



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu postponed his trip to the United States amid reports that a deal on Hebron was imminent.** Netanyahu had been scheduled to address the Council of Jewish Federations in Seattle on Thursday. He has been invited to appear by satellite instead. [Page 3]

■ **The Board of Delegates of the Council of Jewish Federations approved a resolution calling on the Israeli government not to pass or amend legislation regarding conversions.** The resolution said Israeli leaders should not "underestimate the strength of feeling on this matter and its detrimental effect on Jewish unity and Israeli-Diaspora relations."

■ **The Council of Jewish Federations took action on the conversion issue despite urging by the Orthodox Union not to "allow the divisive issue of religious pluralism in Israel to surface on the CJF agenda."** In a letter to CJF officials, the O.U. said CJF's role was to "provide a non-ideological and non-political infrastructure that allows a united North American Jewish community to provide services and raise funds" for Jews in America and abroad.

■ **Rep. Jon Fox (R-Pa.) officially became the 25th Jewish member elected to the next House of Representatives.** Fox's race against Democratic challenger Joseph Hoeffel was so close that a recount was needed. His 10-vote lead was increased when officials included absentee ballots in the final tally.

■ **Two American citizens petitioned Israel's High Court of Justice to overturn a ban on their entry to the Jewish state.** The petitioners, a journalist from Miami and an accountant from Philadelphia, said the ban was unfounded. They are on a list of seven American Jews believed to be involved with extremist groups. [Page 3]

■ **Egypt's arrest of an Israeli citizen on suspicion of spying for Israel caused friction at the economic conference in Cairo.** Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa said Egyptian officials were looking into the matter of Azam Azam, an Israeli Arab arrested in Cairo last week.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Religious right still potent, despite key electoral losses

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It was a mixed bag for the religious right on Election Day.

Voters aligned with the movement turned out at the polls in force, helping to re-elect a Republican majority in Congress.

But the results proved that their movement is hardly the political juggernaut it seemed after the upheaval of 1994.

The religious right lost several of its most loyal foot soldiers in the House of Representatives, gained ground in the Senate, lost a key ballot initiative in Colorado and saw its presidential candidate, Bob Dole, go down in defeat after distancing himself from religious conservatives and their core issues.

Given the mixed results, most analysts say, religious conservatives cannot claim that the election constituted an affirmation of their agenda.

But neither was it a repudiation.

Still, ideological opponents of the religious right, which include most of the organized Jewish community, put a positive spin on the election returns.

"On the whole, they fared much worse than they did well," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

"Despite all their efforts, their core issues of abortion, school prayer, government funding of religious institutions, went nowhere in this campaign. Clearly they do not enjoy the support of the American electorate on those issues."

"Their bark was bigger than their bite," agreed Jill Hanauer, executive director of the Interfaith Alliance, a Washington-based coalition of mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish activists.

"They were effective in some races, but people were so fearful and thought they were going to be the dominating force in elections from the state legislature to the White House, and they weren't."

The Christian Coalition had a different take, claiming success in electing more conservative lawmakers who will support what it calls its "pro-life, pro-family" agenda.

"Conservative evangelicals were the fire wall that prevented a Bob Dole defeat from mushrooming into a meltdown all the way down the ballot," Ralph Reed, the coalition's executive director, said in a statement after the elections.

Focus shifted to local races

Leaders of the Christian Coalition had written off Dole long before last week's votes were tabulated, shifting their focus instead toward local races and retaining Republican majorities in Congress.

To that end, they launched a major effort to mobilize voters, distributing 46 million voter guides to 125,000 churches on the Sunday before the election.

Their efforts, most analysts agree, gave a boost to conservative lawmakers in several close races across the country.

"For the first time in 69 years, a Republican Congress has been re-elected, and it would never have happened without conservative people of faith who provided the margin of victory," Reed said.

The Christian Coalition claims that self-described born-again Christians who attend church frequently accounted for 29 percent of the voting public, based on a poll the group commissioned.

Other polling put the number of voters aligned with the religious right considerably lower.

According to a survey by Voter News Service, a consortium of six major news organizations that provides exit-poll information, about 16 percent of voters identified themselves as members of the religious right.

The outcome in congressional races across the country, meanwhile, presented a mixed picture.

Twelve of the 70 Republican freshmen elected to the House in the

religious right-backed sweep of 1994 were defeated, as were another five GOP incumbents.

Moreover, half of the defeated Republican House lawmakers were on the Christian Coalition's A-list and had been targeted for defeat by opponents of the religious right.

With several races still undecided, at least eight House members who had received 100 percent ratings from the Christian Coalition have so far been rebuffed by voters.

Republicans Bill Baker and Andrea Seastrand of California, David Funderburk and Fred Heineman of North Carolina, and Linda Smith and Randy Tate of Washington all went down in defeat. Reps. Daniel Frisa (R-N.Y.) and Frank Cremeans (R-Ohio) also lost their races.

Meanwhile, Rep. Jon Fox (R-Pa.), the only Jewish Republican freshman and a favorite of religious conservatives, was declared the victor this week after a recount in his extremely close race.

Republican gubernatorial candidates with close ties to the religious right were trounced in Washington state and New Hampshire.

In the Senate, meanwhile, Republicans boosted their numbers from 53 to 55 by winning three open seats in the South and Midwest, the stronghold of religious and social conservatives. Indeed, the addition to the Senate of freshman Republicans such as Sam Brownback of Kansas and Jeff Sessions of Alabama will give the Senate a much more conservative face.

'Bruising ideological battles'

"We are almost certainly in for a series of bruising ideological battles," said Carole Shields, president of People For the American Way, a group that monitors the religious right's involvement in electoral politics. "For the past two years, the Senate has been the moderating force on a House sometimes out of control, but no longer."

Saperstein of the Religious Action Center added that the loss of "moderate consensus builders" in the Senate means that it will be tougher for the Jewish community to defeat legislative proposals advanced by the religious right.

Meanwhile, the religious right agenda was dealt a major setback in Colorado, where voters defeated a ballot measure that would have enshrined in the state constitution the "inalienable right" of parents to "direct and control the upbringing, education, values and discipline of their children."

Opponents, including Jewish groups, claimed that the initiative would have made it harder to prosecute child abuse cases while also posing a threat to sex education, controversial books in school libraries and access to abortion information. Religious conservatives had been looking to Colorado as a bellwether and hoped to advance similar initiatives across the country.

Despite key electoral defeats, the religious right remains a potent political force. Reed has declared that religious conservatives will be a fixture on the American political landscape, and few dispute that assertion. And the successes of religious right candidates in elections at the local and state levels portend a growing political presence of religious conservatives in years to come.

Already looking ahead to the 2000 presidential race, Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson has vowed that his group will not again allow itself to become "peripheral" in the presidential race.

"We're not going to sit by as good soldiers and take whatever is given us," Robertson told The New York Times last week, referring to Dole's failed presidential bid and his abandonment of the religious conservative agenda.

Robertson's frustration, echoed by others on the religious right, concerns some in the Jewish community.

Murray Friedman, who heads the Myer and

Rosaline Feinstein Center for American Jewish history at Temple University in Philadelphia, believes that frustration with the religious right's electoral losses, particularly at the presidential level, could give way to outright anger among the movement's more extreme elements.

Jews should be wary of such a phenomenon because the anger "might have some unfortunate anti-Jewish overtones," Friedman said, noting that Pat Buchanan, an icon to many on the religious right, has scarcely cloaked his hostility toward Jews and Israel. □

ADL: Extremist groups gaining new footholds

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Internet and the infusion of anti-government and racist sentiment into political rhetoric have helped far-right extremists gain new footholds in mainstream society, according to a new study by the Anti-Defamation League.

The report, "Danger: Extremism, the Major Vehicles and Voices on America's Far-Right Fringe," states that hate groups have used the Internet as a low-cost means of establishing new vehicles for global recruitment, marketing and dissemination of propaganda.

The ADL report also notes the "rhetorical support" extremists have received in some segments of the mainstream, citing the National Rifle Association's statements last year equating federal law enforcement agents with the Nazi Gestapo. The report was issued as the FBI released its statistics on hate crimes. The figures show that Jews were the most frequent target of hate crimes motivated by religious bias in 1995.

To illustrate what the ADL calls "the porousness of the line separating the mainstream from the fringe," the report also pointed to talk radio personality G. Gordon Liddy's well-publicized instructions on how to kill a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agent, and the appearance of several lawmakers on a radio talk show that the ADL says is sponsored by the racist and anti-Semitic Liberty Lobby.

The ADL study also asserts that former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke's entrance into politics, including his run for president in 1988 under the banner of the Populist Party, has encouraged hate group leaders to repackage their traditional racist and anti-Semitic views in an attempt to appear more mainstream.

"When pernicious hate seeps into the mainstream dressed as political rhetoric, it threatens to legitimize intolerance and exclusion as an acceptable means for social change," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL.

As hate groups go mainstream, anti-government extremism continues to fester and swell on the fringe as well. In the two years since their existence became known, paramilitary-style militia groups have come to outnumber the membership of the KKK, the neo-Nazis, the racist skinheads and other hate groups combined, according to the ADL. It estimates that militias operate in 40 states with a membership of about 15,000.

Meanwhile, the FBI, citing preliminary data, said American Jews were targeted in 1,058 instances of hate crimes in 1995, accounting for 83 percent of all religion-motivated attacks and about 13 percent of all hate crimes. Overall, 7,947 hate crimes were reported during 1995. The numbers, however, are incomplete because police agencies supply the data voluntarily.

Race was the leading motivation in the crimes, and blacks were the most frequent targets.

Of the 4,831 attacks motivated by race, about 3,000 were directed at blacks. □

Netanyahu delays U.S. trip as talks on Hebron intensify*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has delayed his scheduled departure for the United States as Israeli and Palestinian negotiations on Hebron entered a critical stage.

A statement from the Prime Minister's Office late Tuesday said that Netanyahu had met in his office with Palestinian negotiators at their request.

The statement said Netanyahu decided to delay his departure in order to help advance the negotiations over an Israeli redeployment in Hebron. The talks were described as being in a "sensitive" stage.

The premier had been scheduled to address Thursday the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations, which is meeting this week in Seattle.

CJF has invited Netanyahu to address the gathering by two-way satellite, instead.

Netanyahu met with Palestinian negotiators Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu-Mazen, and Yasser Abed Rabbo.

Abu-Mazen told reporters afterward that they discussed all matters in a general sense and stressed the need to advance the process.

Earlier, Netanyahu met with representatives from the National Religious Party, who demanded that the prime minister show them the agreement with the Palestinians on Hebron before it is signed.

NRP officials said they left disappointed, and that the prime minister told them that the agreement would be presented to the Cabinet for approval. The prime minister also denied reports that the Hebron redeployment would be carried out on the Sabbath. □

Suspended IDF general to resign*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli general intends to resign after he was suspended last week from the peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

Maj. Gen. Oren Shahor, the coordinator of activities in the territories, told confidantes that he "could not continue to function in the current atmosphere," according to the Israeli daily Ma'ariv.

Shahor was suspended from the Israeli negotiating team after Ma'ariv last week published photographs of him leaving the home of Labor leader and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

Ma'ariv said Shahor had also held recent meetings with Labor Knesset member Yossi Beilin, who served as minister without portfolio in the previous Peres-led government.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had authorized the suspension because Shahor had failed to notify the government of his meetings with Labor Party officials.

The decision to suspend Shahor drew an outcry from the opposition.

Shahor maintained that the meetings were of a "personal nature" and that he had disclosed no sensitive information about the negotiations to the opposition. □

U.S. Jews appealing Israeli ban*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Two American Jews have petitioned the High Court of Justice to reverse an order barring them from entering Israel for security reasons.

Michelle Benvenisti, 49, an editor of the Jewish

Press newspaper in Miami, and Hillel Bluestein, 44, an accountant from Philadelphia, filed the appeal Tuesday, according to a court spokesman.

The two are on a list of seven American Jews that Israeli officials believe are members of extremist groups.

The list was compiled by the Interior Ministry last year after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

In their appeal, Benvenisti and Bluestein denied any involvement with extremist groups.

They asked the Interior Ministry and the attorney general to retract all statements suggesting that they had criminal backgrounds and were involved in such groups.

No date has been set for a hearing. □

Iran offers help in search for Arad*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Iran's deputy foreign minister has promised that his country would help locate captured Israeli air navigator Ron Arad.

Speaking in Paris over the weekend, the minister said the matter was humanitarian, not political.

Arad's fighter plane was shot down over Lebanon in 1986.

Israeli officials have repeatedly said that Iran is holding him.

The promise from Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmoud Waize came against the backdrop of talks he held in France on a large economic deal that included the purchase from France of 10 Airbus planes, a \$500 million purchase of communications satellites and cooperation in the area of oil production.

Israeli observers said the promise to help locate Arad was a precondition for the economic deal Iran concluded with France.

Meanwhile, a Lebanese newspaper reported this week that a German-brokered swap of Arad for Lebanese prisoners held by Israel might be imminent.

The unconfirmed report in An-Nahar said German intelligence official Bernd Schmidbauer had visited Lebanon and Israel last month to discuss a possible exchange of Lebanese prisoners for Arad, or information about Arad's fate.

German officials denied the report, Israel Radio said.

Israeli security officials maintained Monday that no new information had been obtained on Arad's fate.

In July, Schmidbauer negotiated the release of 45 Hezbollah prisoners and 123 corpses for the bodies of two Israeli soldiers taken captive 14 years ago in southern Lebanon. □

IDF official lashes out on morale

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The head of the Israel Defense Force personnel branch has criticized the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres for contributing to the lack of motivation in the army.

In an appearance Wednesday before the Knesset Education Committee, Maj. Gen. Gideon Sheffer said, among other things, that the previous government had given exemptions from service too easily.

Sheffer also criticized Rabin for having close ties with singer Aviv Gefen, who has been criticized in Israel for not serving in the Israel Defense Force and for calling on others to do the same.

Deputy Education Minister Moshe Peled told the committee that his ministry was dealing with the issue of declining morale. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Hebron historically at center of Israeli-Palestinian conflict***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Of all the issues confronted in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations so far, none is so laden with emotion — and the potential for violence — as Hebron.

If spokesmen for the two sides are to be believed, an agreement for the handover of most of the West Bank town to Palestinian self-rule is imminent.

The redeployment of Israeli troops in this town of 450 Jewish settlers and 100,000 Palestinians was supposed to take place in March, according to the Interim Agreement signed last year in Washington. But a series of Hamas terror attacks launched in Israel just weeks before the scheduled redeployment led to its postponement.

Now, as negotiators continue to attempt to implement last year's accord, Israelis and Palestinians cast distrustful looks at each other, fearful that one extremist group or another will spark a massive bloodletting after the redeployment takes place.

The significance of Hebron in Jewish eyes can be summed up in a single word: history. It is history that makes this delicate next step in the peace process so significant not only for the Jewish settlers living there, but for many in Israel — and indeed in the Diaspora.

According to biblical sources, Hebron was founded about 1720 B.C.E., making it the site of the oldest Jewish community in the world. It is first mentioned in Genesis 13 as one of the first places where Abraham settled in the land of Canaan. As recorded in Genesis 23, Abraham purchased a plot of land in Hebron that included the cave he wanted to use as a burial site for his wife, Sarah.

The weekly Torah portion in which this purchase is recorded was read in synagogues throughout the Jewish world Saturday.

In a stark convergence of biblical history and modern politics, thousands of Israelis gathered in Hebron over the weekend to mark the Torah portion and the significance of Hebron as the first Jewish foothold in the Promised Land. In later biblical history, King David was anointed in Hebron, where he reigned for seven years.

Forced community to flee

When Jews revolted against Roman rule 1,000 years later, Hebron was the scene of extensive fighting. A Jewish presence remained there for most of the next two millennia, when Hebron was under successive Byzantine, Arab and Ottoman rule.

On Aug. 23, 1929, local Arabs organized a pogrom in Hebron, killing 67 Jews and forcing the rest of the community to flee.

With the exception of a few short-lived attempts to re-establish the Jewish presence there, Hebron had no Jewish community until after the 1967 Six-Day War.

On April 4, 1968, on the eve of Passover, a small group of Jews came to the Park Hotel at the northern outskirts of Hebron to hold a seder. Although the seder was a private initiative, it took place with the permission of then-Deputy Premier Yigal Allon of the Labor Party and senior officers in the Israel Defense Force.

Rabbi Moshe Levinger, the leader of the Park Hotel group, was surprised at how easy it was to hold the seder in the heart of the territories. That night his group declared that they would remain in Hebron. The settlers spent a month at the Park Hotel, after which they were moved to the military government headquarters on a hill overlooking Hebron. It was a victory for the Hebron settlers; they had established a civilian settlement within

the protected confines of a military camp. As far as they were concerned, they were in Hebron to stay.

In 1970, Labor Prime Minister Golda Meir supported the expansion of the Jewish settlement by creating a new town, Kiryat Arba, north of Hebron. The first 105 housing units in Kiryat Arba were ready by the fall of 1972. It was during this period that many of the seeds of the current conflict over Hebron were planted.

While the Labor government at the time believed that Kiryat Arba would become a Jewish twin city to Arab Hebron, the settlers also wanted Hebron.

In the early 1970s, the settlers repeatedly tried to sink roots in the old city amid the Arab population.

Small groups of settlers moved into buildings such as Beit Hadassah and the synagogue of Avraham Avinu. The army removed them, but they tried again.

Then they found what for them was the key to success: Seven women and 40 children settled in Beit Hadassah in downtown Hebron, leaving their husbands in Kiryat Arba. The authorities did not remove them.

When the Likud Party came to power in 1977, the settlers were relieved, believing that they had a government firmly on their side.

In succeeding years, the Jewish settlement of Hebron was expanded. By 1980, Harsina Hill was added to Kiryat Arba, and Beit Hadassah was renovated. But Hebron's Arab residents regarded these moves as a direct provocation, and violence soon ensued. Shortly after renovation work began at Beit Hadassah, yeshiva student Yehoshua Saloma was murdered in the heart of Hebron.

At the insistence of the settlers to react to the murder with a "proper Zionist response," David Levy, then housing minister, prepared a blueprint for the reconstruction of Hebron's Jewish Quarter that the Cabinet passed by a narrow vote. The Arabs responded with a general strike in the territories. Hebron Mayor Fahed Kawasmeh urged the local Arabs to boycott the settlers.

'For security purposes'

In May 1980, six yeshiva students were gunned down near Beit Hadassah. Then-Defense Minister Ezer Weizman ordered the deportations of some local Arab leaders, including Kawasmeh. Several Arab-owned houses near Beit Hadassah were demolished and others were seized by the army "for security purposes."

The early 1980s were characterized by repeated incidents of violence in and around Hebron. Another yeshiva student, Aharon David Gross, was murdered in the center of Hebron. The response, again, was further expansion of the Jewish presence.

By 1984, Hebron's Jewish community had expanded farther, with the establishment of a settlement in Tel Rumeida, a hill overlooking downtown Hebron from the south. Hebron was often at the center of Israeli-Palestinian animosity during the six-year intifada, the Palestinian uprising that began in December 1987.

In February 1994, Dr. Baruch Goldstein, a local settler, opened fire inside the Tomb of the Patriarchs, killing 29 Palestinian worshippers. At the time, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin considered removing the Jewish presence from Hebron, a move that would have found some support in his Cabinet. Instead, Rabin directed his energies toward reviving the peace process, which had nearly been derailed entirely by Goldstein's act.

The violence he committed has come to be known as the Hebron massacre, but history shows that Hebron has been the site of more than one. It is with an eye toward avoiding another one that the negotiators are trying to reach an agreement that will work for both sides. □

(JTA foreign editor Mitchell Danow contributed to this report.)