking in Cairo, said Israel was trying to divide the West Bank town in two.

■ French President Jacques Chirac is slated to become the first foreign leader to address the Palestinian Council when he visits the Middle East next week.

■ Members of the Palestinian legislative council were hosted by Arab Knesset members in the Israeli Parliament despite the sharp opposition of some Knesset members. Their visit coincided with an explosive debate that erupted among members about who was responsible for the murder of Yitzhak Rabin. [Page 4]

■ Natan Sharansky, Israel's minister of industry and trade, was one of three Israelis from the former Soviet Union who beat chess champ Gary Kasparov. Kasparov, who was in Israel to open the finals of the Israeli chess tournament and to participate in Jerusalem 3000 celebrations, played 25 games simultaneously.

■ Rabbi Israel Grunwald pleaded not guilty to a federal charge of non-consensual sexual contact after allegations that he groped a 15-year-old girl on a 1995 flight from Australia, it was reported. Grunwald's assistant, Yehudah Friedlander, who was also on the flight, has already been sentenced to 22 months in prison for sexually abusing the girl.

■ Hungary's newest and largest shopping mall, funded by Israeli and Hungarian investors, was inaugurated in Budapest by the Hungarian prime minister.

**THE RACE FOR CONGRESS [Part 1]****Control of the next Congress will affect Jews' Capitol agenda**

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.) promises to reform welfare reform in the 105th Congress.

Rep. Jon Fox (R-Pa.) wants to stave off cuts in Israel's foreign aid. Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) pledges to preserve benefits for legal immigrants.

Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) vows to turn up the heat on Syria for sponsoring terrorism.

These lawmakers all have one thing in common: They have to get re-elected first.

As the race toward Election Day enters the homestretch, many Jewish voters are turning their attention to their local congressional races.

Across the country, candidates and incumbents are battling for their political lives. When the winners come to Capitol Hill, the way they govern will have a dramatic impact on the American Jewish community.

The 105th Congress will tackle many of the domestic issues nearest and dearest to American Jewish lives.

Indeed, it is the domestic agenda that is surpassing Israel and other foreign policy issues on the radar screen of most Jewish voters this election season.

Among the key issues likely to be addressed:

- The future of federal spending and a balanced budget;
- Changes to welfare reform, Medicare and Medicaid — all programs that have a direct impact on Jewish social services across the country;
- Social issues such as school prayer and school vouchers as well as abortion and gay rights;
- Immigration, campaign finance and tax reform;
- The probable confirmation by the Senate of at least one new Supreme Court justice.

In addition, with the president's new authority to use the line-item veto, the next Congress will have a dramatically changed role in shaping the government's spending priorities.

The volatility of this election has left many veteran observers with no idea which political party will control the next House and Senate.

Indeed, the fight to attain majority status has, in many ways, become the main battle of these congressional races.

**Turnover will challenge Jewish community**

The Republicans, who gained control of both houses in 1994 for the first time in 40 years, are waging an all-out war to retain that control.

And the Democrats, having lost the sweet taste of power, are thirsting for its return.

Regardless of who achieves control, there will once again be a record number of new faces in the next Congress.

And that turnover will challenge the Jewish community's ability to influence policy decisions.

Assuming that all the incumbents running for re-election in the Senate win, there will still be a record number of freshmen.

That is because in 14 Senate races, there is no incumbent running for re-election.

In the House, there are 35 open seats with members not returning and at least another 25 incumbents running behind in their race for re-election.

While no election cycle would be complete without activists and political junkies using superlatives to measure the import of the national elections, this time they say they mean it.

"We have a big stake in the debates of the next Congress," said Diana Aviv, director of the Washington Action Office of the Council of Jewish Federations.

"The potential for challenges to our most basic priorities cannot be underestimated."

With President Clinton riding a commanding lead in the polls, even some Bob Dole supporters acknowledge that the next Congress will likely be

working with a Democratic White House. That makes the congressional races all the more critical.

"We're talking about who sets the agenda for at least the next two years," said Matt Brooks, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition, the Republican Jewish group.

"The American people spoke very loudly and very clearly in the 1994 elections," Brooks said. "They do not want the return to the days of the liberal, Democratic government. The American people historically want the checks and balances of different parties controlling Congress and the White House."

Democrats say they learned their lesson from the 1994 rout and are ready to once again control both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

"The Jewish community has a lot to fear from this type of Republican Congress," said Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, citing concerns about Republican positions on school prayer and restrictions on abortion.

"The country is not looking for revolutionary changes."

The success or failure of the Jewish community's agenda not only rests on who controls the Congress and the veto pen in the White House. It also largely depends on Jewish relationships with lawmakers and their staffs.

#### **'Education, education, education'**

As was the case in 1994, a large number of retiring members will mean that activists from all sides will face a changed playing field.

"We're losing longtime friends," Aviv said. "The new members may support our issues, but they do not have seniority on their committees, and we do not have the benefit of years of experience working together."

By the time the next session gets under way, more than half of the members of Congress will have been elected in the 1990s and activists will have their work cut out for them on the Hill.

"It's education, education, education," said Mike Bloomfield, political affairs director at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby.

By the time the new Congress is sworn in, AIPAC officials will have met with every new member as well as most of the challengers they defeated.

But the best relationships with new members cannot replace long-standing friendships with retiring members, Bloomfield said.

"From the pro-Israel perspective, new members with solid support of the U.S.-Israel relationship is of course important and welcome. But that does not replace a Bill Cohen or a Sam Nunn," he said, referring to retiring Sens. William Cohen (R-Maine) and Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), who crafted many of the defense bills that aided Israel's missile development.

The 105th also will open its doors without Sens. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) and Paul Simon (D-Ill.), to whom the Jewish community frequently turned for support of its domestic agenda.

Activists privately are quick to point out that not all the departures engender feelings of sadness.

Sen. Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.), who spearheaded efforts to limit legal immigration, found himself at loggerheads during the past two years with the Jewish community's lobbyists in Washington.

Jewish activists will also be dealing with a host of new committee chairpeople if Democrats retake either the House or Senate. These gatekeepers of the legislative process wield tremendous power, determining the congressional schedule for virtually all policy and spending decisions.

For example, Gilman, the New York lawmaker, can only seek a tougher approach with Syria if he is able to continue his position as chairman of the House International Relations Committee. While Gilman's re-election seems fairly certain, his chairmanship, like that of so many of his colleagues, is not. □

#### **Supreme Court to review law on religious freedom**

*By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A law expanding religious freedom that stands as one of the Jewish community's crowning legislative achievements will undergo constitutional scrutiny during the current Supreme Court term.

The high court agreed this week to review a U.S. Court of Appeals ruling that upheld as constitutional the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a federal law enacted in 1993 that makes it harder for government to infringe upon the free exercise of religion.

Jewish groups across the gamut, together with a broad coalition of religious and civil rights organizations, were instrumental in pushing the legislation through Congress.

Most — if not all — Jewish groups now intend to either sign onto or file their own friend-of-the-court briefs with the Supreme Court in defense of the statute.

Under the law, local, state and federal government agencies must show a "compelling" interest before interfering with the practice of religion, whether inadvertently or intentionally.

In the case, *Boerne vs. Flores*, the justices will decide whether Congress exceeded its authority in adopting the law, known as RFRA, by usurping power from state and local governments and from the Supreme Court itself.

The law has also been challenged on the grounds that it violates the First Amendment by giving religion exclusive privileges over other expressions of conscience.

More than 20 challenges to RFRA are now floating around in the lower courts. The case taken by the Supreme Court deals with a landmark-preservation dispute between Boerne, Texas, and a Roman Catholic church.

The case arose after city officials denied an application from the church to expand into the city's historic district. The church contended that without enlarging its building, it would be unable to accommodate its members and fulfill its mission. The archbishop sued, charging that the city's action violated RFRA.

The city responded by arguing that the federal law was unconstitutional. A U.S. District Court judge agreed, but the ruling was reversed by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Jewish legal experts, who gave RFRA their own constitutional stamp of approval in 1993, remain optimistic that the court will uphold the law.

"Based on prior law, we have an excellent chance of winning," said Marc Stern, co-director of the legal department of the American Jewish Congress. "Whether the court is planning a major revision of the law is harder to answer."

Another advocate of RFRA, David Zweibel, general counsel and director of government affairs for Agudath Israel of America, said he welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to review the case.

However the court rules, he said, a decision will at the very least eliminate the ambiguity that has arisen from different judicial interpretations of the law.

The justices will hear arguments in the case early next year. A decision is due by the end of the court term in June. □

## Italian court orders retrial for former SS Capt. Priebke

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — The Italian Jewish community has praised the country's highest appeals court for ordering a retrial of former SS Capt. Erich Priebke for his role in the wartime Nazi massacre of 335 Romans.

The Court of Cassation this week nullified the controversial verdict in August that freed Priebke.

It also overturned a summer ruling made by a lesser appeals court, which had rejected a request by the prosecution and relatives of the massacre victims to dismiss the Priebke trial's presiding judge because of his alleged bias in favor of Priebke.

Tullia Zevi, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, called Tuesday's ruling by the Court of Cassation "important and positive."

On Aug. 1, a military court found Priebke guilty of having taken part in the 1944 massacre at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome, but set him free because of mitigating circumstances and a statute of limitations.

Priebke has said in the past that he killed two of the victims.

Approximately 75 of the massacre victims were Jews.

The verdict touched off a storm of protest.

Priebke was rearrested eight hours later and jailed again pending a German request for extradition and expected appeals.

Priebke's lawyer called the order for a retrial unjust.

Relatives of the victims who were in the courtroom burst into applause.

Agostino Quistelli, who headed the three-judge panel in the first trial, reportedly said that he had no regrets about how he handled the case. □

## In a renewed bid for power, Sandinistas vow ties with Israel

By Brian Harris

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (JTA) — They say they have changed.

They insist that they are not the revolutionaries they were in the 1980s.

But try as they might, the Sandinista National Liberation Front finds itself spending much of the final days of this country's third democratic election campaign running against its past.

That past saw a leftist-oriented government that instituted a hated draft, imposed food rationing in the face of a U.S. embargo and forced the vast majority of the tiny local Jewish population to go into exile in the United States and neighboring Costa Rica.

"We are not going to have a return to the past," a high-ranking Sandinista official who asked not to be identified said in an interview.

"You are not going to see the things that went on here in the '80's repeat themselves," the official said. "This time, things with Israel are going to be managed on mutual respect and friendship."

Should Sandinista candidate and former President Daniel Ortega win Sunday's highly contested vote, the official said, there will be an outreach to Israel and the United States, countries that sometimes covertly financed, aided and even directed attempts to overthrow the Sandinistas in the 1980s, particularly through the Contra rebels, who relied heavily on support from the CIA and the Mossad.

Isaac Gorn, a member of the near-defunct Nicara-

guan Jewish community who now lives in Costa Rica, does not trust the Sandinistas.

Recalling that the country's synagogue was seized by the Sandinista government and converted into a secular school, he said no one should trust the Sandinistas.

"Before we lived tranquilly and no one bothered us, but then the Sandinistas came, took the synagogue, burned [his family's textile] factory and everyone had to leave," he said.

He also said, "Maybe there are 20 Jews in Nicaragua and if the Sandinistas win, they will leave again, running."

Once the nemesis of the United States, the Sandinistas now say they are a reform social democratic party no longer wrapped up in radical rhetoric.

"I see it very clearly that the Sandinistas committed many errors," Sandinista campaign chief and Foreign Minister-designate Alvaro Fiallos said.

Fiallos added, "We cannot act like we did in the 1980s.

"The world has radically changed, we recognize that, and our position now is non-confrontation."

All that is just hogwash, according to former Managua Mayor Arnoldo Aleman, an ultraright ally of the Contras who is neck and neck with Ortega in the polls.

He calls the Sandinistas a "red and black coral snake, modest in size but still deadly" and predicts that voters "will step on the coral snake and break its spine."

Aleman notes that Ortega was an active participant and remains an ardent defender of "Pinata," when the Sandinistas handed out vast properties and many businesses to their supporters during the lame-duck period after their electoral defeat in 1990.

At the time, members of the Basque separatist organization ETA and Italy's Red Brigade got Nicaraguan citizenship.

Members of Middle Eastern terrorist organizations were also reported to have received passports from Nicaragua.

Aleman has openly courted the 150-member Nicaraguan Jewish community and invited them to return home to vote.

### 'Definitely with the Jews'

Although the community is small, he hopes that the symbolism of Jewish support will help with fund raising and get him a favorable reception in Washington, which is worried by his hard-line rhetoric.

"He definitely is with the Jews," Gorn said of Aleman.

The Sandinistas' vow not to antagonize Israel is also geared toward the United States, both to back their claim that they are changed from their days of U.S.-bashing and to make amends with American progressives who opposed Contra aid but were also leery of the Sandinistas' unsavory ties to radical Middle Eastern groups.

Since the Sandinistas lost power, ties with the Jewish state have been re-established under the government of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, who is not running for re-election.

At the same time, the fully staffed Libyan Embassy is one of the more visible buildings here.

The posters supporting the Palestinian uprising that once adorned Sandinista party offices are no longer in place.

And the anti-Israel slant in the Sandinista newspaper Barricada has been toned down.

However, the Torah that used to be housed in Nicaragua is now in Costa Rica, and the bitterness that led to the exodus of Nicaraguan Jews has not been forgiven, even if forgotten by the Sandinistas. □

**Knesset members trade barbs over who caused Rabin murder***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An explosive debate erupted on the Knesset floor this week when opposition and coalition members traded accusations about who was responsible for the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.

Wednesday's fiery exchanges came less than two weeks before the first *yahrzeit* of Rabin's death.

It also occurred on a day when members of the Palestinian legislative council that had been elected in January were sitting in the Knesset VIP gallery.

Their visit to the Knesset — at the invitation of the Israeli Arab-dominated Hadash Party — prompted opposition from some right-wing Knesset members.

The Palestinian Council members were brought into the gallery through a back entrance.

There was a strong security presence in the gallery. The Palestinian guests sat on one side, while Israeli families of victims of Arab terror attacks, who had been invited by the right-wing Moledet Party, sat on the other.

The explosive comments about Rabin's death were sparked by a separate debate on a proposal by Moledet Knesset member Binyamin Alon for a commission of inquiry into who made the decision to supply Palestinian police with rifles. Alon's proposal came in the wake of last month's violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, when Palestinian police fired on Israeli soldiers.

During the debate, Health Minister Tzachi Hanegbi remarked that the commission should answer other questions as well.

With this, Labor Knesset member Dalia Itzik shouted, "Such as who killed Rabin" — a reference to Labor Party allegations that the Likud Party had contributed to the violent atmosphere in Israel that preceded Rabin's assassination.

As a series of fiery exchanges ensued, Rehavam Ze'evi of Moledet looked up into the VIP gallery and said of the Palestinian Council members, "Are they going to continue sitting there?" With that, he left the Knesset floor — along with other legislators who were ordered out by the House Speaker. □

**Mordechai questions ability of joint patrols to cooperate***By Mitchell Danow*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Re-establishing trust between the Israeli and Palestinian forces that jointly patrol in the West Bank and Gaza Strip may be difficult to achieve after last month's violence.

This was the assessment of Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who spoke Wednesday at a news conference here about the aftermath of last month's clashes that left 76 Israelis and Palestinians dead.

Israel's opening of a new entrance to a tunnel near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem was used by the Palestinian leadership as "an excuse" to issue a call for mass demonstrations that turned violent, Mordechai said.

Speaking a day after conferring with U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry in Washington, Mordechai addressed the role played by the Palestinian police in the Sept. 25-27 clashes. "We gave them the weapons, we allowed them to have them," and then the Palestinian police turned them on Israeli soldiers, he said. Fifteen Israelis died as a result of the clashes.

To underscore his point, Mordechai spoke movingly of one incident that occurred near Kfar Darom, a Jewish settlement in Gaza.

When an angry mob of Palestinians approached the

settlement accompanied by Palestinian police, he said, an Israeli soldier came out from the settlement and asked a police officer to disperse the crowd.

Apparently satisfied that the police officer had agreed to the request, the soldier started to return toward the settlement compound. At that point, the Palestinian officer shot the soldier in the back.

The soldier, Mordechai added, was still in an Israeli hospital recovering from his wounds.

Prior to September's violence, the cooperation of the joint Israeli-Palestinian patrols had been one of the success stories of the peace accords.

But in the aftermath of the bloodshed, it remains unclear how the patrols will attain the measure of mutual trust necessary for their operations.

Mordechai also spoke with some frustration about the course of current Israeli-Palestinian negotiations aimed at implementing the long-delayed Israeli redeployment in Hebron. Earlier this week, Israeli officials had said an agreement on the West Bank town was imminent.

But their Palestinian counterparts repeatedly issued contradictory statements and by Wednesday, Mordechai was pessimistic about reaching an agreement soon.

"Maybe the Palestinians are waiting until after the [U.S.] presidential elections," he said.

The Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot* questioned in an editorial this week whether Palestinian Authority leader Yasser "Arafat is genuinely interested in reaching an agreement," a question that has often been directed at Netanyahu. Given the support he got from his own people, the broader Arab world and in the international arena in the wake of last month's violence, *Yediot* suggested that Arafat "seeks to perpetuate the current situation, in which Israel has the lower hand." □

**Netanyahu withstands vote of no-confidence in Knesset***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu withstood a Knesset no-confidence vote this week that was submitted by the opposition in the wake of last month's violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu's governing coalition defeated the motion Monday in a vote of 55-49. Two members of the right-wing Moledet Party abstained.

Labor Knesset member David Libai spoke for the opposition on the last day before his resignation from the Knesset took effect.

In the wake of a new law barring legislators from holding other jobs, Libai resigned from the Knesset this week to pursue his academic career.

Libai, justice minister in the previous Labor government, attacked the government's decision last month to open a new entrance to an ancient tunnel located near Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

The move sparked three days of violence in the territories that left close to 80 Israelis and Palestinians dead.

Libai said he had no faith in Netanyahu's decisions, adding that the prime minister did not understand the principles of democracy and had no policy for peace.

Foreign Minister David Levy responded for the government.

He said the Netanyahu government, which has been subject to attacks and pressure since taking office, nonetheless had to implement its policies.

Levy pointed out that talks with the Palestinians were progressing, adding that an agreement on the long-delayed Israel Defense Force redeployment in Hebron could be reached in the coming days. □