

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case that could determine the constitutionality of future displays of menorahs and Christmas scenes. The case involves a Ku Klux Klan-sponsored cross that was erected near a Ohio Statehouse in downtown Columbus. [Page 3]

■ A Michigan public high school exhausted its legal battle to return a portrait of Jesus to the school's hallway after the Supreme Court refused to review an appeals court decision that denied the school permission to rehang the portrait.

■ The Israeli Cabinet approved plans for the expropriation of Arab-owned land for building Jewish neighborhoods in eastern Jerusalem. The decision came amid vows from the Palestine Liberation Organization that it would step up its fight in the world arena against the planned seizures. Members of the left-wing Meretz bloc opposed the move. [Page 2]

■ Israel and Jordan reportedly made progress in their efforts to reach a trade deal. The news came as Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin met in Aqaba with Jordan's King Hussein and toured the ancient city of Petra.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin appointed a campaign manager, even though he has yet to declare his candidacy for the 1996 elections. Rabin tapped Shimon Sheves, who was director-general of the Prime Minister's Office.

■ Nearly 20 percent of the olim Israel has absorbed from the former Soviet Union are not Jewish according to traditional Jewish law, according to a recently released government report. The report was issued in response to the controversy over finding burial space for non-Jews. [Page 4]

■ Canada postponed a deportation hearing for alleged war criminal Joseph Nemsila so he could find legal counsel. Nemsila is accused of misrepresenting himself to immigration authorities when he entered Canada by not revealing his connection to the notorious Hlinka Guard in the Nazi vassal state of Slovakia.

FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE HORROR (Part 2)**Suffering under Nazis and Communists, Jews overcame 'twin angels' of despair**

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, May 1 (JTA) — Fifty years after the defeat of the Nazis, Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe is beginning to flower once again.

Central and Eastern Europe, once the heartland of a vibrant European Jewry, bore the brunt of the Nazis' policy of extermination. It was here that most of Europe's 9 million prewar Jews lived and it was here that Jews from across Europe died in ghettos and death camps.

At the end of World War II, hundreds of thousands of Jewish survivors fled the devastated region, immigrating to Israel, the United States, France and elsewhere.

For the Jews who remained, the end of World War II ushered in yet a new era of danger and oppression under Communist regimes that carried out Soviet-directed policies of suppression and secularization.

Maurice Samuel, the essayist and Yiddish translator, called Nazism and communism the twin "malachei-chabole," or angels of destruction.

"The instrument of the first was mass murder, the bullet and the gas chamber," Samuel wrote in his 1971 book, "In Praise of Yiddish."

"That of the second was and is spiritual and cultural asphyxiation."

Today, five years after the fall of communism, Jewish life in Eastern and Central Europe from Warsaw to Sofia, from Vilnius to Zagreb, is blossoming again, as the often tiny remnant communities are undergoing a renaissance.

"As I watch the candles of the children's chanukiyot burn each evening, I am very moved," Helise Lieberman, director of the first Jewish elementary school to open in Warsaw in more than a generation, wrote in a letter in December, three months after the school opened its doors.

"When celebrating Chanukah outside Israel, one says: 'A great miracle happened there,'" she wrote. "When celebrating in Israel, one says: 'A great miracle happened here.' This year in Poland, we must say that a great miracle is happening here!"

Communists restricted Jewish life in postwar era

Fifty years ago, little was left of the Jewish population or centuries-old Jewish culture in Eastern and Central Europe.

Jews returning to their homes from death camps and exile were sometimes set upon by local anti-Semites. The most infamous incident took place in the central Polish town of Kielce in 1946, when a mob killed more than 40 returning Jews.

But there were anti-Jewish riots and attacks taking place in other countries as well.

The Communists restricted Jewish life and observance and implemented a policy of secularization. They barred or impeded emigration and carried out anti-Semitic campaigns. Political show trials and purges sent hundreds of Jews to jail, labor camps or their deaths, or removed them from their jobs.

Under Communist rule, even memorials at Holocaust sites such as Auschwitz, Theresienstadt and Babi Yar minimized or ignored the fact that most victims were Jewish.

All Communist countries except Romania broke relations with Israel after the Six-Day War in 1967 and embarked on anti-Zionist policies.

At least 300,000 Romanian Jews survived the war, but most of them immigrated to Israel, thanks to the controversial efforts of the late Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen, who traded public support of the Communist regime in exchange for certain privileges for the Jewish community, including the ability to emigrate.

In Poland, Communist authorities let loose an anti-Semitic campaign in 1968 that forced most of the tens of thousands of Jews who had remained in the country after the war to leave.

Soviet oppression and the refusal of Soviet authorities to allow Jews to emigrate sparked a world campaign to aid Soviet Jewry.

For the most part, Jews in Eastern and Central Europe assimilated totally, denying their heritage and identity or going underground to keep the

faith in private. Most Jews who identified with the Jewish community were elderly Holocaust survivors.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee helped support these people when it could, but its operations were banned in various countries at various times.

Only in the late 1970s and 1980s did the oppression against Jews begin to ease as the political foundations of the Communist world began to crumble.

By the late 1980s, as communism teetered on the verge of collapse, younger Jews in some countries had begun to rediscover their identities and tried to learn about Judaism.

The first tentative attempts at rediscovery mushroomed after the collapse of communism, first in the Eastern Bloc countries and later in the Soviet Union, which resulted in the institution of religious freedom, restored diplomatic relations with Israel and the opening of the door to contacts with Jews worldwide.

Young people by the hundreds, many of whom had not known they were Jewish or knew little about Judaism, came out of hiding, eager to learn more about their heritage.

They flocked to new schools, youth clubs, educational programs, camps and exchanges set up by local Jewish communities, Israeli volunteers or organizations such as JDC and the New York-based Ronald S. Lauder Foundation.

The JDC shifted some of its focus from helping the elderly survive to helping young Jews to learn.

For many of the newly emerging Jews, the attraction was cultural, not religious.

Religious life began to revive

There has been a parallel boom of interest in Jewish music, dance, art, literature and even food among non-Jews in many countries in the region.

But religious life, too, began to revive. The Lubavitch movement and others sent rabbis to far-flung communities, and several local Jews studied to become ordained rabbis.

In Poland alone, more than 40 men and boys have been circumcised during the past 18 months.

"Three years ago, I practically did not know anything about Judaism and I felt very lonely," said one teen-ager who takes part in Lauder Foundation activities in Poland.

"I knew that my grandparents had perished in Auschwitz and I thought all the Jews all over the world died as well. I was afraid of my background because I did not know what it meant.

"I remember that I longed for something — something vague, not-defined, incomprehensible, something that I associated with the shape of the Torah which my father saved from the ghetto," the teen-ager said.

Today, the numbers of Jews in East-Central Europe are still small — 10,000 or so in Poland; 4,000 to 6,000 each in the Czech Republic and Slovakia; 5,000 to 7,000 in Bulgaria; 15,000 in Romania.

The only places where Jews live in any significant numbers are Hungary, where there are some 130,000 Jews, and in Russia and Ukraine, whose Jewish populations total about 600,000.

Jewish life in these countries will never be what it was before the Holocaust, and it remains to be seen whether the young, emerging communities can attain the critical mass necessary for ultimate survival.

But local Jews and their helpers from world Jewry are committed to making the effort.

This too, however, has raised questions, as some observers see a "turf war" developing among outside Jewish organizations attempting to influence the develop-

ment and direction of emerging East European Jewish communities.

Anthony Lerman, executive director of the London-based Institute of Jewish Affairs, warned of the potential risks.

"Eastern Europe is a battleground of different strains of Judaism pushing and pulling," he said in a telephone interview.

"Jewish communities in the East must feel empowered to make their own decisions, without pressures from outside.

"They need self-empowerment, not through isolation, but within the context of the broader Jewish world.

"The key is that people should have free choice, especially small communities," said Lerman. □

Plan to expropriate land rankles Palestinian leaders

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 1 (JTA) — The Cabinet has approved plans for the expropriation of Arab-owned land for building Jewish neighborhoods in eastern Jerusalem.

The decision came amid vows from the Palestine Liberation Organization that it would step up its fight in the world arena against the planned expropriations.

At its weekly meeting Sunday, the Cabinet gave the go-ahead to expropriate some 120 acres of land, about 70 percent of it Arab-owned.

The decision was taken despite the opposition of Cabinet members from the left-wing Meretz bloc.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin defended the move, saying that a territorial link to Jerusalem was needed for the suburbs of Ramot and Gilo, which are located near the projected building sites.

But Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein of Meretz called for equal development of Arab areas.

"We think the government policy should be based on equal care of the Jews and Arabs of Jerusalem," he told reporters.

"We would like to be building in Arab areas of Jerusalem as well," said Rubinstein.

Responding to the development, the Palestinian Authority called for an urgent session of the Arab League in Cairo to discuss Israel's plans.

It also appealed to the United States, Russia, Norway and the U.N. Security Council for help in reversing the decision.

"This constitutes the highest form of terrorism against the Palestinian people, which really threatens their existence," said Saeb Erekat, the Palestinian Authority official in charge of municipal matters.

He called the decision by Israel's Cabinet a violation of the self-rule accord, which stipulates that the final status of Jerusalem will be determined in future negotiations.

On Monday, the Palestinian U.N. observer called upon the Security Council to consider measures against Israel in the wake of the land confiscations.

In a letter he circulated Monday at the United Nations, Nasser Al-Kidwa did not seek a formal Security Council session on the matter, but called upon the Security Council "to take urgent measure to redress this grave situation."

Nabil Sha'ath, the official in charge of planning for the Palestinian Authority, accused Israel of trying to create facts on the ground before the final status negotiations, slated to begin in 1996.

But he stopped short of calling for a halt to the peace talks with Israel. □

Case of Klan cross propels court ruling on religious displays

By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, May 1 (JTA) — It's still months away from Chanukah and Christmas, but the Jewish community is once again wrangling over religious displays on public grounds.

Underscoring the division is a case now being considered by the Supreme Court that legal experts said could determine the constitutionality of future displays of menorahs and Christmas scenes.

"This should once and for all put an end to the serious litigation" on the issue of privately sponsored religious symbols on public property, said Marc Stern, co-director of the legal department of the American Jewish Congress.

The case now before the court, Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board vs. Vincent Pinette, Donnie Carr and the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, involves a privately sponsored cross near the Ohio Statehouse in downtown Columbus. The case also pits the issue of separation of church and state against issues of freedom of speech and religious expression, according to observers.

The Supreme Court heard arguments in the case April 26, and must decide whether putting a 10-foot, Klan-sponsored cross in front of the Ohio Statehouse violated the Establishment Clause, which provides for the separation between church and state.

In an argument that Justice Sandra Day O'Connor called "far-fetched," lawyers for the state of Ohio maintained that crosses are purely religious symbols and that placing them in front of government buildings would lead a reasonable observer to believe that the state was endorsing religion.

The Klan argued that the state violated its freedom of speech and expression and noted that during the holiday season, the state allows private sponsors to erect a menorah and a Christmas tree near the Statehouse.

Lubavitch file on behalf of the Klan

The state maintains that those are cultural, not religious, symbols.

As has often been the situation in cases involving the display of religious symbols, Jewish activists filed amicus briefs supporting both sides. Seven Lubavitch congregations filed on behalf of the Klan, saying that private religious speech deserves the same constitutional dignity as secular speech.

"Private religious speech is not the First Amendment's stepchild," the Lubavitch brief said. The court's decision could affect the menorahs the Lubavitch sponsor during the Chanukah season.

In contrast, the American Jewish Committee and the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations filed with several other organizations on behalf of the Capitol Square Board, saying all religious displays on public grounds, including menorahs, are unconstitutional.

The AJCongress and the Anti-Defamation League submitted a similar brief, noting in particular the groups' concerns that the cross was sponsored by the Klan, which they called a "Hydra-headed monster."

The debate in Ohio began in November 1993, when the Klan requested a permit to erect a cross in Capitol Square, where the Statehouse and state Legislature are located. The state said the unattended display would violate the Establishment Clause and denied the permit. The Klan sued, saying the state violated its First Amendment rights.

A U.S. District Court and the 6th Circuit Court of

Appeals agreed with the Klan, allowing them to raise the cross Dec. 21, 1993. The cross stood for two hours before vandals tore it down.

Although some justices, such as O'Connor, were vigorous in their questioning, it is not clear whether the court will support the earlier courts' decisions.

In arguing for the state last week, attorney Michael Renner said a privately sponsored cross on public grounds was especially troubling here because it was so close to a government authority.

"Any religious display, unattended near a seat of government," violates church-state separation, he said.

"We think a reasonable observer would take a message as powerful as that and connect it" to the state, he said, adding that he thought that the lower courts made a mistake in allowing the cross to stand.

O'Connor immediately pounced on Renner, and pointed out that the cross had a sign stating that it was not state-supported. "Here is a sign that says it's not government sponsored. Your remarks propose to suppress speech in a discriminatory fashion," she said.

Some justices questioned the menorah's presence in the same square. "Is it your position that you can have the menorah, but deny the cross?" Justice John Paul Stevens said. "That's what your saying?"

The court was not as tough on the Klan's lawyer, Benson Wolman, who asserted that the government denied the cross because it was sponsored by the Klan.

"We believe that here we have a public forum, where the state permits a variety of displays, and suddenly it chooses to confine it, and evoke the Establishment Clause," Wolman, who is Jewish, told the court. Wolman, who is affiliated with the American Civil Liberties Union, told reporters outside that defending the Klan, which has anti-Semitic views, was like defending any other client.

Although the usually reticent Justice Clarence Thomas grilled Wolman on what the Klan intended the cross to symbolize, he seemed to support the group's argument. He suggested that the state was trying to shoe-horn a political-speech case into the Establishment Clause.

The court is expected to render its decision by late June. □

S. Korean, Israeli brass meet secretly to talk about N. Korea

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 1 (JTA) — A senior delegation from South Korea secretly visited Israel last week for talks about the perceived threat both countries face from North Korea.

The meeting came in the wake of recent reports that North Korea has sold Iran Nodong missiles, which were developed from the Scud missile and are capable of reaching Israel if fired from Iran. The meeting also took place amid increased tensions between North and South Korea over the nuclear issue.

Israeli newspapers reported Sunday that the visit was arranged through the Prime Minister's Office. The foreign ministries of both countries had not been informed of the trip, it was reported.

The Israeli daily Ma'ariv, citing sources close to the talks, said the purpose of the trip was to reach cooperative agreements between the two countries.

Ma'ariv added that Israeli representatives from the Defense Ministry and defense industries have been in contact with South Korea to exchange information on military, political and technological issues.

The discussions also were aimed at formulating a policy regarding the potential threat from North Korea, a security source said. □

Rabin: 'New ideas' for Syria to be discussed with Clinton*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, May 1 (JTA) — Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has said he hopes that a peace agreement can be reached with Syria before the end of the year, even though gaps between the two nations remain wide.

Interviewed on Israel Radio over the weekend, Rabin said he would bring "new ideas" about the Israeli-Syrian negotiations when he leaves for Washington this week for a meeting with President Clinton.

Rabin is scheduled to arrive in Washington on Friday and meet with Clinton on Sunday. Both leaders are scheduled to address the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, Sunday night.

Rabin's comments prompted speculation about what new proposals he would raise with Clinton. The comments also drew sharp reaction from the opposition, which demanded that he inform the Knesset of any plans regarding an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

The Israeli daily Ma'ariv, quoting political sources here, said the Jewish state would give up its earlier demand for a general downsizing of the Syrian army, while still calling for limited troop deployments on both sides of the border.

Sources said Syrian President Hafez Assad viewed the demand as "humiliating," saying it reflected an Israeli attempt to shake up the stability of his regime.

Political sources told the Israel daily Ha'aretz that Rabin would discuss with Clinton Israel's interest in establishing mutual security arrangements, such as early-warning stations.

The Israeli and Syrian ambassadors to the United States resumed their talks in Washington last week. But they reported no progress in breaking the impasse over the future of the Golan, or regarding security arrangements in the wake of an Israeli pullback on the Golan.

Meanwhile, Likud opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu said he sent a message to Assad that stated that a government under Netanyahu's leadership would not withdraw from the Golan.

Netanyahu said he sent the message through U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher. "I said to him, 'Tell Assad that when we set up a Likud government we will not withdraw from the Golan,'" Netanyahu told Army Radio.

"But in the same measure, I believe it is possible to continue the peace process," which he said would include discussions on issues of mutual benefit, such as water resources.

Netanyahu said he had not received a response from Assad. □

Report: About 20% of olim from former USSR not Jewish*By Uriel Masad*

TEL AVIV, May 1 (JTA) — Nearly 20 percent of the olim Israel has absorbed from the former Soviet Union are not considered Jews according to halachah, or traditional Jewish law, according to a recently released report.

The report, prepared by the Interior Ministry's Population Census Bureau for the Ministerial Committee on Alternate Burials, states that of the 555,370 olim who have arrived from the former Soviet Union since 1989, 110,283 are not considered Jewish in the eyes of halachah.

The report by the committee, headed by Justice Minister David Libai, comes in response to what it saw as the real need and distress of non-Jews who could not find burial grounds in Israel.

Many of these olim have Israeli identity cards that list "not registered" under nationality — in other words, no registered religion.

Recently, several deceased olim from the former Soviet Union have been held in morgues for as long as one week until burial grounds could be found.

Orthodox burial societies have refused to bury these olim because their Jewishness was in question.

The Census Bureau figures dispel the notion propagated by fervently Orthodox members of Knesset that non-Jewish olim constitute between 30 percent and 40 percent of the immigrant population, said Amnon Be'eri, spokesman for Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban.

Be'eri acknowledged, however, that the percentage of non-Jews was rising, and has gone up to 24 percent this year.

According to Orthodox law, only those born to a Jewish mother, or those who undergo an Orthodox conversion, are recognized as Jewish, entitling them to be buried in a Jewish cemetery in Israel.

Be'eri said in an interview that all the Soviet immigrants, whether considered Jewish according to halachah or not, have come to Israel under the Law of Return, a secular law.

This law entitles them to all the rights of benefits of Jewish olim, including an answer to their marital and burial needs, he said.

Since the days of the founding of the State of Israel, the Orthodox establishment has had a monopoly of authority over all Jewish life-cycle ceremonies, including burials.

Kibbutzim were the one exception

The one exception was kibbutzim, which were given control over their own burial grounds and were free to choose their own ceremonies and traditions.

Responding to the new report, Avraham Burg, chairman of the Jewish Agency-World Zionist Organization, told the Ha'aretz daily that his agency would continue to rescue people from the Soviet Union.

"Only here in Israel will we start to solve their marital and religious status," he said.

"The Jewish Agency will continue with its efforts to bring to Israel olim from the former USSR, including the non-Jews.

"During thousands of years in exile there were always members of other religions who joined the Jewish people," Burg said.

Burg, who is observant, said he believes that this is the great test of the religious establishment in Israel.

"Will it be able to open up and be flexible toward the non-Jewish olim from the former USSR, and turn them into an inseparable part of the common fate of the Jewish people?" he said.

Libai, Tsaban and the other committee members — Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, minister of housing; Shimon Shetreet, minister for religious affairs and for economic and social development; and Uzi Baram, minister of the interior — are scheduled to meet during the next week in order to continue their efforts to provide a solution for the burial of non-Jews.

Shetreet recently said that he would demand that most Jewish burial societies allocate grounds for alternative burials.

A spokesman for Shetreet explained that this requirement would have to be met by the societies in order for their licenses to be renewed.

Israel must provide burial grounds for those "who saw themselves as Jews during their lifetime, but whose Jewishness came under question after their death," the spokesman said. □