

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **The body of missing Israeli soldier Sharon Edri was found by Israeli troops in a Palestinian village in the West Bank. The Israeli army said the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas group was responsible for the death of Edri, who was last seen in September at a hitchhiking post in central Israel. [Page 2]**

■ **The Clinton administration's special envoy on restitution issues said class action suits against Swiss banks might interfere with efforts to compensate Holocaust victims and reach a settlement with Switzerland. Undersecretary of Commerce Stuart Eizenstat told a delegation from Agudath Israel of America that people could not be stopped from "exercising their right to sue," but stressed that "we have a way of settling this matter in a quiet and dignified way."**

■ **Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, asked the House International Relations Committee to withhold \$100 million in U.S. aid from Egypt until President Hosni Mubarak condemns anti-Semitic rhetoric by Egyptian government officials and Egyptian media. Egypt now receives \$2.1 billion in U.S. aid each year.**

■ **An 18-year-old in Pennsylvania was convicted of vandalism for smashing a Jewish family's menorah with a baseball bat, but was acquitted of ethnic intimidation. Richard Hudson will be sentenced after the other two defendants, both 17, are tried later this month. After the crime, many Christians in Newtown, Pa., displayed menorahs to show their solidarity with the family.**

■ **Tens of thousands of demonstrators are expected to attend a rally this weekend at the Alabama Capitol to support Judge Roy Moore, who displays a plaque of the Ten Commandments in his courtroom and opens sessions with a prayer. He is appealing orders to stop the practices.**

■ **An American private investigator who uncovered dozens of suspected war criminals in Canada carried out his threat to begin naming them if authorities did not act. [Page 4]**

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Belarus Jews remaining calm amid rising political turmoil**

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Jews of Belarus are keeping a low profile in the wake of a crackdown on political dissent and free speech, according to community leaders and activists in this former Soviet republic.

In this respect, they say, the Jewish community is not unlike the majority of the nation's population.

"Jews are not involved in politics and do not react to what is going on" in Belarus, Yevgeny Rabinovich, a Jewish activist, said in a telephone interview from the capital of Minsk.

He said Jewish groups, which are public organizations, do not speak out on the country's political issues.

During the last two weeks, authorities have been cracking down on opposition rallies in the nation's capital, beating and arresting demonstrators who oppose a proposed alliance between Belarus and Russia.

The authorities have also lashed out against Western and Russian broadcasters for their "biased" coverage of events in Belarus.

Last month, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko expelled a Moscow television journalist who featured anti-Lukashenko protests in his reports.

Human-rights activists have been criticizing Lukashenko for the curbs he imposed on opposition protests and news coverage.

Despite these actions, Lukashenko is popular with a broad section of the population, including Jews, Jewish leaders say.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Belarus experienced severe economic hardships. People are nostalgic for the Soviet past and a strong-handed governmental policy, one Jewish leader said.

A Jewish activist from Minsk described the mood of the nation's population, including Jews, as "social apathy."

"People are much more concerned about economic problems," said Yakov Basin. In spite of the ongoing opposition protests, he added, "the situation within the country seems to be stable, and the rest does not disturb the people."

Lukashenko, a former Soviet collective farm director, has virtually no political rivals.

In a referendum last year, he gained nearly unlimited powers and extended his presidency into the next century.

He rules Belarus with an iron-fisted Soviet style that he openly admires. Not surprisingly, he has little tolerance for dissent.

In an interview with a German newspaper a few years ago, Lukashenko spoke admiringly of Hitler's prewar policy for reinvigorating the German economy — a plan that depended largely on massive militarization.

'As long as I find opposition newspapers'

Last month, Lukashenko moved to further tighten his rule in this nation of 10 million.

He said at the time that the people had asked him to introduce a dictatorship similar to that of the Stalinist era.

But leaders of the 100,000-member Jewish community of Belarus do not see the situation as hopeless.

"I don't think people are scared of openly expressing their views," said Rabinovich. He said the situation is tolerable as long as "each morning I find opposition newspapers in my mailbox."

Although most of the opposition papers are printed in neighboring Lithuania, they are easily available in Belarus, at least in Minsk.

Jewish leaders say they do not fear any rise of anti-Semitism in Belarus, where ultranationalist and anti-Semitic groups are weak.

In recent years, Russia has been the sole source of anti-Semitic publications in Belarus, but they are not numerous.

In a recent interview with a pro-government newspaper, Lukashenko said he would crack down on any manifestations of anti-Russian, anti-Semitic or anti-Polish attitudes.

Russians, Poles and Jews are among the nation's largest minorities.

While Lukashenko vows to fight any grass-roots anti-Semitism, his increasing authoritarianism makes it difficult for him to deal with the rise of minority-rights movements.

This rise is "dangerous for the authorities," who might see the movements as undermining the regime, Basin said.

For all its authoritarian stands, the government has not countered freedom of religion or emigration. Each year, about 4,000 Jews leave Belarus for Israel. A few hundred leave annually for the United States and Germany.

Some local activists speak of lackluster Jewish communal life in Belarus, blaming it on the government's lack of support for Jewish organizations.

But Leonid Levin, chairman of the Belarus Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities, described the state of Jewish life as "normal."

Last week, Lukashenko signed a union treaty with Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

The treaty has been sharply criticized by the nationalist, Communist and liberal opposition in Minsk.

Liberals in Moscow have likewise opposed the treaty, fearing that a planned union with the economically depressed Belarus would wipe out Russia's hard-won economic reforms.

The treaty, however, ended up being largely symbolic. Most of the bilateral agreements Russia and Belarus signed over the past few years with the aim of fostering integration have been vague, and the latest accord offers little evidence of a more concrete approach.

Meanwhile, there is little basis for Jewish concern, said Basin. But if the political alliance between the two nations does become a meaningful reality, he added, Russia may be able to guarantee further stability for the Jews of Belarus. □

IDF soldier, missing for months, found dead in Palestinian village

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli security forces, acting on information obtained in part from Palestinian police, have uncovered the body of an Israeli soldier kidnapped and murdered by a Hamas terrorist cell from the Hebron area.

Israel Defense Force security officials said the soldier, Sharon Edri, was killed by members of a cell of the Hamas military wing, responsible for murdering 10 other Israelis and wounding 49 in attacks since the beginning of 1996.

The army said members of the cell, which has until now evaded capture by Israeli troops, lived in Hebron and the nearby village of Tsurif.

The head of the IDF central command, Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, told a news conference Thursday night that there were at least six members in the terrorist cell. Dayan said two had been arrested by Israeli security forces, two by Palestinian police, one was the suicide bomber in last month's suicide bombing at a Tel Aviv cafe and another was still at large. The man responsible for carrying out the March 21 suicide attack had come from Tsurif.

Security officials said the two cell members arrested by Palestinian police were arrested in the part of Hebron that is under self-rule. Information from their interrogation was conveyed to CIA officials, who in turn passed it on to Israel.

Israeli officials would not confirm whether the information had emerged during secret talks held in the Gaza Strip earlier this week, when Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat met with Israeli and American intelligence officials.

IDF forces clamped a curfew Thursday on Tsurif. The deputy IDF chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Matan Vilnai, said 18 residents of the village had been arrested in connection with the cell and that the investigation was continuing.

The body of Edri, who disappeared seven months ago on his way home from an army medical clinic in Israel, was found in Tsurif.

The IDF said in a statement that it appeared that Edri was kidnapped on his way home from the Tsurifin army base in a car with Israeli license plates. The terrorists shot him and buried him in the village.

Members of Edri's family had sharp criticism for the Israeli security establishment, which they said did not sufficiently concentrate their searches for Edri on the assumption that he was kidnapped by terrorist organizations.

Relatives said that despite their efforts, police continued to examine whether Edri could have committed suicide, or disappeared for other circumstances.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai acknowledged that information provided by the Hamas cell members arrested by the Palestinians had aided in locating the body.

But Mordechai added that despite the security cooperation in this particular incident, the Palestinian Authority was still not doing enough to crack down on terror.

Earlier in the day, Mordechai said Israel would have no difficulty recapturing the Palestinian population centers transferred to self-rule.

"There would be no difficulty recapturing Hebron or any other city, but we don't want to do that," Mordechai told reporters during a tour of northern Israel.

"We want the Palestinians to honor the agreements so we can make progress in the process and reach a solution without dangers and threats."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking in Holland, sought to ensure that there was no misunderstanding of Mordechai's comments.

"It is true that we have the capability to return to the towns, but we are not interested, as the defense minister rightly said," the premier told reporters.

"We are searching for another option, primarily stopping violence and terror, and continuing the peace process."

Netanyahu expressed appreciation for the "specific assistance" from the Palestinian Authority that led to the location of Edri's body.

But he, too, stressed that the self-rule authority was still obligated to carry out wide-ranging measures to crack down on Islamic terrorist organizations in the autonomous areas.

Netanyahu added that Israel would seek the extradition of the two Hamas cell members held by the Palestinian security forces. □

Israel's economic slowdown continues

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's economic slowdown in the final quarter of 1996 continued into the first quarter of this year, according to the Bank of Israel.

A central bank survey issued Thursday said that drops in activity were noted in most major sectors, including building, hotels and industry.

The industrial sector reported a drop in output and sales, according to the report, which noted lower domestic demand for textiles and construction.

The survey also noted a drop in housing starts.

Hotels also reported drops in reservations from abroad, which the survey attributed to Israel's deteriorating security situation. □

Netanyahu finds supporters at conference of evangelicals

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

WASHINGTON (JTA) — If Benjamin Netanyahu was eager to be among friends this week in Washington, he found them at the Voices United for Israel conference.

About 3,000 people — most of them evangelical Christians — greeted the Israeli prime minister's remarks Monday with roars of approval, standing ovations and shouts of "amen" and "hallelujah."

The conference, billed as "a summit of pro-Israel Jewish and Christian organizations," was convened by Voices United, a 6-year-old organization based in Kansas City, Kan.

The group is devoted to engendering support wherever it can be found for "a safe and secure Israel."

And these days, that support is found among evangelical Christians.

"We have no greater friends and allies than the people sitting in this room," Netanyahu told the summit, just hours before his meeting with President Clinton at the White House.

Most of Netanyahu's audience believe that the word of God, as written in the Bible, has been proven true by Israel's very existence as a state.

It is also an article of evangelical faith that there is no grace from God without allegiance to Jesus. Many at the summit, including members of the host committee, focus their missionary efforts on Jews.

The involvement of such groups, and the question of whether Jews should lend them legitimacy by sharing a stage, has been controversial for Voices United.

Orthodox Rabbi Tzvi Weinreb of Baltimore pulled out of the host committee after learning about some of the other members.

They included Elwood McQuaid, whose Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry logo is a crown-encircled cross imposed over a Star of David.

Two years ago, the National Jewish Coalition, which represents Jewish Republicans, withdrew from its sponsorship of the annual conference.

This year a handful of Jews, including Zionist Organization of America President Morton Klein, were on the committee.

The committee included evangelical leaders Pat Robertson, Ralph Reed, Jerry Falwell and John Hagee, and conservative political figures and commentators Cal Thomas, Alan Keyes and Jack Kemp.

"I am sick of hearing" about concern over groups that missionize Jews, Voices United founder Esther Levens said in an interview.

Murmurs of 'hallelujah'

"The fact that the prime minister came and spoke is validation enough for what we are trying to accomplish, which is to have a very broad grass-roots support for the State of Israel."

It was the first time that an Israeli premier spoke at the group's annual conference.

"You can make it clear to the American people that the road to peace is through the negotiating table, not the blood of children and women," the prime minister said, referring to recent Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israel.

Jeanne McKean greeted many of Netanyahu's comments with murmurs of "hallelujah" and "Yes, Lord Jesus."

The senior citizen, who had come to the summit from Baltimore, described herself as a Pentecostal Christian "anointed with ruach hakodesh," using Hebrew to say

"the holy spirit," in order "to be a prayer warrior for Israel."

Shortly after "receiving the Lord" two decades ago, she said, God directed her to look at the calendar hanging on her kitchen wall.

It was May 14, the 30th anniversary of Israel's founding and then, McKean said, the Lord told her that for the rest of her life "you will serve my people and comfort them."

McKean spent all of 1995 in the former Soviet Union "to minister to the Jews in Russia."

"I got to meet so many Jewish people who had never heard the word of God.

"I was so happy to tell them about the Lord!" she said.

"The Lord found me a lot of elderly Jewish people I could minister to," and many "received the Lord" each week, professing their new-found belief in Jesus.

Elizabeth Janicki came to the conference from Estes Park, Colo., a town north of Denver, where she, though gentile, owns a Judaica store.

Janicki sells Jewish prayer books, Torahs, prayer shawls and mezuzahs, and in the front window she has hung a banner declaring her love for Israel, she said.

'There's nothing to fear from us'

Every Saturday night a "Messianic" pastor from Denver comes to the store to run a Torah study class in which about 50 people participate, Janicki said. Several are Jews.

"We want the Jews to come in and see that there's nothing to fear from us," she said.

"We have a lot of Jewish people come into our store and they're very glad of what we're doing but they're apprehensive and think that we have an ulterior motive," said Janicki, who has visited Israel four times. Her son will be studying next year at the King of Kings Messianic College in Jerusalem.

Few Jews attended the Voices United summit, and a number of them described themselves as "Messianic" Jews who, like Christians, believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

Melissa McKenzie, from Melrose, Fla., was wearing a large Star of David necklace and what looked like a tiny Jewish star on her lapel.

A closer look, though, revealed that it had a small cross imposed over it.

McKenzie represents Zion's Hope, a missionary organization that runs dinners for as many as 250 Jewish people at a time.

"We have a lot of poor Jewish people in South Florida," McKenzie said.

"Christians buy them tickets to go to the dinner, where we explain Isaiah 53 and other" Bible passages that, McKenzie believes, prove Jesus is the Jews' promised Messiah.

Of the few "non-Messianic" Jews at the summit, many represented Americans For a Safe Israel and Women in Green, two groups opposed to the current Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Although some proselytizing occurred during the summit, in violation of guidelines distributed to delegates, these Jews were philosophical about it.

"When you have people supportive of some of your beliefs, including Israel's right to build in the entire Jewish homeland, and not making any concessions to Clinton or the Arabs, you have to go with them," said Ira Nosenchuk of Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Sometimes I feel like there are more supporters for Israel among evangelicals than among Jews," he said. "We need all the friends we can get." □

Private eye begins to identify alleged war criminals in Canada*By Bram D. Eisenthal*

MONTREAL (JTA) — An American private investigator who uncovered dozens of suspected war criminals living in Canada has begun to publicize their identities.

Steven Rambam last week carried out his threat to begin naming the suspected war criminals on his list if Canada's Justice Department did not make use of the information by the end of February. Addressing a public meeting at a synagogue here, Rambam released the name of Josef Kitisielatis, an alleged former member of a Lithuanian army unit that murdered thousands of Jewish men, women and children during World War II.

"We are going to out one or two people a week over the next couple of months," Rambam said.

The Canadian Jewish Congress has called on the government to initiate legal action against Kitisielatis.

Jewish groups here have criticized the government for what they say has been a lack of resolve in pursuing suspected war criminals. Kitisielatis made headlines more than 10 years ago after he fled from the United States to Canada to avoid prosecution as a war criminal.

According to Bernie Farber, national director of community relations for the Canadian Jewish Congress, U.S. officials had an ironclad case against Kitisielatis.

"He came to Canada in 1948, was here till 1962, when he became a Canadian citizen, then went to the U.S.," Farber said in an interview.

The Office of Special Investigations, the Nazi-hunting arm of the U.S. Justice Department, "discovered him in 1983 and put together a legal case against him for deportation," said Farber. "Two days prior to his hearing, he disappeared, skipping the country and coming back to Canada in May 1985."

"There is no reason that Canada has not gone ahead with legal proceedings against Kitisielatis," he said.

Paul Vickery, senior counsel for the Canadian Justice Department's war crimes division, said in an interview that he would not "comment on whether an investigation is ongoing on a particular individual."

In December, Rambam presented the war crimes unit of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with tapes of interviews between him and dozens of suspected Nazi war criminals living in Canada. Rambam said he continues to speak with some of the alleged war criminals since he first interviewed them posing as a professor from a fictitious Central American university.

Rambam said that he recently spoke by telephone with Kitisielatis, who told him that the RCMP has not visited him since he first returned to Canada more than a decade ago. "He lives in Burlington, Ontario, under his own name and he is [as] happy as a clown," Rambam said. "He is not the kind of guy Canada would want to welcome with open arms." □

Religious leaders urge action against crime in South Africa*By Suzanne Belling*

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — Religious leaders in South Africa this week took a stand against the country's growing crime problem.

More than 1,200 people attended the interreligious gathering at a Johannesburg synagogue.

"We are living in state of absolute anarchy," said Rabbi Yossy Goldman, chairman of the South Africa Rabbinical Association, at a synagogue service preceding a mass action meeting in the adjacent hall.

"We are stretcher cases, ICU cases. Life-support machinery is needed."

Goldman, who emigrated here from New York 21 years ago, said he believed that his "crime resume," more than his rabbinic credentials, qualified him to address the meeting, which included high-ranking police officers.

Goldman noted that his home was burgled twice, his minibus was stolen, his wife and child were saved from an attempted carjacking and murder, and he himself was the victim of a carjacking in a separate incident.

"As far back as December 1995, President [Nelson] Mandela declared war on crime. This must be a very silent war, fought clandestinely," he added. "Has anybody here seen it being waged? Is there any visible policing on our streets?"

To spontaneous applause, Goldman issued a "desperate cry to the highest office-bearers of our country."

"We say to the government: Give us visible policing and, if it means putting the defense force on the streets — so be it. This is an emergency. Treat it as the emergency it is."

Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris said that according to sacred Jewish teachings, prayer for divine help should be accompanied by self-help.

"In the war against crime, we must praise the Lord and pass the ammunition," he said.

"The situation is now so bad that the silent majority of law-abiding citizens must become highly vociferous to demand from the authorities a response towards fighting crime, directly commensurate with the enormity of the problem and the widespread suffering it is causing." □

Jordan holds 11 on suspicion of planning embassy attack*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Jordanian police have detained 11 youths suspected of planning a terrorist attack on Israel's embassy in Amman.

Sources in the Jordanian capital said the youths were also suspected of forming an illegal organization and distributing subversive materials.

Earlier this week, reports from Jordan said the car belonging to the head of the Jordanian committee investigating the March 13 shooting of seven Israeli schoolgirls by a Jordanian soldier had been torched outside his home.

Members of the committee visited Israel this week and met with teachers and students who took part in the school trip to Naharayim. □

Hazardous material hits Israel's coast*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — More than 400 bottles containing poisonous material washed up on Israel's shores this week.

Environment Ministry officials said they believe that the bottles fell off a boat and were blown toward Israel's coast by recent storms.

The white, liter-sized bottles were found along nearly all of Israel's Mediterranean coast, from Rosh Hanikra in the north to Ashdod in the south.

Laboratory tests indicated that the bottles contained an organic material used as a pesticide. Some of the bottles had broken open, spilling their contents into the sea.

Environment Ministry officials said that accumulated seaweed and organisms found on the bottles indicated that they could have been in the Mediterranean for several weeks. □