



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Two influential congressmen expressed solidarity with Israel.** The letter to the Israeli premier from Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and U.S. Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) was seen as veiled criticism of President Clinton, who had called Jewish settlements an obstacle to peace. [Page 2]

■ **A Palestinian court convicted three Palestinians for last week's murder of two Jewish settlers.** Meanwhile, Jewish settlers laid the cornerstone for a new neighborhood in Beit El in memory of the two slain residents. [Page 3]

■ **A top official of a Jewish social services organization in Brooklyn, N.Y., was charged with conspiring to steal more than \$600,000 in government money that had been awarded to the group.** Paul Chernick is the manager of the Council of Jewish Organizations of Boro Park.

■ **A student Bible group on Long Island, N.Y., can hold its weekly meeting at the local high school, according to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling.** [Page 4]

■ **Arab nations are urging the U.N. Security Council to condemn Israel for the planned construction of housing for Jews in eastern Jerusalem.** Meanwhile, Israel's interior minister denied that he is being pressured to freeze the controversial plan. [Page 2]

■ **Hundreds of members of the Waffen SS, Hitler's elite force, are living in the United States and Britain and receiving pensions from the German government, the World Jewish Congress said.** The Jewish group wants Germany to make the names of those in the United States public to determine whether they entered the country legally.

■ **An Austrian court jailed a man for four years for desecrating a Jewish cemetery in 1992 and for trying to revive National Socialism.**

■ **The CIA received information in 1992 about plans by an Islamic fundamentalist group to blow up the Israeli Embassy in Argentina, but did not act on it, an Israeli daily reported.** [Page 4]

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Clinton's nominee for U.N. seen as a 'friend of Israel'

By Cynthia Mann

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) — President Clinton's pick for U.S. ambassador to the United Nations has a reputation as a committed internationalist, a friend of Israel and a consensus-builder.

Indeed, Jewish constituents, organizational leaders and those who have worked or served with Bill Richardson on Capitol Hill respond with accolades at the mention of his name and his recent appointment.

They say the respect and credibility he has enjoyed in Congress for the past 14 years as a Democratic representative from New Mexico will help boost flagging U.S. support for the United Nations.

The United States owes more than \$1 billion to the international body, but has resisted making payments until it institutes a host of reforms.

They also say Richardson's successes as what The New York Times calls a "roving diplomatic troubleshooter" bode well for his new role.

"I think it is a good appointment and that he will serve us well," said Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), who was sworn into Congress with Richardson, went with him to Israel shortly thereafter in 1983 and considers him a friend.

"He's demonstrated patience and a talent for negotiations," Berman said. "He's relentless and pursues his agenda to the end."

Berman and others note that when it came to organizing support for foreign aid among other Democrats, known in political lingo as "whipping the bill," Richardson was "the key guy."

"He was a leader in the Hispanic Caucus on foreign assistance and specifically on foreign assistance to Israel," Berman said.

Richardson was the co-chairman of the Democratic Party Platform Committee in 1992 and, according to one well-placed source, was "instrumental in ensuring there was language supportive of Israel" in the final document. His congressional votes over the years on foreign aid, strategic cooperation, arms sales and other items related to Israel show a consistent record of support for Israel. They also indicate that he will likely be comfortable pursuing an active U.S. role in international affairs and be a bulwark against what many see as the United Nations' anti-Israel bias.

### Cautions against exerting undue pressure

In a private letter of June 9, 1996, he wrote, "United States leadership is essential to keep the risks associated with the new world order to a minimum. The Middle East is a particularly volatile region. Israel is a democratic friend to the United States, and an important ally."

On an appearance on "The Capital Gang" television show Sept. 30, Richardson cautioned against exerting undue pressure on the Israeli government after three days of violence were triggered by the opening of a new entrance to an archaeological tunnel in Jerusalem.

"To squeeze right now, to threaten an important ally that is besieged, I think is counterproductive. That doesn't mean that we don't do everything we can to get the peace process going," he said.

"The best thing we can do now is gently push both sides forward. I think if we use a tourniquet now, especially since the process is so fragile — and also, with [Palestinian leader Yasser] Arafat, I mean he's got to control his people, too. And the Middle East countries — Egypt and Saudi Arabia — they can't keep fanning the flames, they need to find ways to be part of a constructive role in the process."

A spokesman for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, said, "Richardson's understanding that a strong U.S.-Israel relationship is a fundamental cornerstone of U.S. policy has been a guide for him in Congress."

"He also made a special contribution helping to build coalitions between the Hispanic and Jewish communities."

Richardson, 49, was born in California and grew up in Mexico City, where his father was a bank executive. His mother was Mexican and spoke Spanish to him. He reportedly was on a short list for a Cabinet appointment in 1992. Since 1994, he has expanded his portfolio by becoming what the

Washington Post recently dubbed "America's unofficial emissary to the diplomatic underworld."

This year alone, he has been sent to negotiate sensitive situations that more conventional diplomats may have eschewed, in Cuba, Kashmir, North Korea, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Peru and Sudan. "He is not your cookie-cutter diplomat," said a former staffer, who requested anonymity. "He's very aware of other cultures and how they view America" and "is willing to talk to people many others aren't willing to talk to."

"He's good at walking tightropes and difficult lines," he said, adding: "On Israel, he was always willing to give it the benefit of the doubt."

Michael Kraft, now a State Department official, worked with Richardson in the mid-1970s, when the congressman was a staffer on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and was deeply involved in elevating the issue of human rights. Calling Richardson a respected as well as "haimishe guy," Kraft remembers being with him during that period on his first trip to Israel to research counter-terrorism measures.

On the second night of the trip, Richardson expressed some frustration after being served French food. He was eager to sample the local cuisine, said Kraft, who sees that as a metaphor for the congressman's openness.

"He wanted to get a flavor of local culture," Kraft said. He said Richardson "was also impressed by the uninhibited style and give and take" of the Israelis' political discussions at one Friday night gathering.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, called Richardson "a dedicated insider who was very helpful, especially on foreign aid." He noted the congressman's "ability to build consensus," which he said would stand him in good stead at the United Nations.

Several people contacted in the Santa Fe area said Richardson is a popular, accessible and responsive representative. "He's extremely popular," said Ellen Biderman, an active synagogue member and co-director of the Santa Fe Children's Museum. "People here are proud and thrilled for his appointment."

"He has been available to the Jews of New Mexico," she said. "He has been willing to listen to anything that is of concern."

"I can't say I agree with everything he has ever done on every issue," Biderman added, "but it's easy to disagree with him, to have a discussion with him."

Jason Isaacson, the Washington-based director of government and international affairs for the American Jewish Committee, said Richardson had "always been supportive of Israel and accessible to the Jewish community on a range of issues."

But perhaps more important, he said, Richardson "will be charged with carrying out policies of an administration that has been, in every important respect, in sync with concerns of the Jewish community — on Israel, on the need for an active presence by the United States in international affairs, on human rights and on the need to confront terrorism and rogue states." □

### Congressmen show solidarity with embattled Israeli premier

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — One day after President Clinton joined three former secretaries of state in criticizing Israel's settlement policies, the two top Republican foreign policy members of Congress expressed solidarity with the Jewish state.

In a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the

Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House International Relations Committee, wrote Netanyahu: "We would not presume to advise you on specific steps to take, or to refrain from taking, in your pursuit of a just and lasting peace."

Helms and Gilman acknowledged that "there has been some excited discussion in the United States about Israel and its commitment to the peace process in the Middle East."

The letter, dated Dec. 17, was released Wednesday.

Congressional aides say the chairmen intended the letter as a veiled criticism of Clinton, who had attacked Israeli settlements as "absolutely" an obstacle to peace.

"There are voices who insist that it is incumbent upon the State of Israel to make all the sacrifices for peace. Do not count us among such people," Helms and Gilman wrote.

These aides said the letter was also aimed at former Secretaries of State James Baker, Lawrence Eagleburger and George Shultz who, along with other former U.S. officials, criticized Netanyahu in a letter this week.

"Your continued negotiations on the question of Hebron are a testament to Israel's willingness to work towards a viable agreement with the Palestinians, particularly in light of exhortations to terrorism against Israel from Gaza and Damascus," Helms and Gilman wrote. □

### Israeli plan to build housing for Jews in Arab area on track

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Interior Minister Eli Suissa has denied that he was pressured to freeze a controversial plan to build Jewish housing in the heart of an Arab neighborhood in eastern Jerusalem.

The plan to build 132 Jewish housing units in the Ras Al-Amud neighborhood has spawned widespread anger from Palestinians, Arab states and left-wing Israeli groups.

The plan was approved by the Jerusalem Building and Planning Committee only days before the Cabinet voted last week to provide subsidies and tax incentives to settlements, a move that elicited further criticism of the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Opponents of the Ras Al-Amud project said the Palestinian reaction to the plan would make the Palestinian riots that erupted in late September "seem like child's play" in comparison.

The project prompted a group of Arab diplomats at the United Nations to request Wednesday that an urgent meeting of the Security Council be convened to discuss the matter. Security Council President Francesco Fulci of Italy met Tuesday with David Peleg, Israel's acting ambassador to the United Nations, to convey the council's concern about the project.

Suissa backed the project when it was first brought before the planning commission, which he headed prior to assuming the helm at the Interior Ministry.

Suissa, a member of the fervently Orthodox Sephardi Shas Party, called a news conference Wednesday to clarify his position on the plan. "Who says it is frozen? I see no reason for it to be frozen," he told reporters.

Suissa added that after it was approved by the Jerusalem planning committee, the project was sent back to the developers, who are expected to resubmit a modified plan to the Interior Ministry in about three months.

"Then I believe we will not sign it till we have consultations with the prime minister," Suissa said.

He added that even if it were approved by Netanyahu, consultations would then be held to determine the appropriate timing for starting work on the project. □

## Palestinians convict terrorists who killed Jewish mother, son

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Palestinian court has convicted three members of a terrorist cell for carrying out last week's attack in which an Israeli mother and her son were killed.

Two of the men — Abdel Nasser al-Kaisi and Ibrahim al-Kam — were sentenced Wednesday night by a court in the West Bank town of Jericho to life imprisonment with hard labor for opening fire on a car carrying an Israeli family from the West Bank settlement of Beit El.

The third man, Ibrahim Massad, was sentenced to 15 years for driving the getaway car.

All three, who were 20 years old, were members of a cell of the Damascus-based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which militantly opposes the peace process.

After carrying out the attack on a West Bank bypass road, killing Ita Tzur, 42, and her son, Ephraim, 12, the terrorists fled to the nearby town of Ramallah, which is under Palestinian self-rule.

The two weapons used in the Dec. 11 attack were found in the possession of Massad, who was arrested Wednesday.

The two others were arrested by Palestinian security forces the night of the attack.

In a crackdown on the PFLP cell in the Ramallah area, Palestinian Authority security forces arrested dozens of other Palestinians, some of whom were suspected of having aided the terrorists.

Earlier Wednesday, settlers in Beit El laid the cornerstone for a new neighborhood that will be built in the settlement in memory of Ita and Ephraim Tzur.

The Israeli government has not approved construction at the site.

Settlers said the cornerstone-laying was a symbolic act that took place on the seventh day after the slayings, adding that they did not intend to proceed with any building of the new neighborhood on Artis Hill until the government gave its approval.

The Palestinian court's speedy convictions of the three make it unlikely that an Israeli request for their extradition will be honored.

Under the terms of the Israeli-Palestinian accords, Israel can request the extradition of suspected terrorists, but the Palestinian response can be delayed if the suspects are serving prison terms in the self-rule areas.

This week's convictions would not be the first time that Palestinian courts have acted swiftly to pre-empt an Israeli extradition request.

When asked whether the three would be extradited to Israel, Jibril Rajoub, who is in charge of all Palestinian security forces in the West Bank, told reporters after the court handed down the sentences, "It will never happen."

Israel Radio reported that the terrorists who carried out the attack were acting under orders from the PFLP leadership in Damascus, which funds the group and is considered more extreme than the group's leadership in the territories. □

## Netanyahu, security aides continue to spar over tunnel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's tense relations with some of his top security advisers were again thrown into the spotlight this week.

Those tensions emerged after the Netanyahu government decided in September to open a new entrance

to an archaeological tunnel near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Renewed discussion of that decision came against the backdrop of reports that senior security aides had warned Netanyahu last week that expanding Jewish settlements could spark violence among Palestinians.

Calls for settlement expansion came after terrorists killed two Israelis in a drive-by shooting in the West Bank.

But, in a compromise move, the Netanyahu government approved a series of financial benefits for Jewish settlers.

In the wake of the tunnel entrance opening, Palestinian rioting erupted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, leaving 15 Israelis and 60 Palestinians dead in three days of violence.

Defense officials said at the time that they had not been informed of the decision to open the tunnel and only learned about it a short time before it happened.

But Netanyahu gave a different take on the matter this week.

In an interview with Channel Two television, he said he had received a number of assessments from security officials that "not only told me that there would be no reaction, but actually pressed for the opening of the tunnel."

Netanyahu said there were written protocols of the meetings that backed up his statements.

The remarks prompted denials this week from security officials and a storm in the opposition.

At a session Monday of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Labor Knesset member Haim Ramon presented his own set of protocols, in which the head of the Shin Bet domestic security service, Ami Ayalon, warned of possible riots if the tunnel were opened.

For his part, Ayalon was quoted Monday evening as saying that he had told the prime minister that opening the second entrance to the tunnel was possible without prompting violent reaction.

But, Ayalon added, he had also said the opening of the entrance needed to be accompanied by an accelerated pace in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and by the opening of a large mosque located under the Temple Mount that is known as Solomon's Stables.

### Reports of strained relations

Ayalon said he never took part in discussions regarding the timing of the entrance's opening.

Israeli officials Tuesday downplayed reports of strained relations between Netanyahu and Ayalon, denying reports that the Shin Bet head had considered resigning this week.

The Israeli media reported Tuesday that Ayalon had considered resigning over his poor relations with the prime minister — but that he decided not to in order to avoid shaking up the Shin Bet.

Since Netanyahu's election in May, commentators have observed that relations between the prime minister and the defense establishment have been characterized by mistrust and friction.

They attributed this in part to Netanyahu's suspicion that the top security echelon, which had been closely involved in the peace negotiations with the Palestinians, was biased toward the previous Labor government's views.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai on Tuesday stressed that the state of relations between the prime minister and the defense establishment were in working order.

Speaking during a tour of the Gaza Strip, he acknowledged that differences of opinion had surfaced during discussions, but he said this was part of the process of presenting professional assessments. □

## Court's decision on Bible group prompts mixed Jewish reaction

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Supreme Court's decision to allow a Bible study group to continue meeting at a public high school is unlikely to have far-reaching implications on the church-state debate, according to legal observers.

The court, acting without comment this week, declined to review a lower court decision allowing students at a Long Island, N.Y., school to convene Bible club meetings on school grounds.

The Roslyn Union Free School District had attempted to prohibit the Bible club from meeting at Roslyn High School. The school district had asserted that the club violated the district's non-bias policy by discriminating against certain students on the basis of their religious beliefs. The club requires that its officers "profess" Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

A federal judge initially ruled for the school district, but the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the decision and ordered the district to exempt the Bible club from its policy.

The club's requirement that officers be Christians is protected as a form of free expression intended "to guarantee that meetings include the desired worship and observance," the appeals court said.

The Supreme Court's action sets no national legal precedent because it did not issue a ruling. The justices merely refused to hear the school district's appeal.

Jewish groups are not in agreement on the issue.

The Anti-Defamation League, which filed a brief supporting the Roslyn district, expressed disappointment that the high court left the ruling intact.

Steven Freeman, the ADL's legal affairs director, said exempting the Bible club from the school's non-discrimination policy violates the constitutional separation of church and state.

### 'Seems self-evident'

In its brief, the ADL argued that such an exemption would constitute a "governmental preference" or "endorsement" of the group's religious beliefs.

The American Jewish Congress, which often gets involved in church-state cases but did not file a brief this time, had a different take.

Marc Stern, co-director of AJCongress' legal department, said he did not find it "startling or threatening" that "the officers of a Christian club can be required to be Christian. It seems self-evident."

David Zwiebel, general counsel and director of government affairs for Agudath Israel of America, agreed.

"If we want that right for Jewish student groups, we can't deny that right for other groups," he said.

The Roslyn case stems from 1993, when Emily Hsu, then a senior at Roslyn High School, sought to form an after-school club called "Walking on the Water Student Christian Fellowship." She submitted a proposed club constitution that required officers to be Christians.

When the district blocked the club from assembling on school property, Hsu and her brother filed suit.

They said forcing the club to comply with the non-bias policy would violate their religious freedom and a federal law that requires equal access to religious student groups in public schools. In 1984, Congress passed the Equal Access Act to ensure that non-discriminatory access is provided to religious student groups in public schools.

But Freeman of the ADL said the courts, by allowing the Bible club to limit who can join, are granting it "special treatment" rather than equal access.

Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, which represented the Hsus, said the justices "sent a clear signal that religious institutions are to be free from government interference and have a right to define their own doctrine and select their own leadership."

Zwiebel of Agudath Israel said compared to other church-state concerns at play on public school grounds, "this should not rank high as a problem area." □

## Survivors appeal for suspension of operations of 3 Swiss banks

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Holocaust survivors are calling on the U.S. Federal Reserve to suspend the American operating charters of three Swiss banks alleged to have collaborated with the Nazis.

The appeal is related to a class action lawsuit filed against Union Bank of Switzerland, Swiss Bank Corp. and Credit Suisse, charging that the banks aided Nazi Germany by laundering stolen money, jewelry and art treasures during World War II.

In a letter to William McDonough, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, lawyers representing the Holocaust survivors asked the Federal Reserve to undertake an investigation of the role that the Swiss banks played with regard to the receipts and transfer of Jewish assets during the Holocaust.

"No banking institution should be permitted the privilege of conducting business in this country which has committed and participated in the commission of violations of international law," lawyers for the plaintiffs wrote.

Switzerland has found itself besieged by international pressure to determine the nature of its relationship with Nazi Germany, the fate of assets belonging to Holocaust victims deposited in Swiss accounts and the whereabouts of looted Nazi gold purchased by Swiss banks.

The class action lawsuit is one of two filed this year seeking damages from Swiss banks on behalf of Holocaust survivors and their heirs. This suit was filed Oct. 21 by five survivors on behalf of themselves as well as other victims.

"The acts of these banks, yet to be fully disclosed, should not be condoned by U.S. banking regulation," the letter states. "To do so perpetuates an injustice to U.S. citizens who were victims of the Holocaust." □

## CIA knew of plan to bomb Israeli Embassy in Argentina

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Officials with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency had information that could have prevented the March 1992 terrorist bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Argentina, an Israeli newspaper reported this week.

The CIA never acted on information it had indicating that the Iranian-backed Hezbollah movement was planning to blow up the embassy building in Buenos Aires, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The car bombing, which has never been solved, killed 29 people and left more than 100 injured.

An ex-CIA official, identified only as "J," told Ha'aretz that when all the intelligence material that had been gathered a week before the bombing was reviewed, the agency realized that it could have been prevented.

An American private investigator hired by Argentina to investigate the case found that before the bombing, Iran's embassy in Buenos Aires had established contact with a local Hezbollah cell as well as with neo-Nazis in Germany, the paper also reported. □