



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **The U.N. General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted a resolution against Israel because of its construction at Har Homa. The resolution fell short of its original aims of economic sanctions and undercutting Israel's standing at the United Nations. [Page 1]**

■ **Israel began investigating the collapse of a wooden bridge that killed three Australian athletes and injured dozens of others just before the opening ceremonies of the Maccabiah Games. The Australian delegation to the games, which will resume Wednesday after a 24-hour mourning period, decided to remain in Israel. [Page 4]**

■ **A Jewish-owned house was firebombed and bomb threats targeted a Jewish old-age home and synagogue in Cape Town. The attacks were prompted by the distribution of anti-Islamic posters in the West Bank town of Hebron. Muslim leaders in South Africa condemned the attacks. [Page 3]**

■ **The U.S. House of Representatives voted to grant asylum to the Swiss bank guard who rescued Holocaust-era documents from a shredder at the Union Bank of Switzerland earlier this year. The Senate passed similar legislation in May.**

■ **The Bank of Canada launched an investigation into recently declassified American documents that show it was used to launder looted Nazi gold. The bank's governor has promised to review the case immediately and has expressed his concern regarding the transactions.**

■ **The Jewish National Fund of America apparently has tapped Russell Robinson to the charity's top professional post. Robinson, a United Jewish Appeal executive, will replace Samuel Cohen, who recently took an early retirement. [Page 3]**

■ **The United Jewish Appeal has named Bernie Moscovitz its new executive vice president. Moscovitz, who had been the UJA's vice president and chief operating officer, replaces Rabbi Brian Lurie, who vacated his post in November 1995.**

NEWS ANALYSIS

U.N. session targets Israel, revives concern about bias

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — Long-held cynicism about the United Nations and its ability to be fair was reinvigorated this week as the General Assembly reconvened an emergency session targeted at Israel.

"The U.N. is reverting to its Cold War role as an Israel-bashing forum," Harris Schoenberg, director of U.N. affairs for B'nai B'rith International, offered as the world body prepared to debate Israel's construction of the controversial Har Homa housing project.

"The distortion, the hatred, the insult and the injury go well beyond what is warranted," he wrote.

At Tuesday's session, members of the U.N. General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted a non-binding resolution against Israel. But the Arab-sponsored resolution fell short of its original aims of levying economic sanctions against "illegal settlements" and undercutting Israel's standing in the United Nations.

Instead, the resolution called on states to "actively discourage" activities that contribute to the economic development of Israeli settlements.

In spite of the weakened resolution, the General Assembly's debate and its 131-3 vote provided evidence of the demise of the Middle East peace process. The session also underscored Israel's increasing isolation after an anomalous warming of relations with the international community in the wake of the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian peace accords.

David Harris, the executive director of the American Jewish Committee, who had been pressing European U.N. diplomats to vote against the resolution, sounded a note similar to Schoenberg's.

"Treating Israel as a political football, to be kicked around at will, does not bring credit to the world organization struggling to reform itself and re-establish its credibility," he said in a statement.

In an interview, he added, "The U.N. attitude improves when Israel is forthcoming on the peace process. The moment there is a breakdown in the process, there's a reflexive assumption the breakdown is a result of an Israeli action or inaction."

In Jerusalem, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also denigrated the U.N. action even before it unfolded. "While thousands or hundreds of thousands are dying in various wars or disasters in the world," he was quoted as saying, "the United Nations chooses to discuss two or three bulldozers that are building apartments for tranquil citizens in Jerusalem."

The stepped-up isolation of the Jewish state is further evidenced by the reluctance expressed by many nations to attend the upcoming Middle East regional economic conference in the Gulf nation of Qatar because of Israel's participation. Both Israel and the United States have placed a lot of stock in the regional economic dividends that the November conference, the fourth of its kind, is expected to yield.

In fact, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has scheduled her first trip to the Middle East in the top U.S. diplomatic post to attend the conference, the State Department announced Tuesday.

Meanwhile, in London, Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat called on Europe to threaten economic sanctions against Israel to stop it from building new settlements.

'One-sided and hostile'

Tuesday's resolution came in response to recent findings issued by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan that Israel had failed to stop the construction of the Har Homa housing project at a site in southeastern Jerusalem.

That construction triggered a crisis in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking along with Arab unrest in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. While Israel sees Har Homa as part of its undivided capital of Jerusalem, Palestinians view the area as part of the capital of their hoped-for state.

Annan issued the report following an unusual emergency session the General Assembly convened in April.

At that time, members condemned the construction plan and

demanded an immediate halt, adopting a non-binding resolution to that effect by a vote of 134-3.

Israel, the United States and Micronesia opposed the resolution; 11 nations abstained. Once again this week, the United States and Micronesia joined with Israel.

Israel termed the secretary's report "one-sided and hostile" and protested the session, reiterating that its dispute with the Palestinians should be resolved bilaterally and not in the U.N. arena.

The convening of an emergency special session "is an extreme measure intended for use only in the exceptional cases of direct 'threats to international peace and security,'" an official Israeli statement said. "By no means does the Jerusalem housing project constitute such a threat."

An earlier draft of this week's resolution suggested that Israel's U.N. participation be curtailed, but the final draft that was approved Tuesday was softened, only hinting at such action in the future.

At the session, the newly confirmed Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Dore Gold, took the offensive.

During the debate, Gold chronicled a litany of violations committed by Arafat in the agreements he has made with Israel.

He assailed the Palestinian leader for not completing the revision of the Palestinian Covenant; for repeatedly cutting off security cooperation; for not terminating "incitement to violence"; for not carrying out "a systematic and effective combating of terrorist organizations"; for not transferring terrorist suspects; and for not confiscating illegal arms, among other violations.

"In short, while Israel has met all of its commitments, the PLO has met none of its obligations," he said.

Gold also accused the United Nations of "turning back the clock decades" and of undermining the peace process by holding the session as the process enters "its most critical phase."

"To the Palestinian side, it is the clearest of messages that the United Nations is a convenient and willing forum for bypassing the peace process.

"And to Israel, it sends the troubling message that taking serious security risks for peace, as Israel has done in every one of its agreements with the PLO, are concessions which are quickly forgotten."

For his part, Nasser Al-Kidwa, the representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, greeted the session as "a victory for right, justice and the collective will of the international community" and proof that "no country is above international law."

He was also unequivocal in leveling his blame, saying it was "the official Israeli policies that are destroying the peace process." He said the Israeli government is motivated by the political plan to "forcibly acquire more Palestinian land" for the purpose of "ensuring the prevention of the realization of Palestinian national rights." □

House committee urged to steer clear of an amendment on religion

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Religious leaders are urging Congress to steer clear of advancing a constitutional amendment as a way to counter the Supreme Court's ruling striking down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Testifying before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution on Monday, religious leaders and legal experts outlined several alternative courses of action in the wake of the court decision, including passing federal legislation to restore the religious freedom protections voided by the Supreme Court.

Last month, the high court ruled that Congress

overstepped its bounds and usurped judicial authority in 1993 when it enacted RFRA — a law that protected religious practice from government interference.

The decision means that it will be far more difficult to claim that actions taken by government improperly restrict religious freedom.

Reflecting a wariness felt among many members of a broad coalition formed several years ago in support of RFRA, the Rev. Oliver Thomas, special counsel for the National Council of the Churches of Christ, cautioned against a congressional response that might "upset the delicate balance between the institutions of church and state."

"In particular, if we were to amend the First Amendment, we would risk creating larger problems than the one we seek to solve," said Thomas, who chairs the RFRA coalition, which includes many Jewish groups.

Instead, advocates of RFRA are suggesting a variety of legislative responses. Congress, for example, might use its spending powers to make federal funding of local governments contingent upon compliance with RFRA-like rules, or lawmakers could enact another religious freedom law that would apply to federal agencies.

An emerging consensus

In addition to new legislation, other possible avenues include getting states to enact their own religious freedom statutes and finding a case in the lower courts that could challenge a 1990 Supreme Court ruling that sparked the entire controversy.

The recommendations reflect an emerging consensus among most members of the RFRA coalition.

Some conservative Christian groups, however, are actively looking to a constitutional amendment — a move that threatens to fracture the coalition.

Most of those who spoke at Monday's hearing agreed that such a measure should only be considered as a last resort, and lawmakers in attendance, for the most part, seemed to be reading from the same page.

"It would be ill-advised for us to embark on an attempt to amend the Constitution in response to this decision," said Rep. Charles Canady (R-Fla.), chairman of the subcommittee.

"There are important" legislative "avenues to address the problems raised by" the court's ruling, he said, adding that an amendment "would be premature at this point and likely would not pass in any event."

Amending the Constitution requires the approval of two-thirds of Congress and three-quarters of the states.

Most church-state watchdogs specifically fear a constitutional amendment resembling Rep. Ernest Istook's (R-Okla.) "Religious Freedom Amendment," which would, among other things, allow for prayer in school.

Istook has already suggested adding a section dealing with the free exercise of religion to his proposed amendment. There are concerns beyond the content of a constitutional amendment. Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department, said that such a response would have the effect of "declaring war between Congress and the Supreme Court."

He questioned the "political prudence" of engaging in a separation of powers struggle over RFRA, adding that such a battle could come at the expense of the larger goal of restoring protections for religious liberty.

Jewish observers, meanwhile, saw positive signs in Monday's hearing. "What you saw from the members" of Congress "was a clear willingness to do something, and a clear willingness on the part of members to take their cues from what the coalition wants to do," said Nathan Diamant, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs. □

JNF selects UJA executive to fill its top professional position

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — It looks like a United Jewish Appeal executive will be moving to the top professional post at the Jewish National Fund of America.

After a prolonged search process, sources said JNF's new president, Ronald Lauder, and the search committee have decided on Russell Robinson as the new executive vice president.

JNF would not confirm any selection as official, saying details would be finalized later this week.

Robinson, who is based in Los Angeles, is currently the associate vice president for fund-raising for UJA, where he has worked for more than 15 years.

One colleague who asked not to be named said Robinson is known for being "aggressive, very, very committed to Israel and an excellent fund-raiser."

With his contract expected to be signed in the coming days, Robinson is slated to replace Samuel Cohen, the executive vice president who recently took an early retirement after heading the organization for two decades.

The move is part of a broader reform plan designed to restore confidence in the non-profit charitable organization following disclosures last November of fiscal management problems.

The disclosures hurt subsequent fund-raising at the agency known best for tree-planting in Israel, according to some regional presidents.

The reforms included shifting Cohen to a newly created post of senior executive vice president, while a search was launched for his replacement.

Cohen was associated in the minds of some of the regional leaders with the problematic practices.

Lauder was said to have slowed the search so he could rely on Cohen's experience and influence the choice of his replacement.

The selection of the high-profile philanthropist and cosmetics heir as president was also an effort by JNF to restore luster to the badly tarnished organization.

An investigation showed no malfeasance by JNF.

But it revealed that a surprisingly small portion of money raised by the charity for land reclamation in Israel actually gets to Israel. A large portion stays in the United States for Zionist education and promotion of the JNF enterprise.

The agency has been working on ways to increase the flow of money to Israel. □

Violent wave of anti-Semitism breaks out in liberal Cape Town

By Suzanne Belling and Moira Schneider

CAPE TOWN (JTA) — Cape Town's 25,000-member Jewish community — the second largest in South Africa — is reeling from what has been described as the worst outbreak of anti-Semitism in recent years.

Jewish leaders condemned the firebombing this week of a local house that is owned by a Jewish family and the subsequent bomb threats to a Jewish old-age home and synagogue that are also located in the Cape Town suburbs.

The firebombing took place days after a crowd of Muslims marched Saturday on the Israeli Embassy in Cape Town shouting anti-Semitic slogans.

All of the incidents are believed to have been sparked by the distribution of flyers in the West Bank town of Hebron that depicted the prophet Mohammed as a pig stepping on the Koran.

In Cape Town, which has a large, militant Muslim community, the condemnations took a violent turn.

Monday morning, gasoline bombs were thrown at the home of Ivan Maron, an observant Jew who operates a Jewish book center. An estimated \$50,000 damage was caused to the house, which was left uninhabitable.

Maron's daughter, Martine, said her parents and older brother were asleep when the attack occurred.

"Two bombs came flying through the window. Thank God I was awake, sitting in the lounge — where I seldom sit — and able to call the police and the fire brigade."

After the attack, police received a telephone call from a man who claimed responsibility for the firebombing and who said that the Highlands House old-age home and the Wynberg Synagogue would be the next targets.

Saturday's march was on the Israeli Embassy in Cape Town was scarcely less threatening.

It was marked by chants of "Death to Israel" and "One Zionist, One Bullet."

The leader of the march, Abdulatif Abrahams, said, "Our prophet was blasphemed and that is not kosher, but we were not marching against the Jewish people — we will rise up in a group against any atrocities against Muslims or non-Muslims."

He said the slogans used at the march should not be taken literally.

Hours before the march took place, worshipers at the Wynberg Synagogue arrived for Shabbat services to find pamphlets slipped under the door.

Jackie Sachar, chairman of the synagogue, said the pamphlets included such statements as "Gas Chambers for the Jews."

South Africa's chief rabbi, Cyril Harris, had written to a local Islamic council to dissociate the South African Jewish community from the Hebron flyer.

Several local Muslim leaders lashed out at the firebombing and the threats against the Jewish community.

A leading Islamic cleric, Sheikh Seraj Hendricks, said the attack and threats were "wanton savagery."

"If a Muslim group is responsible, the attack should not be confused with the attitude of the general Muslim population, just as the 'pig' poster should not be confused with general Jewish attitudes."

The South Africa Jewish Board of Deputies issued a statement condemning the firebombing and march. □

Two Russian Jews on Forbes' list

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Two Russian Jewish tycoons were listed by Forbes magazine as the nation's richest people.

Boris Berezovsky, a businessman-turned-politician, cracked the top 100 of the magazine's annual list of the world's wealthiest individuals.

He was ranked in the 97th spot, with an accumulated wealth of \$3 billion.

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, president of the Rosprom financial-industrial group, ranked 133rd, with a wealth of \$2.4 billion.

Berezovsky is currently suing Forbes magazine in a London court for an article about him that appeared last December titled, "Is He the Godfather of the Kremlin?"

The article appeared after Berezovsky, who made his fortune in oil, automobiles and media, was appointed deputy secretary of Russia's Security Council.

Vladimir Goussinsky, the president of the Russian Jewish Congress and a well-known entrepreneur, did not make the Forbes list. He is rumored to have amassed a wealth of \$1 billion. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Maccabiah athletes mourn — but vow to let games continue***By Michele Chabin*

RAMAT GAN, Israel (JTA) — Instead of preparing and competing, athletes at the Maccabiah Games spent the day after a fatal accident trying to make sense of a tragedy they were convinced was avoidable.

An air of mourning was palpable at Kfar Maccabiah, the games' official headquarters, where many of the athletes — some of them weeping — tried to come to terms with the tragedy that occurred as the opening ceremonies got under way.

At least three members of the Australian team died and dozens of others were injured — some critically — when a pedestrian bridge collapsed at the Ramat Gan stadium, plunging scores into the river below.

It was the moment that Jewish athletes from around the world had dreamed of and trained hard for, the moment they would march into Israel's largest stadium to usher in the 15th Maccabiah Games.

But instead of entering the stadium to the cheers of 50,000 fans, the 5,500 athletes competing in the games were faced with a tragedy.

Although the Maccabiah management did not cancel the opening-night program — a decision that has sparked a heated debate among politicians and citizens — it did decide to halt the games for 24 hours.

Gathered Tuesday at Kfar Maccabiah, the Australian team, which bore the brunt of the casualties, wrestled with the question of whether to withdraw from the games or continue.

President Ezer Weizman personally urged the Australian delegation to compete in the games, as did some of the members of the 10-pin bowling team, which lost two of its teammates in the tragedy.

Ultimately, however, the decision was left up to the individual athletes, some of whom were in neck braces and bandages.

"We aren't a team sport, and if anyone feels they can't compete, put up your hand," an Australian tennis coach told his group, which was seated in a circle on the grass.

Not a single hand was raised.

'A very brave decision'

"It would be easy for us to just go through the motions, but that's not enough," tennis player Joshua Frydenberg told his teammates.

"We have to focus harder and support each other. We're not doing this for ourselves anymore, but for our team. We're doing it for Sasha."

He was referring to 15-year-old Sasha Elterman, a member of the junior tennis team, who was in critical condition at a Tel Aviv hospital.

After the votes were taken, Harry Procel, the Australian team manager, said the consensus was to go on.

"I think it was a very brave decision," he said.

Procel said that since the accident, the Australian delegation had received hundreds of phone calls and dozens of faxes of support from concerned Israelis and from the other delegations.

Procel said he was touched by the fact that all 50 delegations to the games were attending a memorial service Tuesday evening.

Although a few of the athletes privately expressed anger over the decision to continue the glitzy opening-night ceremonies after the tragic accident occurred, the brunt of their anger was directed at the people who built and approved the temporary ramp that collapsed as the first

delegations — from Australian and Austria — were about to enter the stadium.

"I'm sad and I'm angry," said Randall Braunfeld, a 21-year-old wrestler from Philadelphia. "It's a tragedy that shouldn't have happened."

"Just look at how the bridge was built," said Braunfeld's teammate Jeff Liberman, of Boston. "Seeing it after the fact, I can't see how people were allowed to walk on it, it was so flimsy."

Liberman said that although he and most of his fellow athletes want to compete, "it's tough. Everyone will be competing in the names of the victims and their families. All the fun has gone out of the games."

Said Barbara Barend, a 23-year-old tennis player from Holland, "We're relieved that no Dutch athlete was injured, but we can't have any joy.

"It was especially terrible because our juniors were at the beginning of the parade and we thought some might be hurt. It was 15 minutes before they ran back to us, screaming and crying. We're still in shock."

Those athletes who were on the bridge when it collapsed were on the worst shape.

"Some members of the Austrian team were on the bridge, so we've been affected very much," said Karl Gustavo Edinger, the Austrian tennis coach.

Although he sustained only bruises, Edinger said a few of his teammates remained hospitalized with broken bones. While the older competitors were upset, Edinger added, "it's the juniors, the teen-agers, who are in shock.

"We've decided to take them to the Western Wall this afternoon. We hope that will give them some comfort."

His voice suddenly catching, Edinger paused. For a few minutes he cried silently, unable to speak.

Finally, he said, "The accident happened at the worst possible time, just when things were getting started. Our hearts were pumping because in one more minute we were going into the stadium.

"We lost the biggest moment of our lives." □

Cease-fire agreement ignored as Katyusha lands in Israeli field*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The fighting in Lebanon has once again spilled over into northern Israel.

The Israel Defense Force confirmed Tuesday that Hezbollah fighters had fired several Katyusha rockets at an Israeli army base on the Israeli-Lebanese border and that one of the rockets had fallen into northern Israel.

The rocket landed in an open field in the western Galilee. No one was injured.

Earlier this month, a series of Katyusha rockets slammed into northern Israel following intense fighting between Israeli forces and Hezbollah gunmen in southern Lebanon. At that time, too, the rockets caused no injuries.

Also Tuesday, rockets fired by Hezbollah gunmen landed near Israeli positions in the southern Lebanon security zone. There were no reports of injuries or damage in these attacks.

Hezbollah said in a statement that Tuesday's attacks were in retaliation for Israeli shelling a day earlier that had killed two Lebanese civilians.

Sources in the IDF northern command denied the charge, saying that Israeli forces have refrained from firing into Lebanese villages, despite what they said were continuing violations by Hezbollah of last year's cease-fire.

Under a U.S.-brokered agreement in the wake of Israel's 16-day offensive in April 1996, the two sides agreed to keep civilians and civilian areas out of the cycle of violence in southern Lebanon. □