



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on Syria to stop Hezbollah attacks on Israeli forces in the southern Lebanon security zone after a roadside bomb killed three Israeli soldiers. The premier said the Israel Defense Force has a difficult mission in Lebanon. [Page 2]

■ Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat reportedly warned the United States to refrain from carrying out the extradition of Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook to Israel. The Hamas movement in Gaza told the United States that if it extradited Marzook, America would become an enemy of "Islamic people everywhere."

■ Swiss banks responded to a threatened boycott by New York politicians with assurances that Switzerland is already working fast to set up a fund for Holocaust victims. Meanwhile, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan called Switzerland's dispute with Jewish groups a "public relations disaster" and urged an equitable settlement.

■ A 29-year-old man was sentenced this week to three years in prison for the bombing of the Jewish community center in Yaroslavl. [Page 4]

■ More than 1,000 Moscow Jews packed a concert hall in the Russian capital to meet with former refusenik Natan Sharansky, who came to Russia to promote trade with Israel.

■ A dozen Israeli Reform and Conservative rabbis chained themselves to benches outside the Interior Ministry to protest a pending bill that would ban all non-Orthodox conversions in Israel. [Page 2]

■ A new lay committee of Jewish leaders that is charged with making the final recommendations for a partnership plan for the United Jewish Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations, met for the first time in California at the CJF Leadership Institute. The committee hopes that a vote on the plan by the boards of both CJF and UJA will take place by the end of the CJF quarterly meetings in April.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jews set to promote foreign aid as Clinton asks for more spending

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Before Warren Christopher left his post as secretary of state, he issued a challenge to the American Jewish community: Support President Clinton's quest to increase U.S. foreign aid.

The call to action came at a Jan. 13 luncheon with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations held to honor America's former top diplomat.

"You are all aware of the dilemmas involved when a shrinking budget forces us to conduct a kind of diplomatic triage," Christopher said in his typical formal style. "That is why I ask you to continue your broad support for the resources we need to advance America's interests and uphold America's ideals."

U.S. officials regularly ask the Jewish community to support foreign aid. But this year, Clinton has made increasing foreign aid a priority, and Jewish groups are lining up to support his call.

When Clinton delivers his fiscal year 1998 budget to Congress next week, he will ask Congress for at least \$1 billion more funding for America's diplomacy, according to White House sources. This year, the United States will spend an estimated \$18.3 billion on international affairs, including more than \$12 billion on foreign aid. The increase would include more for the foreign aid budget as well as increased spending for U.S. missions, consulates and embassies.

Even before she was confirmed, Madeleine Albright, the new secretary of state, assumed the mantle of pushing for increased foreign spending.

America cannot conduct its foreign policy "on the cheap," she repeatedly told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Supporting foreign aid is nothing new for the Jewish community. Foreign aid has remained at the top of the Jewish legislative agenda since the 1978 Camp David accords, which led to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt and launched billions of dollars in U.S. aid to Israel and Egypt.

Since the mid-1980s, Israel has received more than \$3 billion a year in U.S. cash assistance. Israel receives \$1.8 billion in military assistance, \$1.2 billion in economic assistance and millions more to assist the resettlement of refugees from the former Soviet Union.

Strong advocates of aid

The Jewish state has also received American guarantees on \$10 billion in loans to aid in the resettlement of Jews from the former Soviet Union.

In addition to their particular concern for maintaining aid to Israel, Jewish activists have been strong advocates of aid to Israel's peace partners — Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians.

Jewish groups look beyond the Middle East as well, with a strong internationalist approach and concern for assistance elsewhere in the world.

Overall, foreign aid has sustained a series of actual dollar-for-dollar cuts as well as a decrease in value as inflation has continued to increase.

Foreign affairs spending peaked in 1993 at \$21.1 billion.

Since those cuts, aid to the Middle East accounts for half the total foreign aid budget, Christopher told the Conference of Presidents.

"These funds advance a vital U.S. interest and must be fully preserved," he said. "But our aid to Israel, Egypt and Jordan will inevitably come under pressure, perhaps irresistible pressure, if other assistance programs continue to be decimated and if this imbalance grows."

With this in mind, Jewish groups have once again joined forces with other foreign aid advocates in a coalition to support U.S. aid.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee will lead the lobbying effort for the foreign aid bill. "If foreign aid is to be able to withstand budget-cutting pressures, a constellation of the many beneficiaries will have to be engaged in educating Americans and lobbying Congress for the highest possible allocation to this important program," said an AIPAC official.

Although foreign spending remains unpopular among many

Americans, the Jewish community is not the only voice supporting increased spending.

A task force from the Brookings Institution and the Council on Foreign Relations recently released a report that also calls for an additional \$1 billion in spending on foreign assistance. "The American people do not want to swap a budget deficit for a security deficit," said the report of the task force, which was led by former Congressmen Mickey Edwards (R-Okla.) and Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.).

More than 80 participants endorsed the report, including former Cabinet officials Zbigniew Brzezinski, Alexander Haig, George Shultz, Brent Scowcroft and Cyrus Vance. After Clinton introduces his budget, the House of Representatives will begin its task of writing the annual foreign aid bill. Hearings are expected in the spring. □

Israeli rabbis demonstrate against conversion legislation

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A dozen Israeli Reform and Conservative rabbis chained themselves to benches outside the Interior Ministry to protest a pending bill on conversions.

The protest, which attracted a great deal of local media attention, passed peaceably Thursday.

Einat Ramon, a rabbi and spokeswoman for the Masorti/Conservative movement in Israel, said the protesters had chosen the ministry "because this is where people receive their identity cards, where people are registered as Jews."

The pending legislation, which is expected to win Cabinet support, would affirm the Chief Rabbinate's control over all conversions to Judaism in Israel and ban non-Orthodox conversions. The battle over who has the legal right to perform conversions in Israel is part of a larger campaign by Reform and Conservative Jews to win recognition for their movements in Israel.

Ramon said the chains "were symbolic of the way Reform and Conservative rabbis, institutions and converts are chained in Israel."

"Our converts are recognized everywhere except Israel," Ramon said.

The rabbi added that even though many Orthodox Jews shouted at the protesters, "a lot of people also expressed their support."

Earlier in the week, a delegation of 50 American Reform rabbis met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to lobby against the pending conversion bill. □

3 Israelis dead, 1 wounded in southern Lebanon blast

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Three Israeli soldiers were killed and another was moderately wounded in a roadside explosion in southern Lebanon.

The three dead soldiers were identified as Lt. Yehonatan Tsirkei, 21, of Kibbutz Shuval, Sgt. Rotem Sharvit, 18, of Jerusalem, and Sgt. Niv Sadan, 19, of Kibbutz Megiddo.

Reacting to Thursday's attack, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on Syria, which has some 40,000 troops stationed in Lebanon, to press Hezbollah to cease its attacks on Israeli troops.

"A very appropriate gesture would be the cessation of this indirect war that is being conducted against Israel and its soldiers in Lebanon," Netanyahu told reporters.

Netanyahu said the Israel Defense Force is facing a difficult mission in southern Lebanon, but that Israel would do all that is necessary to resolve the problem.

Israeli troops occupy a 15-mile-wide security zone in southern Lebanon, which it patrols along with its ally, the South Lebanon Army.

The soldiers, members of the Nahal brigade, were on patrol in the central sector of the security zone when Hezbollah detonated the charge shortly after midnight, killing the three troops who were leading the patrol, and wounding a fourth.

The evacuation of the wounded took several hours because of rough terrain, poor weather conditions and a need to comb the area for additional bombs.

The head of the IDF northern command, Maj. Gen. Amiram Levine, said it was likely that Hezbollah had the patrol under surveillance before it decided to set off the charge.

The soldiers were from the same unit that earlier this month lost another member in a clash with Amal fighters.

The chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Likud Knesset member Uzi Landau, said after Thursday's attack that the government's efforts to renew peace talks with Syria were sending a message to Hezbollah that it would be rewarded for its violence.

Landau said the attacks on Israeli troops would continue, as long as Syria did not have to pay a price.

"We have to make it clear to Syria that we will not accept such a dual situation. We have to make it clear that they will pay a price," Landau told Israel Radio. □

Israel gives Palestinians bodies of 2 Hamas terrorists

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has handed over to the Palestinians the bodies of two Hamas terrorists.

Salakh Jedalla and Hassan Abbas were killed while attacking Israelis in separate incidents in October 1994.

Israel Defense Force soldiers transferred the wooden coffins on Wednesday from army vehicles to Palestinian ambulances waiting at the Israel-Gaza border.

Jedalla, who was among a group of Hamas terrorists who kidnapped and murdered Israeli soldier Nachshon Waxman, had been killed by Israeli soldiers in a failed rescue attempt.

Abbas, with an accomplice, had opened fire in a pedestrian mall in downtown Jerusalem, killing two and wounding 13. He was shot dead by police and armed civilians.

The IDF reportedly had made a deal with the Palestinian Authority to hand over the bodies in exchange for information that enabled them last year to find the body of Ilan Sa'adon, an Israeli soldier who was kidnapped and murdered by Hamas terrorists in 1989.

The IDF denied that a deal was made, saying only that it had decided to return the bodies after Sa'adon's body was recovered. □

Israeli envoy to Jordan leaving

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Professor Shimon Shamir, Israel's ambassador to Jordan, has announced that he is leaving the post in February.

An embassy spokesman denied rumors circulating in the Jordanian capital of Amman that Shamir's decision had anything to do with political differences between the ambassador and the current Israeli leadership.

Shamir, 52, was appointed Israel's first ambassador to Jordan in March 1995 by the previous Labor-led government, which signed a peace treaty with the Hashemite kingdom in October 1994. □

Random House adjusts its definition of 'Nazi'

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Anti-Defamation League has welcomed steps taken by the publisher of the "Random House Webster's College Dictionary" to advise its readers against using the word "Nazi" in a jocular sense.

However, the dictionary will include the informal usage of the term in its definition.

"We applaud Random House for the steps it is taking that the usage of the word 'Nazi' in a jocular sense can be offensive to many people," said Abraham Foxman, ADL national director.

Foxman had called on the publisher to "rethink your decision" after learning that the forthcoming edition of the dictionary would include the added definition of "Nazi" as a "person who is fanatically dedicated to or seeks to control a specified activity" or practice, as in "tobacco Nazis trying to ban smoking."

The definition will now state that many feel that this usage of the word "trivializes the terrible crimes of the Nazis of Germany."

"One will now have a deeper meaning of what the word signifies," Foxman said. He also commended the publisher's inclusion in the dictionary of an essay on avoiding offensive language. "It is clear that as language experts, the editors of the dictionary have recognized their responsibility as standard setters" and their responsibility to include "reports of common usage," he said. □

Hungary's Jews claim Swiss gave partial list of accounts

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Hungarian Jewish leaders are charging that a Swiss list of unclaimed deposits made by Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust is incomplete.

The unpublished list, which contains 33 names, is "fictive," Peter Feldmayer, the president of the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, said in an interview.

The total amount of the deposits on the list Switzerland turned over to the Hungarian authorities Monday was 283,475 Swiss francs, Feldmayer said.

He added that this amount was lower than the sum Switzerland acknowledged holding when Bern and Budapest signed a secret agreement in 1973.

In that agreement, Switzerland said it held 325,000 Swiss francs, worth some \$3 million today, from dormant accounts belonging to Holocaust victims.

The agreement allowed Switzerland to use that sum toward paying off claims totaling 1.8 million Swiss francs for property belonging to Swiss nationals that had been nationalized by the postwar Hungarian government.

In mid-January, Bern turned over to Polish officials a list of 53 Polish Holocaust victims whose Swiss bank accounts were declared ownerless and turned over to the Polish government after World War II.

Switzerland has recently come under increasing pressure from Jewish groups to determine how much money was deposited in its banks by Holocaust victims from across Europe and to make restitution for those sums to the victims or their heirs.

But Switzerland may not be responsible for restituting the 325,000 Swiss francs to Hungarian Holocaust victims because of the terms of the 1973 agreement. It states that Hungary would "recognize the claims of rightful heirs" when and if they press their claims.

While Hungary paid Switzerland 1.4 million Swiss francs, worth about \$7 million today, to pay the claims for nationalized Swiss property, it has not yet paid anything to

members of the Hungarian Jewish community who made deposits in Swiss banks.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Laszlo Kovacs told Jewish leaders Monday that the Hungarian government was going to try to locate the 33 people, or their heirs, named on the Swiss list. The Hungarian Jewish community is entitled to get any heirless property, he added.

In a first step toward providing restitution, the Hungarian Parliament approved in October a government plan that would partially compensate Hungarian Jews for property that was confiscated during World War II.

But that plan did not deal with Hungarian Jewish deposits in Swiss banks. □

Polish priest faces charges of slandering Jews in sermon

By Ruth E. Gruber

WARSAW (JTA) — Controversial right-wing Polish priest Henryk Jankowski has made another anti-Semitic sermon in his church in the northern city of Gdansk.

His comments, reported by the Polish news agency PAP, came less than a week after he was formally charged with slandering Jews in an earlier sermon.

On Sunday, in a sermon in his church of St. Brigitta, Jankowski criticized the Polish government for giving in too much to the demands of Jews and the relatives of Holocaust victims.

"The Polish people, humiliated by that minority, have become the laughing stock of the international community," he said.

"We have the impression that for some time, the diplomatic policy, the president and the government of our country have been too conciliatory toward the requests of the Jews, and at the same time tolerate attacks against Poland," he said.

Former Polish President Lech Walesa, a close friend of Jankowski's, was in attendance at church during the sermon, according to the report.

Jankowski, as Walesa's parish priest, was a key figure in the Solidarity union movement that challenged Communist rule in 1980.

Last week, Jankowski was formally charged with slandering Jews and people of Jewish origin in connection with a sermon he delivered in June 1995.

In that sermon, also attended by Walesa, Jankowski compared the Star of David to the Nazi swastika and the Communist hammer and sickle, adding that the Polish people should not allow those who owed secret allegiance to Israel or Russia to remain in government.

Walesa, who was Poland's president at the time, came under heavy criticism for not immediately condemning those remarks. The charges were brought last week by the Gdansk Provincial Prosecutor's Office on the basis of complaints brought by Jewish groups and by two anti-racist organizations in the southwestern Polish city of Wroclaw.

A spokesman for the Provincial Prosecutor's Office was quoted as saying that Jankowski could face up to three years in prison if convicted.

Jankowski in turn said the charges violated his rights of freedom of speech. "It is a return to a communist totalitarianism," he told reporters in Gdansk. "As a Polish citizen, I feel persecuted by the Jewish minority."

"Poland has too little democratic experience," he said in a statement. "The right to free judgment of politics, persons and history is an empty phrase," he said.

Jankowski's statements have drawn sharp criticism from various officials of the Polish Roman Catholic Church, including the secretary of the Polish Bishops Conference, Monsignor Tadeusz Pieronek. □

Man sentenced in Yaroslavl blast

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A 29-year-old man was sentenced this week to three years in prison for the bombing of the Jewish community center in Yaroslavl.

An explosive charge equivalent to more than 2 pounds of TNT was used in April's attack in Yaroslavl, which is located about 130 miles northeast of Moscow.

The bombing caused no injuries, but led to \$40,000 in damage to the community center.

Aleksandr Sypin, who is unemployed, was convicted of damaging property and illegal possession of weapons. He received the maximum sentence.

Sypin was a member of Derzhava, Russian for "Power," a small Yaroslavl-based group of ultranationalist youths. In the 1980s, he was a member of Pamyat, or "Memory," which at the time was Russia's largest ultranationalist, anti-Semitic organization. □

Israel flies more aid to Rwanda

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israel has sent a second plane of supplies to Rwanda for its refugee population.

The aid includes tons of various types of seeds, machines for producing bricks and roof shingles, and hundreds of hand tools, among other items.

The Israeli assistance was based on requests of the Kigali government.

The flight, which left Israel on Monday, was organized by the Israeli Foreign Ministry's Center for International Cooperation (MASHAV) in coordination with its International Organizations and Africa Departments.

Hordes of people throughout Central Africa have been turned into refugees because of the region's ethnic strife. □

Questions surround cross' origin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The discovery of a rare bronze-and-wood cross in excavations sparked international interest last week over the possibility that it could contain wood from the original cross of Jesus.

But Israeli archaeologists, while citing the historical value of the artifact, cast doubt on those claims, saying that the cross was more likely a souvenir of a Byzantine-era pilgrim.

"Even back then, there was an industry of souvenirs in the Byzantine era, to bring back holy oil, water and such items from the Holy Land," Ronni Reich, the director of the excavation where the artifact was found, told reporters. The cross was found near Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem's Old City. Reich said the palm-sized cross was still rare, because it was the first to be uncovered with wooden pieces in it dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries.

But he said it was unlikely that the wood was part of the cross on which Jesus was crucified.

Reich said archaeologists had found a number of small bronze crosses in excavations in the area, inside a building believed to have been an inn used by pilgrims.

He said the excavations also uncovered a bathhouse and remains of shops. □

Israel thinks of deporting workers

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel hopes to deport tens of thousands of foreign workers and phase back the employment of some 45,000 Palestinians this year, according to an Israeli newspaper.

Under the proposal, to be presented to government officials last week, some 45,000 foreign workers will be

expelled by August, the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported.

The government has estimated that there are some 250,000 foreign workers in Israel, half of whom are here illegally. They were first brought in three years ago to replace Palestinians who were kept from their jobs within Israel after closures were imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the wake of terrorist attacks.

Palestinian officials have complained that the restrictions on Palestinian workers cost the self-rule economy about \$6 million per day.

The plan to reinstate the Palestinian workers would depend on security conditions, Yediot reported. Under the plan, Palestinian workers would be driven to their jobs on buses and the Palestinian Authority would be responsible for choosing those Palestinians who could work in Israel, the newspaper added.

Some 50,000 Palestinians are now allowed to work inside Israel. □

Knesset opposes Sabbath flights

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Knesset this week voted down a bill calling for El Al to fly on Shabbat and Jewish holidays.

The sponsor of the bill, Meretz Knesset member Avraham Poraz, had argued that Israel's national airline loses tens of millions of dollars annually because of the current policy against Sabbath flights.

He said that it would be impossible to find an investor willing to buy the airline, which is in the process of privatization, with such losses.

"No investor in his right mind would do this," Poraz said.

However, the chairman of the Knesset Finance Committee, Avraham Ravitz of the fervently Orthodox party United Torah Judaism, said there were other matters to consider.

Ravitz said the relatively high patronage from religious Jews could stop if El Al began flying on the Sabbath.

Last year, Tower Air introduced services on select flights, including sections with no audio and video entertainment, to accommodate their fervently Orthodox passengers. El Al has tried to act similarly.

Earlier this week, it was reported that the airline was considering putting up a partition between the seating section for fervently Orthodox passengers and video screens in the plane.

The airline already has a committee that edits out scenes from in-flight movies, which it believes might offend the sensitivities of some of its clientele. □

Israeli top court: All beards equal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's High Court of Justice has ruled that all beards are created equal.

A three-justice panel ruled Wednesday that all bearded Israelis are eligible to receive special gas masks to accommodate their facial hair.

During the 1991 Gulf War, when Iraq launched Scud missiles at Israel, the Israel Defense Force distributed gas masks to all Israeli citizens out of concern that the missiles were armed with chemical warheads.

At the time, only men who wore beards for religious reasons were allowed to receive special masks. Other bearded Israelis had to make due with the standard issue.

In its ruling, the court said a Defense Ministry regulation providing special gas masks only to Orthodox Jews discriminated against other bearded Israelis. □