

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ The Council of Jewish Federations sent federation presidents and executives a memo noting widespread concern for the "profound effects" of legislation expected to be proposed in Israel to invalidate conversions to Judaism other than those approved by the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate. CJF also sent a draft resolution calling on the Israeli government to refrain from amending or passing any legislation on the matter. CJF delegates are slated to consider the resolution at its General Assembly next week in Seattle, where Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is set to speak.

■ Final exit polling data from the Voter News Service found that 78 percent of Jewish voters supported President Clinton in the presidential election, 16 percent supported Bob Dole and 3 percent chose Ross Perot. The nationwide exit polls of tens of thousands of voters showed that Jews represented about 3 percent of Americans casting a ballot.

■ Eliahu Ben-Elissar, Israeli ambassador to the United States, said he was "optimistic" about relations between the two countries in President Clinton's second term. Speaking to an Anti-Defamation League gathering, the diplomat also said Israel was ready to sign an agreement on the Hebron redeployment "whenever" Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is ready.

■ Four Arabs were lightly wounded after a bomb exploded outside an eastern Jerusalem branch office of the Israeli Interior Ministry. [Page 4]

■ Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy traveled to Cairo for talks aimed at reducing friction with Egypt. Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu urged Israeli business leaders to attend the regional economic conference in Cairo next week.

■ France returned a work of art to the heir of a Jewish family whose collection was stolen by the Nazis. Foreign Minister Herve de Charette presented Antoinette Carvailho with a pastel drawing by Leon Augustin Lhermitte that was stolen from her father's home in 1940.

**NEWS ANALYSIS****Austrians warily confront wartime role against Jews***By Ruth E. Gruber*

VIENNA (JTA) — Robert Liska, vice president of the Federation of Austrian Jewish Communities, sits behind his desk in his family's downtown Vienna furrier business and smiles.

"The whole matter speaks for itself," he says of the outcome of last week's auction of Jewish property that had been plundered by the Nazis.

The extraordinary sale raised more than \$14.5 million for the benefit of Austrian Holocaust survivors — more than four times the pre-sale estimate.

"We are very happy that such an amount of money was realized," he adds.

"But above that, what was important to us was to show people in a public, poignant, penetrating way what happened to people just like them.

"Especially here in Vienna, the objects on sale would have been owned by people just like you and me."

"This sale," he says, "did things that pictures of concentration camps and the war won't do."

The auction was held just two weeks after the Freedom Party, the strongest far-right party in Western Europe, made strong gains in Austria's European Parliament elections.

The auction provided a strong reminder of a past that Austrians have long tried to ignore.

It also came at a time when plans to erect a downtown monument to the 65,000 Viennese Jews killed in the Holocaust have provoked emotional debate and focused attention on Austria's continuing uneasy relationship with its past.

Austria has, to say the least, a troubled relationship with its wartime role, which it has only really begun to confront openly during the past 10 years.

Hitler's Reich annexed Austria in 1938; Hitler, who was born in the Austrian town of Braunau, was cheered by hundreds of thousands of Viennese when he entered Vienna that year in triumph.

Numerous top Nazi officials were Austrian, and anti-Semitic Austrians eagerly joined in the harsh persecution of the country's Jews.

Nonetheless, postwar Austria was declared by the Allies to be "the first free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression" — and the country jealously maintained and promoted this identity throughout the postwar period.

It was only in the early 1990s that Chancellor Franz Vranitsky publicly admitted that Austria had been a willing servant of the Nazis — a sentiment he reiterated on the eve of last week's auction.

"We know [Nazi] crimes were possible because we supported the system which made the Holocaust possible," he said. "I and many Austrians do not want to cover up and be silent."

**'The weight of history'**

The auction closed a decades-long controversy over Austria's delay in returning the seized art and other property to Jewish ownership after the works were returned to Austria by the Allies at the end of the war.

But that is just one facet of the complex Jewish-Austrian relationship.

"Living in a place like Vienna in the center of Europe, nothing happens without the weight of history," says Liska. "History vis-a-vis the Jews is compounded generation to generation with more problems. This is a society with a long history and a heavy load on both sides, both Christians and Jews.

"It makes it difficult to relate on a normal footing — there is either a reaction against or a bending over backwards the other way."

As an example of the bending toward Jewish concerns, this week marks the start of a huge, monthlong festival of Austrian Jewish culture in London that was sponsored by the Austrian government.

"I know that in the light of recent history, a festival of Austrian Jewish culture sounds like an oxymoron, but Jewish cultural life in our

country is reawakening," Emil Brix, an Austrian diplomat who conceived the festival, was quoted as saying.

But there are cases where Austrian attempts to come to terms with its past have provoked controversy.

Liska's office is only a few hundred yards from Judenplatz — Jews' Square — the centuries-old plaza that was the heart of Vienna's medieval Jewish ghetto.

Half of the square is closed off for archaeological excavations that have uncovered the medieval synagogue that was burned down in 1421 during a pogrom that lasted months and saw hundreds of Jews burned to death or set adrift on the Danube in boats without oars.

During the terror, about 100 Jews committed suicide in the synagogue.

On one house on the square a Latin plaque erected later in the 15th century still states that the flames purged the sins of the "Jewish dogs."

It is here, because of the initiative of Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal, that the city decided two years ago to erect a monument to the city's Holocaust victims. The design, by British artist Rachel Whitehead, is a stark cement cube, which represents a room turned inside out.

The initiative has sparked conflict both among local Viennese and also from within the estimated 14,000-strong local Jewish community.

"The Viennese ask me where the monument is going to be, how big it will be and so on," says a woman who gives guided tours of the synagogue excavation.

"They say it will obscure the view of the Baroque buildings, that it will be out of place.

"History is made up of good and bad," she adds. "Some people only want to remember the good parts."

Some local people called the planned monument a security threat for the neighborhood. Other critics said the stark modernity of the design would be too sharp a contrast to the surrounding buildings.

From within the Jewish community came other protests. Some feared that the monument would become a lightning rod for anti-Semitic acts. Others said the monument should not be in such a prominent position.

According to some in the community, such protests demonstrated a continuing ambivalent identity or a "don't-rock-the-boat" policy among Vienna's Jews, particularly given the new political ascendancy of the country's far right.

Liska disagrees with the critics.

"I think that the monument should not be out in the outskirts somewhere, and that it should not match the surrounding Baroque buildings," he says. "It should be something of a thorn in the flesh. It's not the Jews who need the monument — Jews remember forever."

At the moment, the \$500,000 project is on hold.

The synagogue excavations, which eventually will be turned into a museum, are more extensive than predicted. Excavation work has halted for the winter, and a final decision regarding the monument and its position will be made next year after the archaeologists finish their work.

"The authorities would love the Jews to say the final word, to give the death knell" to the project, Liska says. "I hope it will not happen." □

### Wiesenthal Center files suit dealing with Swiss accounts

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Attorneys for the Simon Wiesenthal Center have filed a class-action suit on behalf of Holocaust victims and their heirs against Swiss banks that may be holding the claimants' undisclosed assets.

The move comes as other parties, including the

World Jewish Congress and the U.S. Senate Banking Committee, also are pressuring Switzerland to disclose the extent of their cooperation with the Nazis during the war, the fate of assets belonging to Holocaust victims deposited in Swiss bank accounts and the whereabouts of looted Nazi gold purchased by Swiss banks.

Rabbis Marvin Hier and Abraham Cooper, the center's two chief executives, notified Carlo Jagmetti, the Swiss ambassador to the United States, of the action and urged his government to:

- Voluntarily freeze all assets in dormant or questionable accounts that may have been opened by Nazi officials, front organizations or businesses.

- Mandate the complete cooperation of all Swiss government agencies and private financial institutions in opening their records on transactions with Germany or German businesses during the Nazi period.

- Appoint a historian or panel of historians to review such transactions.

- Convene a "truth commission," similar to the one established by the South African government. For one year, the Swiss commission could grant complete civil and criminal immunity to persons who candidly report on Swiss financial involvements with Nazi Germany.

- Agree to the jurisdiction of U.S. courts for a final review of possible collaboration by Swiss banks with Nazi Germany.

Cooper said the involvement of American courts was necessary to prevent Swiss banks from exploiting Swiss laws to delay and block action on claims.

Estimates on the value of accounts in Swiss banks deposited by Holocaust victims and Nazi leaders, businesses and collaborators may be as high as \$30 billion, said Cooper.

The Wiesenthal Center has also launched an independent investigation on collaboration between Swiss banks and Nazi Germany. □

### Hungarian court acquits neo-Nazi leader, followers

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST (JTA) — The Hungarian Supreme Court has acquitted a Hungarian neo-Nazi leader who was charged with inciting racial hatred.

In reading the recent verdict, the judge said Albert Szabo and four co-defendants had not broken any of the laws under which they had been charged.

The court upheld a March ruling from a lower court. That ruling had prompted the state prosecutor to announce that he would appeal the case to the Supreme Court. Szabo's trial began in November, after he and his followers were charged with wearing Nazi uniforms and with displaying Nazi flags and other symbols at public demonstrations.

His acquittal in March led the Hungarian Parliament to enact a new, tougher law regarding hate speech and incitement toward racial hatred.

Legal observers said Szabo might be tried under the new law after he made public pronouncements against Hungary's Jews last month.

Szabo fled Hungary in 1956 when the country was under Communist rule. When he returned here some five years ago, he founded the World National Popular Rule Party, which was patterned after the wartime Arrow Cross Party of Ferenc Szalasi.

Hungary had a prewar Jewish population of nearly 1 million. About 90 percent of the Jews fell victim to the Holocaust under the Szalasi regime.

Szalasi, a Hitler collaborator, was executed after World War II as a war criminal. □

**NEWS ANALYSIS****Five years after Madrid, hopes for peace displaced by tension***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Five years ago, the Bush administration cajoled Arab and Israeli leaders to participate in a landmark Middle East peace conference.

The 1991 gathering in Madrid opened the way to a direct Israeli dialogue with Syria, Jordan and the Palestinians that led to a changed Middle East.

The evolution of these talks during the past five years brought about Israeli-Palestinian mutual recognition, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from nearly all the Gaza Strip and most Palestinian population centers in the West Bank, and set a framework for negotiating a permanent settlement of the conflict.

Israel and Jordan embarked on a path of normalizing ties after signing a peace treaty, and other Arab countries moved toward establishing economic ties with the Jewish state.

But the gains in Arab-Israeli reconciliation stimulated by the Madrid Peace Conference now appear to be endangered by a shifting atmosphere that harkens back to the period before late 1991.

The fifth anniversary of the Madrid conference was marked this week by talks of possible war between Israel and Syria, paralysis of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and tension in the Israeli-Jordanian relationship.

Has the Middle East come full circle?

In 1991, Israel was led, as it is now, by a conservative Likud government that refused to accept language indicating that the basis of the peacemaking would be land for peace. In the end, a way around the problem was found, by recourse to the constructively ambiguous U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

**Refused to negotiate**

The question of Palestinian participation was similarly solved by resourceful diplomacy on the part of U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and his team, which included some of the U.S. officials who now are trying to keep the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on course.

The issue then was that the Israeli government, under Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, flatly refused to negotiate with Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, then headquartered in Tunisia.

Then, too, a way was found to proceed: The Palestinian delegation was led by Dr. Haidar Abdel-Shafi, a respected doctor from the Gaza Strip, and was composed of distinguished persons living in Gaza and the West Bank.

The Palestinian delegation took its orders from the PLO in Tunis, and made no secret of doing so.

But Shamir resolved to turn a blind eye to this. As a result, the committee-level negotiations that followed the formal conference opening were able to continue, sporadically, for several months.

But the negotiations, both on the Palestinian track and on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, went nowhere.

On the Palestinian front, Shafi's "double life" — pretending to lead, but in fact looking to Tunis for instructions — made serious progress impossible.

The Israelis, for their part, maintained their implacable resistance to having any direct dealings with the PLO. Israel maintained this position until almost a year into the Labor-led government of Yitzhak Rabin, which took office in the summer of 1992.

It was Rabin's readiness to break with this long-held policy that represented the most momentous shift, and paved the way to the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian accord hammered out in Norway.

For months, in fact, Rabin insisted that the Oslo channel must eventually merge with the ongoing, basically barren, "Madrid negotiations" that were taking place sporadically in Washington.

Eventually, however, Rabin dropped this position, and a historic deal was struck in the Norwegian capital without the Madrid-Washington negotiators even knowing that they had been rendered wholly anachronistic.

Was Oslo, then, a consequence of Madrid?

Can Yitzhak Shamir, who agreed to go to Madrid, share in the "credit" for Oslo?

Shamir himself, now out of active politics, insists that he cannot — and sees Oslo as no credit at all to any Israeli leader.

He maintains that his whole policy at Madrid was directed at keeping the PLO out, while Oslo brought it in.

But other observers, especially on the Labor side, claim that this is disingenuous — that Shamir knew all along that the Palestinians at Madrid were Arafat's surrogates, yet he nevertheless agreed to negotiate with them.

There is a sense among some observers here that the Likud-led government of Benjamin Netanyahu looks back at Madrid with a certain longing, almost as though it wishes it could turn the clock back to that event five years ago.

After all, Israel under Shamir succeeded at Madrid in both acceding to the fervent international desire that a negotiating process be set in motion, while not actually making tangible concessions — either of territory or of its principled opposition to dealing with the PLO.

In government circles today, the feeling is that the Israeli-PLO accord destroyed Israel's ability to maintain that posture; hence, Netanyahu's current, reluctant negotiation with Arafat's Palestinian Authority on the redeployment of Israeli forces in Hebron.

Among the opposition, Madrid is seen as a piece of history that is gone forever, overtaken and left far behind by the breakthrough in Oslo, which brought the PLO into the heart of the process — both here in Israel and at the negotiating table.

**Departure from Madrid**

This is the reality, which cannot be turned back five years.

A similar argument also applies to the Syrian track.

Shamir claims today that he never agreed or intended to withdraw from all or indeed any of the Golan Heights — neither at Madrid itself nor in the subsequent negotiations with Syria. If, as now seems clear, the late Rabin did so agree, this was a departure from Madrid, says Shamir, not a consequence or extension of it.

But, again, others argue that by agreeing to sit opposite the Syrians at Madrid, in the knowledge that they, and most of the international community, expected a land-for-peace deal on the Golan, Shamir was implicitly recognizing, or at least acquiescing to, the likelihood that land for peace would become the basic equation underlying subsequent peacemaking between Israel and Syria.

For now, the resurgence of Shamir's posture in the approach of the Netanyahu government has diminished hopes of restarting the Israeli-Syrian talks that were suspended in March. With Netanyahu as prime minister, Israel has in some respects already come full circle to the time in Madrid. After all, Netanyahu, then Israel's deputy foreign minister, served as the country's top spokesman at the conference, facing off in countless television debates against the Palestinians' highly effective spokesperson, Hanan Ashrawi.

Shamir himself left Madrid after a day and a half, and Netanyahu became the most senior Israeli in attendance. □

**Four injured in bomb blast outside Israeli ministry office***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A small bomb exploded outside a branch of the Israeli Interior Ministry in eastern Jerusalem this week, lightly wounding four people and damaging the entrance to the building.

It was not known whether Thursday's attack had a criminal or nationalistic motive, according to police officials.

Police officials added that they were investigating all motives, including the possibility that the bomb attack was carried out by Jewish extremists.

The Jewish state has been on high security alert since Sunday, when security sources said there was information that an Islamic Jihad terrorist cell had infiltrated Israel and was planning a terrorist attack on a bus or in a shopping mall.

Israeli security officials said the planned attacks were linked to the anniversary of the 1995 assassination of Islamic Jihad leader Dr. Fathi Shakaki.

Shakaki was shot in the head five times Oct. 26, 1995, in Malta.

Islamic Jihad officials hold Israel responsible for the slaying and have vowed revenge.

Israel has declined to comment on whether it was behind the shooting. □

**Netanyahu pledges to give settlers personal attention***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged during a meeting with settlers this week to give his personal attention to their concerns.

The meeting on Thursday came amid complaints from settler leaders that despite the prime minister's commitment earlier this year to expand settlements, many projects have been delayed because of technical or bureaucratic reasons.

"The participants in the meeting agreed to continue meeting with the prime minister in a regular way to solve bureaucratic problems," a statement from Netanyahu's office said.

"The prime minister said he would continue to deal with the issue personally."

Settler leaders said they were encouraged by the meeting and were suspending planned protests.

"We very much hope we will not have to demonstrate against the Netanyahu government," settlement leader Aharon Domb told Israel Radio after the meeting.

The leaders of the council of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip met later Thursday with Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

Since his election in May, Netanyahu has lifted a freeze on building in the territories that was imposed by the previous Labor government.

But settlers complain that little has been done to implement the decision on the ground.

This week, the Housing and National Infrastructure ministries unveiled plans for massive building in the West Bank.

The plans are still subject to approval by the government.

According to figures released this week by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, the total number of Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip now stands at 140,000.

There are about 2 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to the bureau. □

**Jewish state apologizes for shelling of Lebanese village***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has apologized for the shelling this week of a village in southern Lebanon in which a civilian woman was injured.

The apology was conveyed to a meeting of the five-nation monitoring committee, which convened in the Lebanese town of Nakoura to address a Lebanese complaint about the shelling.

The monitoring committee had been created this year to monitor the April cease-fire that ended Israel's cross-border fighting with Hezbollah units in southern Lebanon.

Under the terms of the truce, the Jewish state and Hezbollah agreed not to launch attacks from or target civilian areas.

Israel told the committee that the Israel Defense Force and its allied South Lebanon Army had fired on the Lebanese village to retaliate for the killing earlier this week of an SLA soldier by a roadside charge laid by Hezbollah fighters.

The committee condemned the Israeli action, but stopped short of condemning Israel. □

**To Russia with love? Sharansky to head mission***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ten years after leaving Russia in an East-West swap, Natan Sharansky is heading for his homeland.

The former Soviet Jewish dissident and Israel's current Trade and Industry Minister will travel Nov. 25 to Russia for a weeklong visit, Sharansky's ministry said in a statement.

In addition to the personal significance of the trip, it will also be the first trip to Russia by a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

The visit is intended to strengthen trade and industrial ties between the two countries.

Another goal of the trip is to enhance political relations.

Sharansky is to be accompanied by a delegation of 50 government officials as well as members of the business community.

Israeli exports to Russia now total an estimated \$260 million, with imports totaling \$100 million.

During the visit, Sharansky, who served nine years in Soviet prisons, is scheduled to meet with government ministers and participate in a seminar to promote industrial cooperation. He also is set to meet with the Russian Jewish community and visit sites that served as major milestones in his activities in the former Soviet Union. □

**The Soviet spy who went free***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Gregory Londin, convicted by Israel of spying on behalf of the Soviet Union, has been released from jail after serving nine years of a 13-year jail sentence.

Londin was freed from prison, after one third of his sentence was commuted for good behavior.

Londin was arrested in 1988, as part of a wave of disclosures of other Soviet spies in Israel.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Tuesday that his identity, as well as other Soviet spies, was apparently disclosed by Alexander Lumov, a KGB agent who defected to Israel in the same year. □