



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli authorities tightened security around Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai amid concerns that he is being targeted by right-wing extremists. Mordechai and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly have been marked because they are negotiating a deal to turn over most of Hebron to Palestinian self-rule.

■ Switzerland said it wants dormant bank accounts of Holocaust victims and their heirs, not government money, to be used in a fund to help survivors. [Page 2]

■ A 15-year-old Arab in Jerusalem crashed a car into a shop in the crowded Machane Yehuda market, killing one person and injuring four. Police said the incident appeared to have been a traffic accident, but they did not rule out a terrorist motive. [Page 3]

■ United Jewish Appeal officials sent a special message urging donors not to stop giving money to the campaign for Israel because they might object to "transient" Israeli government policies on settlements and religious pluralism. They said withholding funds would punish new immigrants and the poor and turn the "mitzvah of tzedakah" into a "political weapon."

■ Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy is visiting Libya to foster friendship and cooperation between the countries, Libyan media reported.

■ A White Plains, N.Y., woman, who once went before a congressional committee to get her husband released from the Soviet Union, went on trial after being accused of killing him with an ax. Rita Gluzman is charged with second-degree murder in the death of Yakov Gluzman.

■ Modern-day Jewish priests, known as Kohanim, appear to be descendants of a single common male ancestor — Aaron, the brother of Moses who was the first biblical high priest. Researchers from the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and the University of Arizona at Tucson reported the genetic links in the current issue of Nature.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Partisan wrangling threatens Jewish legislative strategies

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Partisan wrangling over the re-election of Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has emerged as a key threat to one of the Jewish community's central strategies for the 105th Congress.

Concerned by the conservative legislative direction of the last Congress, Jewish activists had hoped to advance their own political agenda this time around by helping to cultivate a moderate center of House Democrats and Republicans.

Specifically, Jews had hoped to work together with other religious and ethnic groups to encourage congressional moderates to oppose some budget cuts and to resist expected legislative initiatives on certain social issues many Jews view as regressive.

But Gingrich's ethical troubles, which triggered bitter battles as Congress opened this week, threatened the pledge of good relations between the parties that had followed the November elections.

Gingrich narrowly won re-election to his post Tuesday, but the political bickering is likely to continue as the House Ethics Committee begins consideration of what measures to take against Gingrich for the misuse of tax-exempt funds and for giving the committee false information.

Without bipartisanship, many Jewish activists fear that the Republican majorities in Congress will face off against the White House and congressional Democrats instead of cooperating on policy issues.

"A whole slew of social-welfare and social-justice programs will face a tougher time in a more partisan atmosphere," said Jason Isaacson, Washington director of the American Jewish Committee. "It certainly does seem to be shaping up as a mean season."

Among the issues of most pressing concern in the organized Jewish community are restoring welfare cuts to legal immigrants and defeating a series of expected constitutional amendments, including one on requiring a balanced budget. The last Congress, in passing major welfare-reform legislation, eliminated federal benefits to legal immigrants and abolished the federal guarantee of social services to America's poor.

In this uncertain period, "the key is to forge enough of a centrist block that it will have to be reckoned with," said Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. "There is so much tumult in the House right now, it is so unclear what tone will be struck."

When the November votes were tallied, Republicans had maintained control of the House and extended their majority in the Senate.

'This Senate won't be there for us'

Republicans won a slimmer majority — 227-207 — in the House, which now also has one Independent. In the Senate, the GOP extended its majority, now operating with a 55-45 advantage. Although the numbers did not change that much, the personalities did, forcing "some profound strategy differences" in the Jewish community, Saperstein said.

"In the last Congress, we used the Senate as a more moderate block against the excesses of the House," Saperstein said. "This Congress is very different. The House is slightly more moderate, but the Senate is arguably one of the most politically conservative of the century."

With this in mind, many activists are cautioning against being "lulled into a false sense of security," said Reva Price, associate director of the B'nai B'rith Center for Public Policy. "Last Congress we thought: 'Let the House be as crazy as they want. We'll stop it when it gets to the Senate.' This Senate won't be there for us."

For months, representatives of Jewish groups have been meeting to strategize how to cultivate a moderate core of Democrats and Republicans in both the House and Senate.

What emerged is a religiously diverse coalition, including virtually all Jewish groups, that came together to urge passage of one piece of legislation, the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, which affords greater protection against discrimination against religiously observant employees.

Activists say they hope that a cooperative and bipartisan push for this

measure will lead to future victories after developing early relations with members of Congress and their senior aides. They also hope that it will lead to the emergence of new leaders of a moderate center.

But increasingly, these activists fear that the partisan acrimony could derail the effort. Equally important, some activists say, is a defense against the expected push for school prayer and other initiatives that would erode the separation between church and state.

These activists hope that passage of the workplace legislation will serve to dissuade lawmakers from pushing for other measures on religious issues. "Many people will want to demonstrate religious bonafides and that they can deliver to religiously observant constituents," said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League. "If we have this in our arsenal, we stand a better chance to stop other measures."

As strategies turn into action, Jewish groups plan to increase their reliance on grass-roots activism to persuade lawmakers on both sides of the aisle. "Over the last 20 years there has not been a single major political initiative from the Jewish community" that has not had bipartisan support, Saperstein said. He cited Soviet Jewish rescue efforts, support for Israel, the separation of church and state as well as civil- and women's-rights initiatives.

At the same time, successful campaigns against legislation usually require Democrats and Republicans to work together.

Jewish activists say that after President Clinton's January inauguration, and his State of the Union speech scheduled for the first week in February, they will push as hard against some measures as they will for the Workplace Religious Freedom Act. On the top of the short-term list will be opposition to a balanced-budget amendment.

Many Jewish groups oppose the amendment because it would further tie the federal government's hands in spending on social programs.

While activists expect stiff challenges on the domestic front, support for Israel and the peace process runs deep in the 105th Congress, activists say.

Although aid to Israel appears secure, other foreign aid could be affected if Congress and the administration become serious about achieving a balanced budget.

"If this process continues, then foreign aid will have to be cut as well," said an official of the pro-Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

But increasingly, the official said, there is a "general understanding" among members of Congress "that foreign aid has been cut to the bone." □

Jewish Agency head blasts Swiss restitution proposal

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Jewish Agency for Israel Chairman Avraham Burg has rejected Switzerland's announcement that it wants to set up a restitution fund for Holocaust victims and their families.

Switzerland said Tuesday that it wants dormant bank accounts of Holocaust victims and their heirs, not government money, to be used in the fund.

The statement was viewed as an attempt to ease the international furor that resulted when then-Swiss President Jean-Pascal Delamuraz last week called Jewish demands for a \$250 million compensation fund "blackmail."

But Burg was critical of the latest Swiss offer, saying, "They're trying to buy us with money that's not theirs."

Charging that the Swiss were "playing with words," Burg blasted Swiss leaders for refusing to apologize for Delamuraz's remarks.

Burg said he would not take part in a joint commission's search for dormant accounts in Swiss banks left by Jewish victims of the Holocaust until those remarks were retracted.

"It would be difficult to a level of impossible for me to personally sit around the same table with people who did not negate, oppose or reject the words of the president," said Burg, who met Monday with the Swiss ambassador to Israel.

Swiss banking officials and Jewish leaders agreed last spring to form a joint commission to investigate the fate of funds that Jews deposited in Swiss banks in the World War II era.

The joint commission, headed by former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, includes Burg, other Jewish leaders and Swiss bankers.

No further meetings of the committee have been scheduled, agency officials said.

On Sunday, Burg and World Jewish Congress Secretary General Israel Singer announced at a news conference here that the World Jewish Restitution Organization was planning a series of retaliatory measures, including a boycott of Swiss banks, if the Swiss authorities did not denounce Delamuraz's statements within a month.

The WJRO was created in 1992 by the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

After Jewish leaders protested Delamuraz's controversial remark last week, the Swiss leader said he was sorry if he offended families of Holocaust victims. But he repeated his view that it was not the right time to set up a compensation fund.

Meanwhile, U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), who has spearheaded the congressional investigation of Jewish assets held by Swiss banks, urged the Swiss government to repudiate Delamuraz's statement.

"The silence of the [Swiss] Federal Council on the seriousness of these remarks is a telling feature of the country's policy," D'Amato wrote Tuesday in a letter to Swiss President Arnold Koller, who replaced Delamuraz Jan. 1 under the country's rotating presidency.

Swiss bank shares fall

Earlier, the State Department reacted strongly to allegations made by Delamuraz last week that foreign critics were trying to undermine Switzerland's role as a world financial center.

"To make a charge that somehow an agency of the United States government is attempting to destabilize the Swiss banking system or is blackmailing the Swiss government is ludicrous," said State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns.

Burns said the U.S. government is continuing to search its own records to ascertain its actions in the late 1940s regarding the assets of Holocaust victims.

Swiss bank shares fell this week in what some traders said was a response to the Jewish plans for a boycott.

Meanwhile, a Knesset subcommittee on the return of Jewish property met for the first time this week, hearing testimony from individuals involved in the restitution efforts.

Ed Fagan, an American attorney who is lead counsel on a team suing Swiss banks on behalf of Holocaust survivors, told the committee that World War II could have ended earlier had the Nazis not been financially aided by the Swiss.

Committee Chairman Avraham Herschson of the Likud Party released a list of Swiss banks that he claimed had secretly served Nazi interests. He also released two documents declassified by American investigators regarding the wartime activities of Swiss banks. □

Arab teen-ager kills Israeli after crashing car in market

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A 15-year-old Arab crashed a car into a bakery in Jerusalem's crowded Machane Yehuda outdoor market this week, killing one person and injuring six others.

Police said an initial inquiry showed that Tuesday's incident was a traffic accident.

But they did not rule out other possibilities, including a terror attack.

According to witnesses, the youth, a resident of the Kalandia refugee camp north of Jerusalem, drove the car out of an alley and rammed full speed into the shop on Jaffa Road.

The Arab, who did not have a license, worked at one of the vegetable stalls in the market and was driving his employer's car.

The youth told investigators that the brakes on the car failed.

Police said one possibility was that the youth stepped on the gas pedal instead of the brake.

Investigators detained the owner of the vegetable stall for questioning.

He was suspected of allowing his employee to drive the car, knowing that the youth did not have a license.

The crash victims were evacuated to Jerusalem hospitals, where one of them, 72-year-old Yosef Cohen of Beersheba, later died of his injuries.

Two victims sustained serious injuries. The injuries of the remaining victims were described as moderate to light. □

Hebron shooter re-enacts incident for authorities

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli soldier who opened fire last week on Palestinians in a Hebron market has re-enacted the incident for investigators.

Under heavy security early Tuesday morning, Noam Friedman, 22, demonstrated how he opened fire Jan. 1, wounding seven Palestinians before he was wrestled to the ground by an Israeli officer.

A religious Jew, Friedman has said he carried out the attack in an effort to thwart a planned Israeli redeployment in the volatile West Bank town.

He also said he wanted to avenge the death of Baruch Goldstein, who in 1994 gunned down 20 Palestinian worshipers in a mosque before being killed by some of the survivors, and of Meir Kahane, the founder of the anti-Arab Kach movement who was assassinated in 1990 in New York City.

Off-duty at the time of the attack, Friedman had not been posted to serve in Hebron.

Reports that Friedman had suffered from psychological problems in the years before his compulsory army service have provoked questions about why he was drafted and issued a weapon.

In Israel, suspects who confess to a major crime are asked by investigators to re-enact it. For instance, police took Yitzhak's Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir, back to the Tel Aviv square where he shot the prime minister.

On Tuesday, Friedman told investigators that when he first entered the market area, a mechanical problem prevented his army-issued M-16 from firing.

Friedman said he then walked to the Beit Romano complex of the Jewish quarter and fixed the problem before returning to the market and opening fire. □

Synagogue torn as rabbi faces molestation charges

By Teresa Strasser

Jewish Bulletin of Northern California

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — A local synagogue is trying to reassure its members that their children are still safe, despite allegations that its rabbi molested a 12-year-old female student.

Pending a preliminary hearing on the charges Feb. 4 at Sonoma County Municipal Court in Santa Rosa, Calif.,

Rabbi Sidney Isaac Goldenberg is not allowed on the premises of Congregation B'nai Israel in Petaluma during religious school hours, according to Regina Wilson Seppa, synagogue president.

The rabbi, 58, was suspended from his post at the synagogue last month after he was charged with one count of lewd acts with a child and two counts of annoying a child.

Goldenberg pleaded not guilty to the charges last week.

He has been free since the day after his Dec. 16 arrest, when he posted an undisclosed portion of a \$100,000 bail.

Seppa last week called a meeting of the 100-family Conservative congregation to discuss the situation.

"Parents feel assured," Seppa said. "I think the congregants and preschool parents have some level of faith or trust in how we're handling this, even though their trust is shaken in terms of the rabbi and allegations against him."

At the meeting, the congregation decided that "it would be premature to hire someone new."

"Everyone has an opinion. We don't see our role as saying how we feel about it," said congregant Eileen Mattison-Schupnick.

"It's not for us to talk about publicly. We don't know enough about the event, or the non-event, or whatever it is."

She and other congregants declined to comment further.

'Community torn up'

Carolyn Metz, of the Jewish Community Agency of Sonoma County, however, summed up the congregation's reaction to the charges.

"It has torn the community up, but not apart," she said.

"I think people are very upset," she also said. "It's a shock."

"People liked the rabbi," Metz said. "They have very conflicted feelings."

The synagogue hired the rabbi from New York to his first pulpit last year.

Police officials say the 12-year-old girl told a counselor at a public school that the California rabbi molested her during a four-month period — between September and December — while she was receiving religious instruction.

The rabbi allegedly made lewd remarks, touched her breasts and requested that she put her hands in his pockets, according to the arrest warrant.

So far, Petaluma detectives have turned up no evidence of untoward incidents between Goldenberg and other students at B'nai Israel, said lead investigator Sgt. Todd Hart.

Both Goldenberg's lawyer and Sonoma County Deputy District Attorney Gary Medvigy, who is prosecuting the case, declined to comment.

If convicted, Goldenberg faces up to eight years in state prison. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Israeli programs help families overcome scourge of child abuse

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — For years, Maya Cohen was seized with sudden, uncontrollable fits of rage when one of her children, who are hyperactive, spilled a glass of milk or refused to turn in at bedtime.

"I was under pressure, so much pressure, and sometimes I beat them," admits Cohen, whose name has been changed to ensure privacy. Sitting in the living room of her modest apartment, she adds, "I didn't know what to do, I didn't know what was wrong with my kids. I cried all time, I was a nervous wreck. It was a horrible situation."

It was not until Cohen was charged with assaulting an adult that she and her children received the help they so desperately needed.

Sitting before a judge in family court soon after her arrest, Cohen made a decision: "I told the judge that I was a bad mother, an abusive mother, and that he should take the kids away from me. They needed help, my husband and I needed help, and I saw this as the only way."

Although Cohen displayed courage by admitting her abuse, many Israeli parents who beat or neglect their children never come to the attention of Israel's overburdened social welfare system.

"For every case of child abuse that's reported in this country, we estimate that three times as many cases go unreported," says Yitzhak Kadman, executive director of the National Council for the Child.

In 1995, authorities here handled 20,000 new cases of child abuse. Some of those cases involved severe neglect.

Although the figures for 1996 are not yet available, Kadman suspects that the numbers will be comparable.

Long a taboo subject in Israeli society, child abuse "has been slowly let out of the closet," says Hana Katz, director of Children at Risk programs at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Israel.

"Israelis have always attached a great stigma to child abuse. Until just a few years ago, the society was in denial. People just couldn't accept the fact that Jewish parents can abuse their children."

'Always, always better to be safe'

The turning point, experts agree, came in 1989, the year Israel introduced a mandatory reporting law requiring social workers, teachers and others suspecting abuse to report such cases to their local municipalities.

The legislation was instituted after the Israeli media devoted an uncharacteristically large amount of attention in the late 1980s to the case of an abused child. A series of graphic news reports at the time encouraged a nationwide debate and ultimately shocked Israelis into action.

Not all reports of suspected abuse lead to remedial action, however. Although follow-up investigations reveal no wrongdoing in about half of all reported cases, "it's always, always better to be safe than sorry," says Frada Feigelson, director of the Schusterman Center for Children at Risk and their Families in Jerusalem.

"We once had a case where the parents divorced and the mother remarried. When the children visited a family member, they related how their stepfather had abused them," Feigelson said. "This turned out not to be true, but the social workers saw children under severe stress, feeling torn between the two parents. One of the children was almost on the verge of a breakdown. The intervention came just in time."

Although there are several factors that can contribute to the probability that a parent will become abusive, "it

is a mistake to think that abusers belong to a specific [stratum] of society," says Kadman. "We find abuse in all kinds of settings: in towns, kibbutzim, in religious and secular homes, rich and poor, Sephardi, Ashkenazi." Instead of targeting a specific segment of the population as potential abusers, Kadman says, "we determine whether the family is under considerable stress. Has there been a divorce or separation, are there financial problems?"

The fact that poor and new immigrant families have a higher-than-average rate of abuse may be due to increased stress, Kadman says. In addition, however, these families are often connected to the social welfare network, and are therefore more likely to be observed by professionals, he says. Contrary to popular Israeli belief, "it's simply not true that olim (immigrants) have a higher abuse rate because they come from Third World countries," he says.

"Immigrant families are in a particularly high state of flux — cultural, economic, they must learn a new language, find jobs — and that is the reason that most of the reported cases [of abuse] come within the first two to three years of a family's arrival in Israel."

Lest anyone doubt that child abuse afflicts every segment of Israeli society, a visit to one of the country's six children's shelters — including one for Israeli Arabs — proves the point. At the Schusterman Center in Jerusalem, up to 15 children from every imaginable background spend up to three months as boarders. Hundreds more receive outpatient evaluation and counseling throughout the year.

While the children seem ordinary enough at first glance, the slightest thing can precipitate a violent temper tantrum. Rather than allow the children to hurt themselves or others, they are placed in one of the center's "soft rooms." Here, amid rubber toys and matted floors, the children can safely vent their anger. "Because of the pain they have experienced, abused children often express their anger in sudden, explosive outbursts," says Feigelson.

'Parents also must deal with anger'

For the center's work to be effective, parents, too, must overcome their anger, Feigelson says.

When Maya Cohen's children were placed at Schusterman she and her husband were encouraged to seek counseling. The children have since returned home. The therapy also extended to the carefully supervised visits they had with their children, during which they were taught a wide variety of communication and parenting skills.

After this kind of intervention, more than 50 percent of abused children are eventually returned to their parents. The remainder are placed in boarding schools, foster homes or, in rare instances, put up for adoption.

The Cohens are one of the system's success stories.

"The counseling I received helped me find the courage to leave a marriage that wasn't working and to move to the city," Cohen says. "The people at the center taught me how to improve my parenting skills, how to communicate with my kids."

To enable Cohen to work a full day, and to give her an hour of free time in the late afternoon, municipal social workers found an enriched after-school program for the Cohen children. There, the children complete their homework, have a hot meal and play with other children. At 6 p.m. they return home. "This is a woman with great strength," says a social worker who counseled the family. "She loves her children and was willing to improve herself to get them back."

"Things are so much better," says Cohen, her eyes a bit misty. "I'm calmer, the kids are calmer. I wasn't capable of taking care of them. If I hadn't gotten help, I think I might have lost them."

"Now," Cohen says, "what's good for my children is good for me." □