



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Foreign Minister Shimon Peres urged American Jews to give "clear and unwavering support" for the peace process.** Peres addressed the opening session of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council's annual plenum in Washington. Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu sent a different message to the delegates. He called for a major overhaul of the peace process with the Palestinians and Syria. Peres is scheduled to meet with President Clinton and other administration officials as well as congressional leaders during his visit.

■ **The Israeli Cabinet voted to continue the closure it imposed on the Gaza Strip and West Bank** following the Jan. 22 double suicide bombing near Netanya that claimed the lives of 21 Israelis. The Cabinet agreed to loosen some restrictions for humanitarian needs, such as granting free passage to doctors and teachers and allowing essential goods to reach Palestinians. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat are expected to discuss the closure when they meet Thursday.

■ **A delegation of American business leaders led by Commerce Secretary Ron Brown arrived in Israel** for talks aimed at strengthening U.S.-Israeli trade relations and encouraging economic development in the Middle East. Before coming to Israel, Brown made a brief stopover in Cairo, where he met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. In Israel, Brown met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and other government ministers.

■ **A group of 29 Knesset members flew aboard a Jordanian airplane from Tel Aviv to Amman to attend a banquet hosted by King Hussein at his palace.** Hussein said he arranged the unprecedented visit to help advance Israeli-Jordanian relations.

■ **The Justice Department initiated deportation proceedings against a Pennsylvania man** who served as an armed concentration camp guard in Poland and Germany. Nikolaus Schiffer was stripped of his U.S. citizenship in 1993 and now must show cause why he should not be deported. [Page 3]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Four years after war begins, Jews of Belgrade feel cut off

By Edward Serotta

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (JTA) — Nearly four years after war broke out among the republics of the former Yugoslavia, the Jews of Belgrade feel cut off from the world.

Since the start of the war in 1991, triggered by the secession of the former republics of Slovenia and Croatia, Belgrade's bustling and proud Jewish community of 1,800 Jews has had to cope with the same grim realities affecting the rest of the country's population.

Soon after the war broke out, international trade sanctions were imposed upon Serbia and Montenegro, the two republics comprising what remains of Yugoslavia. The sanctions created shortages of food, medicine and other necessities.

But the Jews of Belgrade, while trying to stem the ruinous effects of trade sanctions and rampant inflation on their own community, have also managed to help others.

Working in conjunction with SAVEZ, the Federation of Yugoslav Jewish Communities, the Belgrade Jewish community has helped nearly 1,000 refugees from the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo.

Despite their efforts, most media attention has focused on the Jewish community of Sarajevo, which took on the role of a humanitarian relief agency helping residents of the war-torn city, regardless of their religious or political affiliation.

The Sarajevo Jewish community also garnered headlines after it helped arrange convoys that transported Jews and non-Jews alike far from harm's way.

In contrast, the Jews of Belgrade, continuing their own non-political humanitarian efforts, found themselves far from the spotlight of the world's attention.

Jews here also found themselves in a particularly difficult position because Serbia has been portrayed by the international media as the main aggressor in the brutal war in Bosnia, which erupted in 1992.

'We leave our politics outside the door'

During a visit late last month by delegations from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief, the president of Belgrade's Jewish community spoke proudly of how Belgrade's Jews had opened their community center and homes to Bosnian Jewish refugees.

Working with funds as well as guidance from JDC and the British Fund, the community has "received 980 Bosnian Jews over the past three years, and 200 chose to remain with us in Belgrade and Novi Sad," said the president, Brane Popovic.

"We leave our politics outside the door of this community center," he said, "and we come here, just as we always did, to be together as Jews."

The community here has felt particularly isolated since the recent death of the longtime president of SAVEZ, Dr. Ladoslav Kadelburg. His replacement, David Albahari, one of Serbia's best-known short-story writers, subsequently left for a teaching sabbatical in Canada.

Feeling cut off from the world, the Belgrade community and SAVEZ warmly welcomed the recent visit by JDC and the British Fund.

Both organizations have been supporting all the Jewish communities in the former Yugoslavia during the war.

Their visit to Belgrade was intended to show their support for the ongoing communal efforts, according to representatives of the organizations.

JDC's relations with Yugoslavia date back to 1933, when it began financially assisting German Jews who arrived here fleeing persecution at home.

Most of Yugoslavia's Jews were deported or killed during the Holocaust.

Only 6,500 Jews were registered in Yugoslavia after the war — down from a total of some 78,000 prior to 1941. The largest concentration of Jews — with communities of 1,500 each — were in Zagreb, now the capital of

Croatia; Sarajevo, the current capital of Bosnia; and Belgrade, the capital of Serbia.

Though few in numbers, the Yugoslav Jewish community became one of the most vital small Jewish communities in Europe, with its operations coordinated by SAVEZ's Belgrade office.

With JDC support, the Yugoslav Jewish community established a summer camp, an old age home and myriad youth and social welfare programs, which became the glue that held the community together in the postwar years.

During its daylong visit to Belgrade in late January, the JDC-British Fund delegation visited most of the programs they support. The JDC was represented by its financial chairman, Jonathan Kolker, and by Norman Tilles, chairman of the JDC International Committee.

The delegation was hosted by Asa Singer, current president of SAVEZ, and by Popovic.

Popovic, a longtime community member, is typical of the people in their 40s to 50s who have taken over the reins of the community and have been working vigorously to keep local programs operating.

Requests for food declining

"When sanctions first hit Serbia and Montenegro in 1991 and inflation soared, our efforts were channeled toward cash supplements and later on getting food shipments into Belgrade," Kolker said as he toured a fully stocked food warehouse located in the basement of a local synagogue.

"But since last year, currency reforms have cut back on inflation, and with a more stable currency, we've gone from a high of 500 requests for food packages to less than 300," he said, referring to the number of needy recipients.

According to Tilles, JDC had arranged food and medical shipments even before the war began, as a precautionary measure.

He said JDC not only sent in goods and cash, but a social worker to help implement the programs.

Singer and Popovic took the delegation through the community's pharmacy, which was established when drugs became difficult to obtain in local shops.

As part of their efforts, JDC and the British Fund had trucked in requested medicines, along with books on pharmacology.

Nearly half the community's 1,800 members are older than 50, and many depend on medicines.

The pharmacy, whose shipments are brought in as humanitarian aid under U.N. supervision, also supplies medicines to three small Jewish communities in Banja Luka, Doboj and Grbavica, located over the border in Serbian-held Bosnia.

The pharmacy fills some 1,500 prescriptions each month, officials here said.

Singer said the community also shares a portion of its medicines with the local population in Belgrade. He said they also see to it that the city's Gypsy population receives food parcels as well.

Singer said the local Jewish and Gypsy communities had shared warm relations ever since the occupying Nazis killed Jews in a Gypsy neighborhood in Belgrade in 1941. Until today, the Gypsy community commemorates the date with a memorial service held in conjunction with Belgrade's Jews.

As he hosted the tour, Popovic emphasized the need for children's welfare programs.

"This is where we must invest," he said. "Of course, we must care for our elderly, but 20 percent of this community is comprised of children. That means we need to have a summer camp and more activities for our youngsters."

The former Yugoslav summer camp is located in Croatia, no longer reachable by members of the Belgrade community. As a result, JDC has supplied scholarships for Serbian Jewish youths to attend Jewish summer camps in Bulgaria and Hungary.

During its visit, the delegation toured a new children's center located inside a synagogue building, where a warren of rooms are now devoted to drawing classes, arts and crafts and a lounge.

Six separate clubs now serve up to 150 children each week.

At another stop, the delegation met with six psychologists who work at a non-sectarian psychological institute.

JDC had provided the psychologists with fellowships that took them to Israel, where they took courses in learning how to deal with stress, war and the hardships of refugees.

During the evening, about 100 local Jews attended a special program for the visitors.

Jovan Shatric, a 16-year-old who spoke both English and Hebrew fluently, described how he and his friends were busy rebuilding their teen club.

Nearby sat psychologist Tamara Steiner-Popovic, who is involved in nearly all the local children's programs.

"During the worst part of the sanctions and the inflation, we learned how to do everything with literally nothing," she said, noting that even the simplest things, such as crayons and paper "were out of reach — especially when inflation reduced a person's monthly salary to \$1.50."

Then she smiled. "Those days, it appears, are now behind us, and we can begin building our programs again," she said.

The international community eased its sanctions against Serbia a few months ago, when Serb officials promised to stop aiding the Bosnian Serbs. Among other things, the easing of the sanctions opened up lines of communication and supplies.

Despite the difficulties created by the war, the sanctions and Serbia's negative image in the international media, the majority of Belgrade's Jews say they plan to remain.

Dejan Petrovic, a 27-year-old veterinary student who works with the community's social programs, summed up an attitude prevalent among many here:

"My family has been in Serbia for 700 years," he said. "They have stuck through everything. I simply won't be the first to leave."

"Besides, my fiancée and I are planning a Jewish wedding this spring," he said, adding that a good friend of his is completing his rabbinic training in Israel and plans to return soon.

Yugoslavia's only rabbi, Cadik Danon, is retired.

Petrovic said of his friend: "He's coming back soon, and we're waiting for him. We hope our wedding will be his very first duty." □

Drive over mine kills two

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Feb. 5 (JTA) — Two Eilat residents were killed this week when they drove their jeep over an anti-tank mine in the southern Negev.

Rafael Buskira, 42, and Chaim Sadrusi, 30, had driven into an old minefield near Kibbutz Elot, located near Eilat.

The area was fenced off and had warning signs posted, according to Israel Radio.

Soldiers worked for several hours before they were able to recover the bodies. □

**OSI moves to deport man
accused of Nazi war crimes***By Jennifer Batog*

WASHINGTON, Feb. 5 (JTA) — The Department of Justice has initiated deportation proceedings against a Pennsylvania man accused of serving as an armed SS concentration camp guard in Germany and Poland during World War II.

Nikolaus Schiffer, 75, of New Ringgold, Pa., has to show cause why he should not be deported for his involvement with the SS, according to the department.

In documents filed at the U.S. Immigration Court in Philadelphia last week, the department's Office of Special Investigations and the Immigration and Naturalization Services' Philadelphia office ordered Schiffer to supply the information.

Schiffer served as a guard at the Sachsenhausen and Hersbruck camps in Germany and the Majdanek camp in Poland.

He was a guard on labor details at the camps and on two Nazi "death marches," according to the Justice Department.

Schiffer was stripped of his citizenship in August 1993 as a result of an OSI denaturalization suit.

The judge in that case, Franklin Van Antwerpen, said the evidence "clearly and unequivocally established" that Schiffer actively participated in persecution at the camps by preventing inmates from escaping the "grotesquely inhumane condition there," according to the Justice Department. □

**A Torah arrives in Jericho
as Palestinians stand guard***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 5 (JTA) — In a new twist on Israeli-Palestinian relations, several dozen Jewish settlers were protected by Palestinian police as they brought a new Torah scroll to the ancient synagogue in Jericho.

Israeli settlers had engaged in a tense standoff with the Palestinian police last summer after the Jericho area, along with the Gaza Strip, fell under Palestinian autonomy in May.

At the time, settlers charged the police with desecrating the site.

As yeshiva students sang and danced around the Torah last week, Palestinian police remained on duty outside the synagogue.

The police said the synagogue was a religious place, adding that they were under instructions to respect it.

This was the first Torah to be brought to a synagogue located in the Palestinian self-rule area, but members of the yeshiva said it would not be the last. □

**Police scuffle with settlers
barred from shrine in Hebron***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 5 (JTA) — Israeli police in the West Bank town of Hebron scuffled briefly with Jewish worshipers as they tried to pray at the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

The site was closed to Jews as Muslims marked the start of the holy month of Ramadan.

About 30 Jewish worshipers last week had arrived at the site, hoping to pray inside.

But the police prevented them from entering.

Access to the shrine was restricted to 1,200 Muslim worshipers, in keeping with new security arrangements at

the site, which is considered holy by both Jews and Muslims.

New security arrangements were made at the Tomb after the February 1994 massacre, during which a Jewish settler from nearby Kiryat Arba opened fire on Muslim worshipers, killing 29 people.

The Tomb remained closed for more than six months after the incident, until Israeli officials completed a new security design aimed at keeping members of the two faiths apart.

As part of the new arrangement, Jews and Muslims are allocated 10 days of sole use of the shrine each year on special holy days. □

**Legislators prepare letter urging
E.U. nations to resume Syrian boycott***By Jennifer Batog*

WASHINGTON, Feb. 5 (JTA) — Members of Congress are preparing a letter to European leaders urging them to resume their arms embargo against Syria.

The letter comes two months after the European Union abolished its 8-year-old arms embargo against Syria.

"We hope that your government will not choose to sell weaponry to Syria," the letter, co-signed by about 60 representatives, says. The letter's sponsors expect to continue collecting more signatures from other House members.

The letter cites Syria's continued blind eye to terrorist acts and its ongoing state of war with Israel as reasons for countries to continue denying Syria weapons and other military materials.

It also warns that sending arms there would only enhance the country's "belligerent military posture."

"By offering a carrot to Damascus before it ends sponsorship of narcotics trafficking and terrorism and clearly commits itself to the peace process, we only encourage Syria's continued unacceptable behavior," the letter said.

The letter recognized the economic gain from selling arms overseas, but stressed that the goals of international stability and encouraging Syria's peaceful behavior should outweigh financial gain.

Reps. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) and Jim Saxton (R-N.J.) spearheaded the bipartisan effort. Other co-signers include: Reps. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), Jon Fox (R-Pa.), Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), Peter King (R-N.Y.) and Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.)

The E.U. repealed the embargo against Syria last November, drawing sharp criticism from Israeli officials and some members of Congress. □

**6 Israelis arrested in Russia
in ancient documents theft***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 5 (JTA) — Six Israelis were arrested in connection with the theft of some 90 ancient manuscripts valued at \$330 million from the National Library in St. Petersburg, Russia.

The men were apprehended last week by police after Russian investigators passed on evidence implicating them in the theft.

Israel Television reported that the manuscripts were stolen in December. Russian police got hold of the ancient documents before the suspects were able to smuggle them out of the country.

Based on the questioning of the suspects in Russia and other evidence, the Israeli suspects, all men in their 40s from the Tel Aviv, Bat Yam and Haifa areas, allegedly helped plan the break-in. □

Japanese publisher pledges education drive on Holocaust

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 5 (JTA) — One of Japan's most influential publishers has pledged to use his chain of magazines to educate his country's citizens "about the tragic history of injustices and suffering endured by the Jewish people."

The pledge was part of a formal apology by the publisher delivered last week during a mass news conference in Tokyo.

In one of his magazines, a 10-page article appeared denying the existence of gas chambers and the systematic killing of Jews at Auschwitz.

An editorial preamble to the article had expressed "major doubts regarding the 'Holocaust' and the massacre of Jews at the hands of the Nazis."

It characterized the article, "The Greatest Taboo of Postwar History: There Were No Nazi Gas Chambers," as the "new historic truth."

Kengo Tanaka, president and CEO of the respected Bungei Shunju publishing house, said that after seeing the article in the February issue of Marco Polo magazine, he decided to shut down the publication, fire the responsible editors and pull all unsold copies from newsstands.

In a highly unusual action, the Japanese Foreign Ministry released a formal statement on the matter, describing the article "as grossly insensitive and inappropriate."

The article had triggered a barrage of protests from U.S. Jewish organizations and the Israeli government.

The protest resulted in an advertising boycott of Marco Polo — at the request of the Simon Wiesenthal Center — by half a dozen international companies.

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Los Angeles-based Wiesenthal Center, flew to Tokyo at the invitation of Tanaka to accept the formal apology and to appear with him at the Feb. 2 news conference.

"It was unbelievable," said Cooper on his return.

"The press conference lasted two hours and 20 minutes and was attended by more than 400 journalists from the Japanese and Western media, and at least one Arab reporter."

'The article has caused immeasurable pain'

Cooper said Tanaka had expressed his deep regret that "the article has caused immeasurable pain, not only to Jews who have suffered more than enough, but also to millions of others dedicated to truth and decency."

After acknowledging his own company's "overall lack of understanding" of the Holocaust, Tanaka promised to take remedial steps.

"We will do everything in our power to educate ourselves and our readers in Japan about the tragic history of injustices and suffering endured by the Jewish people," he said.

Tanaka added that "Japanese history and culture are so widely different and removed from those of the Jews that a proper perception of the realities involving the Jewish people will be possible here only through an extensive educational effort" with the assistance of organizations such as the Wiesenthal Center.

During the news conference, one Japanese reporter held up an anti-Semitic book published by a subsidiary of Bungei Shunju.

Tanaka assured Cooper that such books would no longer be distributed.

A considerable stir was created in Tokyo by the abrupt closure of Marco Polo, a glossy magazine with a circulation of about 250,000 that is aimed at men in their 20s and 30s.

At least one journalist said he saw the crackdown and the advertisers' boycott as confirmation of international Jewish power.

Others noted that the magazine had been plagued by falling circulation and financial difficulties.

But Tanaka said his decision had been based on the contents of the offensive article.

Neither the Wiesenthal Center nor other organizations that had protested the article, including the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League, had asked for the shutdown of the magazine.

Meanwhile, the author of the article, a young physician named Masanori Nishioka, held his own news conference, at which he charged that the magazine "was crushed by Jewish organizations using advertising, and Bungei Shunju obliged."

"They crushed room for debate," the author also said.

Cooper told those in attendance at the news conference with Tanaka that he was puzzled by the recurring publication of "Jewish conspiracy" books and articles in a nation with only 1,000 to 2,000 Jewish residents and hardly any historical contact with Jews.

Most observers believe that the popularity of such books is rooted in frustration over the country's economic problems and trade conflict with the United States.

On the positive side, Cooper said, there were practically no anti-Jewish hate crimes in Japan, the translated version of "The Diary of Anne Frank" had sold nearly 5 million copies and a Holocaust exhibit last year drew heavy attendance.

Looking at the conflicting evidence, Cooper said, even highly educated Japanese "don't have a clue" about the Jewish people and the Holocaust.

He said he expected a more detailed proposal in the next few months from Tanaka on how to raise editors' and readers' awareness of the Jewish experience. □

Yad Vashem rejects request on photos of naked WWII victims

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Feb. 5 (JTA) — The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial here has rejected a request by a group of fervently Orthodox Jews to remove photographs showing victims of the Holocaust going to their deaths naked.

Avner Shalev, the administrative chairman of Yad Vashem, said the institution had a duty to portray history as it happened.

"The pictures show how millions of Holocaust victims were taken to their deaths," Shalev said.

"We have no reason or authority to cover the terrible truth or make it more attractive. We have to present it the way it was."

He said he dismissed a threat from a Jerusalem municipality official, Chaim Miller, who called for a boycott of Yad Vashem.

Miller, who heads the Association for Rights of the Haredi Public, a group representing the fervently Orthodox, said that after "a letter is sent forbidding visits to Yad Vashem, I believe it will reconsider its irresponsible decision."

According to Miller, "Halachah (or Jewish religious law) forbids displays of nakedness. It is a humiliation and insult to Yad Vashem to show people who died [this way]."

"The Holocaust does not need nudity to make it more shocking."

He added that those who refuse to consider the request of his group are turning the issue into a debate between religious and secular Jews. □