

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Palestinian police detained a senior security officer suspected by Israel of planning terrorist attacks.** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the alleged Palestinian police involvement in terrorism the gravest violation of the Israeli-Palestinian accords. [Page 4]

■ **The parents of seven Israeli school-girls who were murdered by a Jordanian soldier protested the life sentence given him by a military court near Amman.** The mayor of Beit Shemesh, the hometown of many of the girls, said he would appeal to the international community and Jordan's King Hussein to impose the death penalty. [Page 3]

■ **Thousands of Argentine Jews gathered to mourn and voice outrage on the third anniversary of the bombing of Argentina's Jewish community center.** The anger, directed at the government and Jewish leaders alike, was sparked by the inability of Argentine officials to find those responsible for the bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association, or AMIA. [Page 3]

■ **The Swiss Bankers Association is set to announce the names of 775 people who opened Swiss bank accounts during World War II that have remained unclaimed,** a spokesman for the association has confirmed. The names are expected to be published Wednesday in newspapers around the world, including publications in the United States, Israel and Australia, and will also be made available on the Internet.

■ **Israeli National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon and former Labor Party head Shimon Peres are campaigning for an amendment to the election law that would make it easier for the Knesset to dismiss the prime minister.** The measure would reduce the number of votes needed from 80 to 61, without requiring new Knesset elections.

■ **A new compact disc calling for the murder of Jews is in circulation in the skinhead communities of Germany, Austria and Switzerland.** One of the songs on the disc is titled, "Put a Knife in a Jews' Body."

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Claims Conference doles out millions as stakes get higher**

By Stewart Ain
New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK (JTA) — Seeing "Schindler's List" two years ago created such a rush of repressed memories for Holocaust survivor Elizabeth Roth that she needed professional help.

"I got a shock in the movie house," said the 72-year-old New York widow, explaining that the film caused her to remember events "I did not want to remember."

Roth, a native of Hungary, said she was a teen-ager and her mother 46 when the Nazis imprisoned them in Auschwitz-Birkenau from May to December 1944.

The film triggered memories of the forced marches, the dogs that attacked women who did not march fast enough and the steps she took to protect her mother. And she remembered being shot by the Nazis when she was separated from her mother.

"I didn't have a chance to say goodbye," she said. "The soldiers were screaming, the dogs were barking."

The trauma of recalling those harsh memories, coupled with the loss of her husband six years ago, caused Roth to seek counseling from Selfhelp Community Services, an organization with an emphasis on helping survivors.

Roth is among hundreds of New York-area survivors who have benefited from Selfhelp programs funded in recent years by money from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, a group that distributes large sums of money.

Founded in 1951 to represent world Jewry in negotiations with the German Federal Republic for compensation for Holocaust suffering, it now represents 23 Jewish organizations worldwide.

While world attention is focused on the Swiss Holocaust Memorial Fund that will soon be distributed to needy Holocaust survivors, the Manhattan-based Claims Conference quietly has allocated \$100 million in the last two years alone — more money than it had distributed in its first 45 years combined — to help needy survivors.

The recent windfall came from the sale of former Jewish property in East Germany; most has been spent in Israel and the former Soviet Union.

Claims Conference criticized

But the Claims Conference has come under fire of late, criticized by some individual heirs who say they should be a higher priority than collective programs for survivors.

In an extensive interview, officials of the Claims Conference provided an overview of the various restitution programs established by the German government in the last 45 years, the strict restrictions imposed on eligibility and their battle with the German government to liberalize those rules.

Officials also acknowledge the criticism they have received from survivors in recent years.

Many of these survivors do not understand that eligibility restrictions for reparations were imposed by Germany, not the Claims Conference, the officials say.

"There are people who think we represent the German government," said Rabbi Israel Miller, president of the Claims Conference for the past 14 years.

"We do not. We represent the survivors."

"The mandate of the Claims Conference is to utilize the proceeds of the sales for projects and programs that benefit needy Holocaust survivors."

He added that up to 20 percent of funds are used for research, documentation and education about the Holocaust.

Several recent articles in The Jerusalem Report portrayed the Claims Conference in a less than flattering light, accusing it of preventing Jews from retrieving property in Germany.

One survivor was quoted as complaining that he was being compelled to "fight Jews to get back property confiscated by the Nazis."

Officials of the Claims Conference insist they are working on behalf

of survivors, not against them, and strive for compassion in the painful task of distributing dollars to compensate for untold anguish.

After German reunification in 1990, the government adopted a law allowing people to recover property that had been nationalized by the former Communist government in East Germany. About 10 percent of the property belonged to Jews.

The Claims Conference successfully argued that Jewish property which had been sold under duress or was confiscated by the Nazis from 1933 to 1945 should also be included. The Claims Conference was named by the German government as the successor of heirless or unclaimed Jewish property or the property of dissolved Jewish communities.

The German government set a deadline of Dec. 31, 1992, to reclaim property. Miller said his organization publicized it widely; critics disagree. Jews who failed to file their claim on time, such as the man who spoke of being compelled to "fight Jews," are upset that Germany is recognizing the stake of the Claims Conference.

But Claims Conference officials said that rather than shut the door on these Jews, they are giving them a share of the money derived from the sale.

The officials said the amount paid to individuals is on a sliding scale based on the value of the property when it was sold. All of the proceeds from the sale of property that sold for less than \$66,000 is to be given to those Jews. The sliding scale applies to property of greater value. The smallest amount paid would be about 30 percent, but the average paid to date has been 60 percent.

"We're talking about 400 [Jews] who missed the deadline and who have now come to us and said give us back the property," said Greg Schneider, director of allocations and special projects for the Claims Conference.

Before filing its claims, the Claims Conference had to determine which property — homes and businesses — had been owned by Jews. That effort required a "massive research effort," said Saul Kagan, executive vice president of the Claims Conference. He said his group filed claims for "anything that had been owned by someone with a name that sounded Jewish."

In all, 75,000 property claims were made. To date, 20,000 claims have been resolved. All but 1,100 were rejected or withdrawn. Some were duplications, some were properties owned by non-Jews and 20 percent were returned to the Jewish owners or their heirs.

Review could take up to eight years

Kagan said that at the current rate, the review will take another five to eight years to process and adjudicate all the claims. In some cases, the present non-Jewish occupants are fighting the claims in court.

Of the 1,100 pieces of property turned over to the Claims Conference, 75 percent were sold for a total of \$120 million — \$100 million of which has been allocated in the last two years.

Miller said 60 percent of the money has been spent in Israel, primarily on capital projects that have helped to "revolutionize geriatric care" there. For instance, 3,000 nursing home beds have been added. He stressed that none of the projects are paid for entirely with money from the Claims Conference.

Miller spoke glowingly of a mental health hospital for survivors south of Haifa, Sha'ar Menashe, that money from the Claims Conference and the Israel Ministry of Health helped to renovate. He said that "one of the great experiences of my life was to attend the dedication of the new building."

He said he felt a similar sense of fulfillment attending the dedication of the Chesed building in Kiev, a

facility that provides social services for survivors and that was built with funds from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Claims Conference.

About 25 percent of the money from the Claims Conference supports social service projects — from food packages to home care — in the former Soviet Union. In the two years ending Dec. 31, it will have spent \$26 million in the former Soviet Union.

In addition, the Claims Conference provided \$10 million for survivors in 22 cities in the United States, including New York, Miami and Los Angeles. The money is distributed through Jewish family service agencies that operate programs exclusively for survivors.

The Claims Conference's first agreement with Germany in September 1952 gave survivors until 1965 to apply to Germany for compensation in the form of monthly pensions.

Since then, Germany has paid more than \$50 billion in compensation — the vast majority of that money to Jews. It continues to pay \$1 billion a year to 120,000 Nazi victims.

The Germans agreed also to make a one-time payment to nearly 800,000 people who were imprisoned in a ghetto or concentration camp.

For every month of imprisonment, they received about \$50.

Survivors excluded from these payments were those who lived in the Soviet bloc and nationals of formerly occupied Western European countries who were compensated by their governments through lump-sum payments from Germany. Among those countries were Belgium, France and Holland.

Under increasing pressure to compensate other survivors not previously covered, in 1980 the German government established a Hardship Fund, agreeing to make a one-time payment of \$3,000 to survivors in need. Because of the large number of applicants, Germany lifted its limit on such payments and thus far has paid out \$500 million to 157,000 individuals.

New benefits added

New Claims Conference negotiations in the fall of 1992 produced the Article Two Fund, which provides monthly pensions for survivors under a certain level of income who were in a concentration camp for at least six months, in a ghetto or in hiding for at least 18 months.

Since then, new benefits have been added, with liberalized criteria.

A total of 90,000 survivors have sent applications for this fund; 27,000 have been approved, 55 percent in Israel. But Rabbi Miller said because the current rules will cover no more than 40,000 survivors, the other 50,000 are being told negotiations are needed to liberalize the criteria and to include Jews not now covered — such as the Jews of Eastern Europe and those forced to perform slave labor.

The political consul to the German Consulate in New York, Andreas Reinicke, said the Claims Conference "has been very instrumental in defending the view of the Jewish survivors."

Asked about the Claims Conference's repeated attempts to renegotiate compensation agreements in the hope of liberalizing eligibility requirements, Reinicke said that Germany "was constantly ready since the late '60s to renegotiate with the Claims Conference."

But he said Germany is currently in an "extremely difficult financial situation."

"My government is determined to fulfill each obligation signed until now and although it is very difficult to add new obligations, it is ready to add more money."

But it is very difficult to meet all the expectations of survivors." □

Argentine Jews express outrage on anniversary of AMIA bombing*By Sergio Kiernan*

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Fifteen thousand people mourned and expressed outrage last week at a ceremony marking the third anniversary of the bombing of Argentina's Jewish community center.

The outrage from the local Jewish community, directed at the government and Jewish leaders alike, was sparked by the inability of Argentine officials to find those responsible for the bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association, also known as AMIA.

A silent crowd filled the streets Friday near the 600 block of Pasteur Street, where a powerful bomb leveled the AMIA building on July 18, 1994.

During the four-hour ceremony, the crowd repeatedly booed those members of the Argentine government who were present. They also jeered Ruben Beraja, president of the Argentine Jewish umbrella organization DAIA.

A siren went off when the ceremony began at 9:53 a.m., the exact time of the fatal blast.

The mournful crowd repeated the names of the 86 victims as they were read from the podium.

But the mood changed to anger when the widow of one of the victims, Laura Ginsberg, addressed the crowd and started attacking the government for the lack of results in the investigation.

"The interior minister is still not doing anything," Ginsberg said, looking straight at the head of that ministry, Carlos Corach.

The crowd started booing Corach, who is Jewish, and chanted, "Jewish traitor. Jewish traitor."

Beraja, who spoke after Ginsberg, was repeatedly interrupted by catcalls.

Dozens of people turned their backs while Beraja spoke. Others demanded that he reveal the contents of a list of names of government and judicial officials who Beraja claims blocked the AMIA investigation.

Last week, Beraja said he was going to make the list public. But he refused to do it during the ceremony, saying, "I reject public vengeance."

Beraja, visibly upset, told the crowd: "I respect the tribunals and the courts. If we want justice, we have to uphold the laws of a civilized country."

His words were drowned by chants of "Names. Names."

86 Memorial candles lit

Following the speeches, a scuffle broke out when Corach and other officials left the site.

The crowd reserved its applause for opposition politicians and Israeli Ambassador Itzhak Aviran, a strong critic of the Argentine government's stalled investigation.

At noon, the crowd slowly filed past the bombing site, where a huge black banner was draped over the new AMIA building, which is still under construction.

People then walked arm-in-arm across the downtown area to the square in front of the central courthouse building. There mourners lit 86 memorial candles, a poem was read and two popular musicians sang.

After the ceremony was over, dozens of people stayed at the square hugging and crying.

That same day, Beraja paid an unexpected visit to government officials to apologize for the incidents at the memorial ceremony.

"Jewish leaders do not share the insults and accusations made against President Carlos Menem," said Beraja, who also offered an apology to Corach.

Along with its fruitless probe into the AMIA blast, the Argentine government has also come under withering

criticism for its inability to solve the March 17, 1992, bombing of the Israeli Embassy here, which left 29 dead and some 100 wounded.

The anniversary of the AMIA blast was also marked in New York Friday, when more than 100 people gathered at noon opposite the Argentine Consulate for a memorial service and for what was billed as a "call for justice."

Sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, the memorial featured Elie Wiesel as the keynote speaker.

The council also delivered a message to the consulate demanding that the Argentine government apprehend the attack's perpetrators.

A day earlier, demonstrators outside the consulate held a vigil at which Rabbi Avi Weiss accused the Argentine president of a cover-up in the investigation.

Weiss, whose Coalition for Jewish Concerns — AMCHA sponsored the July 17 vigil, said, "It is inconceivable that three years after this horrific event, not one suspect has been apprehended." □

(JTA staff writer Cynthia Mann in New York contributed to this report.)

Parents of murdered students object to Jordanian's sentence*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The parents of seven Israeli schoolgirls who were murdered by a Jordanian soldier are protesting the sentence he was given.

"I'm disappointed, especially in King Hussein," said Miri Meiri, the mother of Ya'ala Meiri, one of the victims. Meiri said that during a condolence visit to the bereaved families, the Jordanian monarch had said he felt as if he lost one of his own daughters.

"Is this the sentence they would have given for the murder of a princess?" Meiri asked Sunday at a news conference called by the Beit Shemesh municipality where most of the girls lived.

A Jordanian military court sentenced Cpl. Ahmed Dakamsheh to life in prison for killing the schoolgirls at the Naharayim border enclave in March.

The five-member tribunal said they were reluctant to sentence him to death because they did not believe his actions were premeditated.

The judges stated that Dakamsheh, 26, was under intense mental stress, due in part to "exhaustion from being on guard duty for 22 hours straight" and from "sexual frustration due to his wife's pregnancy."

Meiri said Dakamsheh was "totally sane" at the time of the attack.

"He even admitted that he intended to murder children from another bus, but that they looked too young," she said. "It is impossible to turn him into some unstable person as well as a national hero."

Beit Shemesh Mayor Danny Vaknin said he would appeal to King Hussein and to the international community about the sentence.

Dakamsheh was also sentenced to 10 years of hard labor for wounding five other schoolgirls, three years of prison for disobeying army orders, and one year for threatening to use a weapon against his fellow soldiers.

He was demoted to the rank of private and discharged from the military.

In Amman, Jordanian university students demonstrated Sunday in support of the convicted soldier and against their country's peace treaty with Israel.

"Don't fear prison, Ahmed our hero," protesters chanted. "Hold your head up high. We don't want to see your eyes weeping." □

Israel claims Palestinian police participate in terrorist attacks*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli-Palestinian peace process, already in crisis, has been further hobbled by Israeli charges that senior Palestinian security officials are involved in planning terrorist attacks on Israelis.

During Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting, the head of the Shin Bet domestic security service, Ami Ayalon, disclosed that according to information obtained by Israel, two senior Palestinian security officers — Brig. Gen. Ghazi al-Jabali and Col. Jihad Masimi — were involved in planning the attacks.

Jabali is the Palestinian police commander in the Gaza Strip.

An Israeli official reportedly said Sunday that Israel had intercepted orders for the attacks that Jabali had sent to Masimi, a senior Palestinian police officer in the West Bank.

Palestinian officials said Masimi and at least three other police officials had been detained for questioning.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the Cabinet that the allegations, if true, represented the gravest Palestinian violation to date of the self-rule accords.

The United States told the Palestinians last Friday to take the Israeli charges seriously.

The allegations surfaced after Israeli officials arrested three Palestinian police officers last week near the West Bank town of Nablus.

Israel suspected the three of being on their way to carry out a terror attack on the Jewish settlement of Har Bracha, located near Nablus.

The three, who have been questioned by Israeli security forces, have reportedly confessed to opening fire on Jewish settlers and conspiring to commit terrorist acts.

Israeli officials subsequently called on Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat to launch an inquiry into whether Palestinian police are cooperating with Hamas or acting independently to carry out terrorist attacks against Jewish targets.

'This is not a routine incident'

Israeli and Palestinian officials made some progress last week in talks concerning the opening of a Palestinian airport in Gaza, one of the unresolved elements of the Interim Agreement signed in September 1995.

But Israeli charges of alleged Palestinian police involvement in planning and carrying out terrorist attacks threatened to pose another setback to the fragile peace process.

Foreign Minister David Levy discussed the allegations during a meeting Sunday with top Palestinian negotiator Nabil Sha'ath.

Levy later said that the two men discussed the Israeli demand that the Palestinian Authority investigate the allegations.

"We want actions, not statements. This is not a routine incident," Levy told reporters.

"It is their obligation to fight terrorism and violence."

Arafat, speaking Sunday in the West Bank town of Ramallah after meeting with Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul Salam al-Majali, said an inquiry was under way.

He would not give any other details.

Arafat's talks with Majali focused on the peace process and increasing economic ties between Jordan and the self-rule areas.

Levy's discussions with Sha'ath were aimed in part at setting up a meeting later this week between Levy and Arafat at a European Union meeting in Brussels.

But it remained unclear whether the Levy-Arafat meeting would take place. After his talks with Levy, Sha'ath told reporters that Arafat "has not yet taken a decision to go [to Brussels]. But certainly if he goes, he will meet with Mr. Levy." □

Sponsors of Berlin memorial reopen project design contest*By Deidre Berger*

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Nearly two years after they selected a winning entry, the sponsors of a planned monument in Berlin to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust have reopened the competition for the project's design.

The move reflects the long-standing difficulties surrounding the construction of a Holocaust monument in the German capital. The project has created sharp disagreements among German officials, Jewish leaders, artists and historians, and has become the subject of an often heated national debate.

A 1995 decision by the sponsors to build a design by Berlin artist Christine Jakob-Marks was sharply attacked by critics who found her project too colossal.

Marks' design called for building a slanting stone monument the size of two football fields. The monument was to be engraved with the names of the 6 million victims of the Holocaust.

Ignatz Bubis, the leader of Germany's Jewish community, questioned whether Marks' plan to inscribe millions of names on the monument would succeed in personalizing the Holocaust. Bubis contended that there were so many names, some of which were similar, that it would blur any individualization of the victims.

Holocaust experts also pointed out that many of the victims' names are unknown. They warned that an incomplete list could fuel arguments by Holocaust deniers that the 6 million total had been exaggerated.

The project was launched by an independent group of sponsors in conjunction with the city of Berlin and the German federal government. Hundreds of mostly German artists and architects participated in the competition for the monument. After a jury designated by the sponsors selected the winner and runners-up in 1995, the lengthy process of criticism began — and the project became an ongoing national controversy.

At one point Chancellor Helmut Kohl intervened, threatening to rescind the government's offer of a central site in Berlin for the monument if the winning design was not reworked.

The continuing stream of criticism prompted the sponsors to hold three colloquia earlier this year in Berlin to discuss the site and purpose of the proposed monument.

Dozens of experts on the Holocaust were invited.

Few agreed with either the form, design or location of the proposed monument.

After the sponsors said they would not change the location or reopen the competition, a number of invited guests left the forum, including several prominent members of Germany's Jewish community.

After the extensive criticism and the lack of public consensus for the project, the sponsors backed down from their position and decided to reopen the artistic competition.

They have invited the winner and eight runners-up from the previous competition, as well as 16 internationally known artists and architects, to submit entries.

It is unclear if all 25 artists will participate.

Some of them, including a few Jewish artists, have said that they disagree with the idea of building a monument that only commemorates the Jewish victims of the Nazis. □