

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israel approved the construction of a new Jewish neighborhood in Jerusalem, despite Palestinian protests and threats of violence. [Page 4]

■ The Swiss government agreed to share control of a Holocaust humanitarian fund with Jewish groups. The decision Wednesday was hailed by the World Jewish Congress and ended months of public acrimony over the issue. [Page 2]

■ The number of anti-Semitic incidents reported in the United States declined for the second straight year, according to the Anti-Defamation League's annual audit. [Page 1]

■ A Republican lawmaker criticized the NBC broadcast of "Schindler's List" and urged the networks to stop "polluting the minds of our children." [Page 3]

■ Bail was set at \$1 million for a former kosher butcher in Jacksonville, Fla., accused of making a bomb threat and placing a bomb in a Jacksonville synagogue to disrupt a speech by former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. [Page 4]

■ The only active synagogue in Warsaw was damaged in what appears to be an arson attack. [Page 4]

■ A Jewish family from New Jersey filed a lawsuit against Iran in connection with the death of their daughter. Alisa Flatow was killed in a suicide bombing in the Gaza Strip. [Page 3]

■ The Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel launched a strategic planning process to redefine its mission to be more relevant to the Jewish world. The board, which concluded its meetings at the Dead Sea, also began deliberations on a restructuring plan that would have the Jewish Agency take over the Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education and most of the operations of the World Zionist Organization.

■ Israel's balance of payments deficit for 1996 totaled \$4.9 billion, the Central Bureau of Statistics said. The figure was \$1 billion more than the 1995 deficit.

ADL: Anti-Semitic incidents decline, Internet new threat

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The number of anti-Semitic incidents reported in the United States has declined for the second straight year, according to the Anti-Defamation League's annual audit.

In 1996, 1,722 incidents were reported to the ADL — 121 fewer than in 1995, signifying a 7 percent drop.

But while harassment, threat or assault declined from 1,116 incidents to 941, about a 15 percent drop, the number of acts of anti-Semitic vandalism increased from 727 incidents to 781, a 7 percent jump.

ADL officials read good news into the numbers, which show anti-Semitic activity to be at its lowest level since 1990.

The two-year drop, moreover, marks the first multiyear decline of anti-Semitic incidents in 10 years. It represents a significant shift since 1994, when anti-Semitic activity reached a record high of 2,066 incidents.

"It tells us that the combination of law enforcement action and educational outreach is an effective one-two counterpunch that is reaping results in the traditional arenas where anti-Semites are active," said Abraham Foxman, ADL national director.

The report, however, said the proliferation of hate activity on the Internet had made it more difficult to track and quantify anti-Semitism.

"Electronic hate is the dark side of technology, and anti-Semites have particularly taken to the medium," Foxman said.

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, said the past year has seen an "absolute explosion of hate sites on the Internet."

His organization now counts more than 400.

"We're looking at the emergence of a subculture of hate on the Internet, and that unfortunately means that the potential pool of young people into these particular groups is much broader."

In its report, ADL distinguishes between acts of vandalism and those of harassment, threat and assault.

While acts of anti-Semitic vandalism increased in 1996, attacks against Jewish institutions actually declined by 20 percent — a phenomenon that Foxman attributes in part to the "security consciousness" of the Jewish community.

Of the 781 reported acts of anti-Semitic vandalism, 407 involved defaced public property.

Only 117 were attacks against Jewish institutions, and the remaining 257 were directed against private Jewish property.

Foxman said that last year's increase could be attributed to the enhanced security at Jewish institutions, making vandals more likely to deface other property.

The attacks against Jewish property included:

- More than 60 grave markers were toppled at a Jewish cemetery in East Haven, Conn., one day before Rosh Hashanah.

- Two Arizona synagogues were attacked on the night after the anniversary of Kristallnacht. A window was broken at one site, and at the other, a Molotov cocktail hurled at a window was extinguished before causing major damage.

- A small bomb detonated at the door of a Jewish center in New York City. No one was hurt, and the incident caused only minor damage.

Incidents range from intimidation to violent attacks

The ADL also cites a broad spectrum of anti-Semitic incidents involving harassment, threats or assault.

They range from intimidating or hostile anti-Semitic comments made in passing to violent attacks in which anti-Semitic bias was the motive.

- In Milwaukee, two men entered a synagogue and began shooting a BB gun at congregants during a morning minyan.

- In Washington, D.C., a voice mail message was left at the home of an employee of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. It said: "Just looking for a kike designer. I understand they are gutting crematoriums."

- In Highland Park, outside Chicago, multiple bomb threats were

phoned in against a Jewish community center-sponsored basketball league that met in school gyms.

The audit is based on reports made to the ADL and law enforcement agencies by 41 states and the District of Columbia.

Nine states reported no anti-Semitic incidents. Those states were South Dakota, Oklahoma, Wyoming, West Virginia, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas and Mississippi.

States with large Jewish populations continued to experience the highest levels of anti-Semitic activity, according to the audit.

Last year, 328 incidents were reported in New York, 238 in New Jersey, 186 in California, 123 in Florida and 106 in Massachusetts.

California experienced the biggest decline, with a 30 percent drop in anti-Semitic activity.

Other findings contained in the report include:

- Anti-Semitic incidents reported on college campuses declined by about 25 percent in 1996 to the lowest level since 1990.

In particular, ADL noted the lack of Holocaust denial advertisements that were submitted to campus newspapers.

The development, however, may simply reflect a shift in tactics, according to the report.

With Holocaust deniers now posting materials on the Internet, the debate over ads has been replaced by debate over the First Amendment rights of Holocaust-denial sites on the World Wide Web, according to the ADL.

- The number of anti-Semitic incidents perpetrated by skinheads declined from 17 to 10.

While ADL noted several positive trends in the battle against anti-Semitism, Kenneth Stern, program specialist on anti-Semitism and extremism at the American Jewish Committee, cautioned against trying to read too much into the tea leaves from one year to the next.

"Anti-Semitic incidents are only part of the package," he said.

He noted that the proliferation of hate and anti-government extremist groups continues to pose a long-term threat to the "security of Jews and the vibrancy of American democracy."

"It's a gauge, but it's not the only thing we should be concerned about," Stern said.

In conjunction with the release of the audit, ADL officials were scheduled to hold a series of meetings Wednesday with top administration officials and members of Congress.

Officials were set to meet with Education Secretary Richard Riley to discuss ways to combat anti-Semitism through educational programs.

The officials were also scheduled to meet with Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh to discuss methods for increasing local law enforcement participation in providing data under the Hate Crimes Statistics Act.

Similar discussions were planned with Sens. Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah). □

Swiss approval of Holocaust fund ends months of public acrimony

By Lisa Hostein

NEW YORK (JTA) — Needy victims of the Holocaust may soon be the beneficiaries of tens of millions of dollars as a result of a long-sought agreement on a Swiss humanitarian fund.

The Swiss government Wednesday signed off on a delicately negotiated agreement on control of the fund,

which was recently established by Switzerland's three largest banks.

The announcement earlier this month of the fund, which the banks initially infused with some \$68 million, had ended months of public acrimony over Swiss compensation for dormant bank accounts of Holocaust victims as well as for the nation's wartime role.

The debate between Swiss and Jewish officials over a compensation fund reached a high pitch when the president of Switzerland at the time accused Jewish groups of "blackmail" and Jewish groups threatened a possible boycott.

Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, which spearheaded the campaign for compensation, hailed this week's agreement as "marking an historical turning point in Swiss-Jewish relations and seeking to right some of the terrible wrongs" committed during the Second World War.

The Swiss government has said it, too, will contribute to the fund, but only after a panel's investigations into Switzerland's wartime role is released later this year.

This week's intense negotiations over administration of the fund added last-minute drama to the agreement.

The issues of contention involved who would control the funds and who would be its beneficiaries, officials said.

The WJC had insisted that there be a Jewish majority on the committee administering the fund and that the World Jewish Restitution Organization, which was created by the WJC, be in charge of distributing the funds to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

For their part, the Swiss wanted Jewish groups to play an active, but not dominant, role.

Israel Singer, secretary general of the WJC and chairman of the executive committee of the WJRO, and Swiss Foreign Minister Flavio Cotti had reached an agreement in principle on the matter during talks Monday in Bern, according to a well-placed Swiss government official who asked not to be identified.

Two sides reach compromise

But complications emerged, including the role Israel would play, according to sources.

In the end, the two sides reached a compromise on representation, said WJC officials, whereby the foundation administering the fund would be run by a seven-member executive.

According to the agreement, the executive will include four "eminent Swiss persons," including the president of Switzerland, and three "eminent persons recommended by the WJRO."

To assure equality, Rolf Bloch, the president of the Swiss Jewish community who also serves on the WJRO, will be one of the four Swiss members.

Bronfman will also serve on the fund executive, according to Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJC.

According to the text of the agreement, the object of the fund "is to support persons in need who were persecuted for reasons of their race, religion or political views or for other reasons, or were otherwise victims of the Holocaust/Shoah, as well as to support their descendants in need."

Non-Jewish victims are also expected to receive compensation, including Gypsies, who were represented at the meetings this week.

The decree for the fund takes effect March 1. Steinberg said distribution of the fund could begin as early as this summer. □

(JTA correspondent Fredy Rom in Zurich contributed to this report.)

U.S. lawmaker: 'Schindler's List' should not have been broadcast

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A debate over the television airing of "Schindler's List" erupted in the U.S. Congress this week when two Republican lawmakers sparred over its appropriateness.

Rep. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) urged public outrage to stop the networks "from polluting the minds of our children."

NBC's airing of Steven Spielberg's Oscar-winning film Sunday took network television "to an all-time low, with full-frontal nudity, violence and profanity being shown in our homes," Coburn, co-chairman of the Congressional Family Caucus, said in a statement Tuesday.

Arguing against the new television rating system, which labeled the film "TV-M," for mature audiences, Coburn said Sunday's broadcast "only encourages the airing of more sex and violence."

"I cringe when I realize that there were children all across this nation watching this program.

"They were exposed to the violence of multiple gunshot head wounds, vile language, full frontal nudity and irresponsible sexual activity."

Coburn's statement prompted Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) to take the Senate floor to denounce his colleague.

"When I first received this statement, I thought it was a prank," D'Amato said.

The exchange prompted a flurry of negative reaction from other members of Congress and a host of organizations across the political spectrum.

"To equate the nudity of Holocaust victims in the concentration camp with any sexual connotation is outrageous and offensive.

"I am shocked and appalled that any member of Congress would make these kind of statements. I am particularly embarrassed that they were made by a member of my own party."

Accusations of grandstanding

In a later statement, Coburn said the issue was not the quality of the movie, but whether the movie belonged on network television.

The movie "was an excellent and informative program that should not have been aired on a network," he said.

The National Jewish Coalition, the Jewish Republican group, accused Coburn of "political grandstanding."

"Clearly on this issue, Coburn is a voice of one," according to Matt Brooks, NJC executive director.

He added that his group would make its views on this issue known directly to Coburn.

NBC, which broke Sunday evening viewership record when about 65 million Americans tuned in to see the movie, sharply criticized Coburn's comments.

"I just wonder if Congressman Coburn is aware that there was a Holocaust, that millions of people died and it's not something anybody should ever forget," NBC West Coast President Don Olhmeyer told Variety.

Oklahoma Jews were also quick to condemn Coburn.

"We're outraged and horrified that someone who represents us in Oklahoma could have these feelings," Edie Roodman, director of the Jewish Federation in Oklahoma City, said in a telephone interview.

"To equate nudity in the Holocaust to nudity does not make sense.

"It proves that we have not done enough education." □

Jewish family sues Iran for death of a daughter

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Family members of a Jewish victim of Middle Eastern terrorism have for the first time sued Iran for damages.

Stephen Flatow, the father of Alisa Flatow, the 20-year-old American victim of an April 9, 1995, suicide bombing in the Gaza Strip, filed a lawsuit Wednesday seeking \$150 million in damages.

Islamic Jihad, the militant fundamentalist group that receives \$2 million a year from Iran, claimed responsibility for the attack, according to court papers.

Standing next to a poster-size photo of his daughter, Flatow of West Orange, N.J., vowed to seek justice.

"I am not a sovereign nation. I cannot wage war," Flatow said at a Capitol Hill news conference.

But he can battle in the courts.

A provision of last year's anti-terrorism law allows American citizens to file suits in U.S. courts against foreign sponsors of terrorism.

"When you lose a child, you want to pull the covers over your head and make the rest of the world disappear," Flatow said. "But you can't do that."

Flatow's effort to stop Iran from exporting terrorism is not the first time he has sought to make a difference.

After Alisa Flatow's death, the family donated her organs to Israelis needing transplants. Israeli doctors credit this decision with saving three lives.

"There is no doubt that the funding spigot for international terrorism starts in Iran," said Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) at the news conference designed as a send-off before attorneys filed the lawsuit in U.S. District Court.

'No illusions about road ahead'

"Nothing can bring Alisa Flatow back to her family and friends. I do hope, however, that the award of large punitive damages in this lawsuit will spare other families the same suffering," said Lautenberg, who was traveling in Israel at the same time that a suicide bomber rammed his car into the No. 36 Egged bus as it approached Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip, killing Flatow and seven other passengers.

Lautenberg was joined by other New Jersey lawmakers, Reps. Jim Saxton (R-N.J.), who called the news conference, and Frank LoBiondo (R-N.J.).

The Flatows are seeking damages from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as from Ayatollah Ali Hoseini Khamenei and the president of Iran, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, according to a copy of the lawsuit, which, along with a photo of Alisa Flatow and the charred bus, was distributed to reporters.

"My family has no illusions about the road ahead of us," Flatow said.

According to Steven Perles, the Flatows' attorney, it is likely to take four years before the case comes to trial.

This is not the first time Iran will be defending itself in a U.S. court.

After Lebanese terrorists freed American hostages in the late 1980s, some tried to sue Iran for damages.

Iran vigorously and successfully defended itself, Perles said.

But that was before Congress passed a law last year that allows American victims of terrorism to sue for damages if the attack was promoted by a country that the State Department includes on its annual list of nations that sponsor terrorism.

Iran has been included on the list since the State Department first issued it in 1986. □

**U.S. chides Israel, cautions
Palestinians about Har Homa***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. officials have criticized a decision by Israel to go ahead with construction of a new Jewish neighborhood in southeastern Jerusalem.

Wednesday's endorsement by the Ministerial Committee on Jerusalem of the plan to build at Har Homa had been anticipated in recent days.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the decision by the 12 of his 18 Cabinet ministers who sit on the committee, adding that the plan to build the first 2,500 of 6,500 planned housing units at Har Homa would help ease an acute housing shortage in the capital.

Stressing the Israeli government's concern for both Jewish and Arab residents of the city, he announced that the committee also had approved the construction of 3,000 housing units for Arabs residents of Jerusalem.

"There is a growing need over years for construction, for both Israelis and Palestinians, especially young families," Netanyahu told a news conference. "It is important for both populations, Palestinian and Israeli."

In Washington, the committee's decision did not go over well. The decision "is not a step that will build trust and confidence," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said at a briefing Wednesday. "Frankly, the United States would have preferred a different decision."

Burns also criticized the recent Palestinian warnings that a go-ahead for construction at Har Homa could lead to violence.

"People who threaten violence and people who incite violence and practice it are speaking the language of the past," he said. "The language of the present is to sit down and negotiate differences."

Burns added that the Har Homa issue was certain to be part of the discussions between President Clinton and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat during his scheduled visit to Washington next week.

Final approval for construction must now be made by Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Eliyahu Yishai, who has expressed his backing for the plan in the past.

Bulldozers could begin clearing land at Har Homa within about two weeks, according to Israeli officials. Israeli security forces have meanwhile gone on heightened alert in anticipation of potential Palestinian violence. □

Hebron shooter deemed unstable*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Psychiatrists examining an Israeli soldier who opened fire Jan. 1 on Palestinians in the Hebron market have concluded that he was mentally unstable at the time.

The panel of three psychiatrists was appointed by a court to determine whether Noam Friedman is capable to stand trial in connection with the incident, in which six Palestinians were wounded.

The panel of three psychiatrists concluded that Friedman was not in control of his actions at the time and that he still requires hospitalization.

The panel is scheduled to submit its findings to the military court where Friedman was charged in the shooting.

Friedman, a religious Jew, said after his arrest that he had felt compelled to stop the Hebron redeployment from being carried out.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority formally signed the Hebron agreement Jan. 17, the same day that Israeli troops redeployed from 80 percent of the West Bank town.

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

Jewish man admits to planting bomb

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (JTA) — A former kosher butcher was arrested this week on charges of making a bomb threat and placing a bomb in a Jacksonville synagogue to disrupt a speech by former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

Harry Shapiro, a 31-year-old Orthodox Jew who has pursued yeshiva studies and now works at a gas station, turned himself in to police, local authorities said.

Bail was set Wednesday at \$1 million. Shapiro's next court appearance was scheduled for March 13.

The Jacksonville Jewish Center had received a bomb threat Feb. 13, shortly before Peres was to appear. But no device was found. Nine days later, three children playing at a Bat Mitzvah reception at the synagogue found a pipe bomb. Police disarmed the device. □

Flames destroy part of Warsaw shul

NEW YORK (JTA) — The only active synagogue in Warsaw has been damaged in what appears to be an arson attack.

The Tuesday fire was caused by two cans of flammable liquid that were ignited and thrown into central Warsaw's Nozyk synagogue, police said.

The fire wrecked the shul's old main entrance and left a large vestibule charred and littered with debris. Police said the cause of the blaze was probably arson.

One person was treated for smoke inhalation.

A day earlier, a bomb threat was made to a building next to the 1,000-member shul. Police searched that building, used by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, a Jewish educational charity, but found nothing.

Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski condemned the attack as well as violence against the Jewish community in general.

Jewish officials pointed out that in the last few days, Polish media has been devoting air time to the country's new law on returning property to the Jewish community.

Last year, a bomb smashed windows of Warsaw's kosher restaurant, also near the synagogue. The motive for that attack has not been explained. □

E.U., Palestinians reach trade accord*By Joseph Kopel*

BRUSSELS (JTA) — The European Union has signed a trade and cooperation accord with the Palestinian Authority.

"This is very important for the Palestinian people," said Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat. "With this we accept the economic, political and moral significance of the agreement between Europe and the Palestinian people."

Under the accord, the Palestinians are recognized as full partners of the European Union. Several Mediterranean countries, including Israel, have similar association accords with the 15-member European Union.

The agreement, which covers a five-year period, offers enhanced economic cooperation, including reduced tariffs for Palestinian exports to E.U. member-states.

The Palestinians have been granted a maximum five-year period to eliminate all restrictions and tariffs on imports from Europe. However, the Palestinians have complained about the difficulties they encounter in exporting their goods to Europe. Gaza, as well as construction of a seaport, are still before Israeli and Palestinian negotiators.

The European Union has been the leading financial supporter of the Palestinian Authority. □