

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Russian thieves broke through a window and stole five Torah scrolls from the St. Petersburg Synagogue.** The Universal Torah Registry alerted U.S. customs officials and Israeli police in an effort to block possible ports of entry for the thieves. [Page 2]

■ **Israel rejected an Arab-proposed resolution condemning Israel's nuclear program.** The resolution, introduced as the U.N.-sponsored conference considering extension of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was winding down, left the fate of the extension uncertain. [Page 2]

■ **President Ezer Weizman returned to Israel after a five-day trip abroad, where he attended V-E Day commemorations in London, Paris and Moscow.** He arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport with 51 new immigrants from Russia. Weizman said most Israelis do not realize how much Israel's standing has improved in the world, Israel Television reported.

■ **Rabbi Arthur Schneier of New York joined Moscow's Jewish community to commemorate the end of World War II.** Schneier called the gathering at a Moscow synagogue a "tremendous outpouring" by the Jewish community, but warned that some groups today keep Hitler's racist ideology alive. A day earlier, the rabbi, a Holocaust survivor, joined world leaders at a state dinner at the Kremlin.

■ **President Clinton proposed to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin that Israel and Syria set up early-warning stations on the Golan Heights and in northern Israel** as part of security arrangements that will form part of an eventual peace agreement between the two countries. Clinton made the proposal when Rabin visited Washington this week. [Page 3]

■ **Residents of the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona went on strike to protest what they called the government's failure to respond to the needs of the community in the wake of repeated Katyusha rocket attacks.** The rockets have been fired from southern Lebanon by the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement. Kiryat Shmona Mayor Prosper Azran called the strike.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Romania's ex-chief rabbi stirs up controversy in Senate talk**

By Odette Blumenfeld

NEW YORK, May 10 (JTA) — A recent speech by a former chief rabbi of Romania has revived a controversy over that country's role in the Holocaust.

The controversy has stretched all the way to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, where officials criticized the conciliatory remarks made by Alexandre Safran in a speech before the Romanian Senate.

Safran, 84, now the chief rabbi of Geneva, focused on a few examples of Romanians who helped save the lives of Jews during World War II.

But there was no mention of the atrocities that occurred.

Toward the end of the speech, presented to a body that has no Jewish members, Safran said:

"From the point of view of the deportation of the Jews to Poland, Romania belongs to the few European countries invaded by Hitler's armies, such as Bulgaria, Denmark and Finland, which did not send their children of Jewish extraction to perish in the gas and fire of Auschwitz."

In the speech, the rabbi also blessed "with plenties the beautiful Romania and the kind and beloved Romanian people."

However, in Safran's memoirs, "Resisting the Storm," which was published in 1987, he told a different story, registering the painful events of the lives of Romanian Jews as a whole, as well as his traumatic personal experiences during the war.

As chief rabbi of Romania from 1940 to 1947, prior to the tenure of Rabbi Moses Rosen, Safran represented 800,000 Jews.

As a result of World War II, that number was cut in half. Now, about 18,000 Jews live in Romania.

Historians, Jewish leaders react negatively to speech

In his memoirs, Safran made specific references to official Romanian policy during the war.

"The Jassy pogrom was organized and carried out by the Romanian army and civil authorities with the help of German units present in the city," he wrote, referring to one of the worst atrocities against Romanian Jewry during World War II.

"When the Romanian troops entered Bessarabia and took control of the region, all the hatred for the Jews there erupted in general massacres," he also wrote.

"Those Jews who had survived the massacres in Bessarabia, as well as Bukovinean Jewry and the Jews of Dorohoi, were chastened by the Romanian government by a wave of deportations to Transnistria under inhuman conditions."

Historians and Jewish leaders have reacted negatively to the speech, which was delivered March 28.

Michael Berenbaum, director of the United States Holocaust Research Institute, wrote in a letter to the rabbi that the speech "saddened me and worried me."

"You told the Parliament not what they had to hear, but what they wanted to hear, namely that the Romanian people are good and that the Romanian Jews were saved," Berenbaum wrote.

Referring to Safran's statement that Romania is among those nations that did not deport Jews, Berenbaum said: "Romania, Finland and Bulgaria were not invaded by the Nazis. Moreover the [Fascist Ion] Antonescu regime allowed the Nazis to deport at least 4,500 Jews from France, Germany and Austria."

A group of scholars on Romania also protested the address.

In an open letter to the rabbi, they wrote, "You lent your prestige as the rabbi of Geneva and former chief rabbi of Romania to tell the Romanian Senate — and through it to the world at large — what the Romanian nationalists wanted to hear."

"Through your speech you contributed to the history of the cleansing efforts of those Romanians who are interested in whitewashing Romania's

role in the destruction of close to 270,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews," the letter said.

Safran has since responded to the outcry over his speech in an April 19 letter to his critics, which was written in French.

According to Radu Ioanid, one of the scholars who sent Safran the open reply, the rabbi "tried to gently defend his speech" in his letter.

The rabbi did not apologize for what he said in front of the Senate, said Ioanid, the director of the registry of Holocaust survivors at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Ioanid, also an expert on the Holocaust period in Romania, sent a separate letter to Safran on April 21.

In that letter, Ioanid reiterated his position: "Your speech in the Romanian Senate is a missed opportunity which will never return. The very same people who invited you there are tolerating and very often encouraging the ongoing rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu and the erection of his statues.

"I am convinced that the main problem of your speech is that you ignored the perpetrators. You did not mention even once Ion Antonescu and his regime, who are responsible for the mass murder of part of Romanian Jewry."

Indeed, the rabbi's speech before the Senate apparently has elicited the precise reactions feared by historians.

Adrian Paunescu, a member of the Romanian Senate, said, "I am happy to have reached the moment when a great personality of Europe, a great sufferer, a great sage, came to tell the truth about the Romanian people and about what they did for the Jews during the long, bloody night of World War II: the Romanians defended the Jews.

"I thank you, chief rabbi, for the historical justice you did to the Romanian people by stating, with your prestige and from the perspective of your suffering, that the Romanians" did not deport the Jews. □

(JTA staff writer Alissa Kaplan in New York contributed to this report.)

Five Torah scrolls stolen from St. Petersburg shul

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, May 10 (JTA) — Five Torah scrolls were stolen from a St. Petersburg synagogue in Russia Tuesday night, including one the congregation had obtained just last year.

During the night, at least two thieves broke through a window at the St. Petersburg Synagogue, broke the lock on the ark and fled with the holy scrolls, according to David Pollock, administrator of the Universal Torah Registry.

According to Pollock, the method of the theft has led investigators to believe that the thieves knew exactly what they were after.

They stole nothing else and committed no vandalism, said Pollock, who is also the associate executive director of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council.

Russian police are zeroing in on a suspect, he said.

The Universal Torah Registry, based in New York City, has offered a \$1,000 reward for the St. Petersburg scrolls' safe return, though those Torahs were not registered with the organization, Pollock said.

The registry has also alerted U.S. customs officials and Israeli police in an effort to close off the two most likely ports of entry through which the thieves would try and sell the Torahs, Pollock said.

Nearly 10,000 Torahs, most of them in the United States, are registered with the organization, he said.

He said that since the group's founding in 1982, thefts of Torahs have dropped from about 200 each year in the United States to "virtually nil."

Each registered Torah scroll is marked with a pattern of eight tiny holes made with a super-fine needle. The placement of the perforations tells the registry identifies the owner of the Torah.

Pollock said he knew of no other Torahs stolen from the former Soviet Union in recent years. □

Israel rejects Arab effort to pass resolution on NPT

By Steven M. Zeitchik

NEW YORK, May 10 (JTA) — Israel has reacted strongly to efforts by a group of Arab nations to pass a resolution against the Jewish state that threatens the extension of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The resolution, spearheaded by Egypt and Algeria, condemns Israel for its nuclear weapons program.

The proposal came in the waning few days of a monthlong international conference to extend the 1970 treaty.

It calls on Israel to renounce nuclear weapons and to sign the NPT. The resolution would then be added to the overall extension treaty.

Israel has staunchly refused to sign the NPT, saying it would consider the creation of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East only after there is comprehensive peace in the region.

"We cannot sign for the time being," said Gad Ya'acobi, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, at the start of the conference. "It is contrary to our basic security interests."

Israel objected to the latest maneuver, arguing that by not including other non-signatories, the Arab nations were imposing a double standard.

"Why do they want to single out Israel?" said an Israeli diplomat. "There are other countries that didn't sign the NPT."

India and Pakistan have also refused to sign the treaty despite persistent reports that they, too, possess nuclear weapons.

The Arab nations have backed down from earlier attempts to block total passage of the treaty extension, which expires this year.

But Israeli officials say the latest move is another attempt on the part of Arab countries to force Israel to sign the NPT.

"They're trying to achieve with this what they were unable to achieve in the original resolution," said the Israeli diplomat.

Egyptian and Algerian diplomats were unavailable for comment Wednesday, along with the dozen or so other Arab countries that introduced the resolution, due to a Muslim holiday. The holiday also forced the postponement of the signing of the extension, which is now scheduled to take place Thursday.

The fate of the resolution remains unclear.

In an effort to defuse the situation, Ya'acobi met Wednesday with Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and an official from the State Department, according to Israeli officials.

Meanwhile, Israeli and Arab diplomats are reportedly working feverishly to formulate the resolution in a manner acceptable to all parties. If a compromise cannot be reached, worry many diplomats, the extension may not be signed.

The conference is scheduled to end Friday. □

U.S. proposes to Israel, Syria: Early warnings for security

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 10 (JTA) — The United States has reportedly proposed that Israel and Syria set up early-warning stations on the Golan Heights and in northern Israel as part of security arrangements that would form part of an eventual peace agreement between the two countries.

The Israeli daily Ma'ariv said President Clinton presented the idea to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin when the Israeli leader was in Washington this week.

According to the plan, Syrian soldiers would be stationed in northern Israel, while Israeli troops would be stationed on the Golan.

Clinton proposed to Rabin that the Syrian and Israeli military chiefs-of-staff resume talks on a joint early-warning system, according to Ma'ariv.

Clinton's proposal did not mention an Israeli demand that Syria downsize its army, or refer to the two sides' dispute about the size of a demilitarized zone that would be established on either side of the border.

Rabin did not indicate whether he accepted the proposal, an Israeli official said.

But according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Rabin gave his approval to the proposal, and the Americans were planning to present the idea to the Syrians.

Recent talks between Israel and Syria have been deadlocked over security arrangements.

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa is scheduled to visit Washington next week, and U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher reportedly is planning another round of regional shuttle diplomacy soon after that in an effort to boost the stalled negotiations. □

Israel arrests 2 activists for blocking ship near Haifa

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 10 (JTA) — Israeli officials arrested two members of the Greenpeace environmental group Sunday for blocking what the activists believed was the dumping of toxic waste into the Mediterranean.

Early Sunday morning, Greenpeace activists in rubber rafts reportedly surrounded the trawler Aribel, off the coast of Haifa, in an effort to prevent it from dumping 300 tons of sludge it was carrying for Haifa Chemicals.

Divers were said to have attached buoys to the boat saying "Stop," while the rafts surrounded the boat. After about three hours, the Aribel returned to port. Police later detained the two activists.

Officials at Haifa Chemicals, one of the world's largest producers of potassium nitrate, which is primarily used for fertilizer, said they were licensed by the Environmental Affairs Ministry to dump their waste.

In the eight years that the company has been dumping waste, no detrimental change has been noted in the sea environment, the officials said.

Greenpeace activists said the waste was toxic and causing harm to the sea environment. □

Jewish world marks V-E Day with low-key commemorations

By Uriel Masad

TEL AVIV, May 10 (JTA) — Beyond the spotlight of commemorations in Berlin and Moscow, Jews around the world marked the 50th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany with their own smaller ceremonies.

In Israel, events were low key compared to those in Europe.

"How can we celebrate victory when a third of our people died?" Likud Knesset member and Holocaust survivor Dov Shilansky said on Israel Television.

"We Jews must not call this a day of victory, but rather the day Nazi Germany was defeated."

Ceremonies in Israel focused on the 1.5 million Jewish soldiers who fought in the Allied armies. Among them were the 3,000 Jewish Brigade volunteers from Mandate Palestine who fought alongside British forces, as well as Jewish veterans of the Soviet army, members of the underground and fighters inside the ghettos.

Included in the various ceremonies was a salute to the immigrants from the former Soviet Union who are Red Army veterans.

More than 500,000 Jews fought in the Red Army. Of them, 13,000 now live in Israel.

In Jerusalem, some 1,000 Red Army veterans paraded through the city center. And in Tel Aviv, more than 15,000 olim from throughout the country attended a ceremony in Hayarkon Park.

Israelis go abroad to commemorate occasion

Veteran Wolf Solomonov, speaking on Israel Radio, said in Russian, "Israelis are not sufficiently aware of the war itself. They think only of the Holocaust. But we fought a bloody and hard war against the Nazis, and we won."

"None of us ever dreamt then that the day will come when we celebrate the victory's 50th anniversary with our children and grandchildren in the State of Israel," he added.

Some Israelis went abroad to commemorate the occasion. Several Israelis were among the 15 Jews invited to participate in Austria's weeklong series of activities.

For Austria, the end of the war marked the restoration of democratic rule after seven years of Nazi domination. All 15 of the Jewish guests — also from the United States, Denmark, England, Sweden, South Africa and Argentina — had been forced to leave Vienna after Hitler's annexation of Austria.

The restoration of democratic rule was commemorated at a joint session of both chambers of the Austrian Parliament, during which Austrian President Thomas Klestil and the president of Parliament, Heinz Fischer, delivered addresses sharply critical of Austria's close ties to Hitler's Germany.

The Jewish guests took part in all official celebrations, including a parliamentary session, where they were greeted with applause when Fischer pointed out their presence in the audience.

Klestil said Austria had made a mistake not to "call these citizens back to their home immediately after the war."

In Holland, more than 1,400 Jews filled the 300-year-old Sephardi synagogue in Amsterdam on Sunday to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the country's liberation from the Nazis.

The ceremony was organized jointly by the city's Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Liberal congregations, with the participation of Ashkenazi Chief Cantor Hans Bloemendal and Liberal movement Cantor Avery Tracht.

The ceremony took place despite the well-publicized objections of former Chief Rabbi Meir Just, who objected to the participation of non-Orthodox Jews.

He and his supporters had maintained that the memory of the more than 100,000 Dutch Jews who perished in the Holocaust would be desecrated by the participation of "heretics" at the event. □

(JTA correspondents Marta S. Halpert in Vienna and Henriette Boas in Amsterdam contributed to this report.)

Jewish activist files suit against FBI, Howard University

By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, May 10 (JTA) — Jewish activist Rabbi Avi Weiss has filed separate lawsuits against two of Washington's most prominent entities, the FBI and Howard University.

The FBI suit, which names Director Louis Freeh, accuses the bureau of suppressing evidence that Weiss was a potential target of the terrorist network indicted in the World Trade Center bombing two years ago.

The suit against Howard alleges that security guards at the predominately black university violated Weiss' right to protest when they failed to protect him and three other activists during a controversial speech there last year by Nation of Islam leader Khalid Abdul Mohammad.

Mohammed has made numerous anti-Semitic statements in his public speeches.

The FBI suit was filed in Federal Court, while the Howard suit was filed in U.S. District Court.

In the FBI suit, filed May 3, Weiss seeks a court order saying the bureau breached its constitutional duty and federal laws when it waited seven months to inform him that members of the group led by Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman had twice called him "a suitable candidate for violence."

Weiss, national president of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns-Amcha, is also asking for an injunction preventing the FBI from suppressing such information in the future, according to an Amcha statement.

"I am just one person who was not told," Weiss said in the statement.

"I'm taking this action because I believe there are others who might be potential victims who should be informed so they can take appropriate measures."

In a May 5 statement, the FBI said Weiss' allegations were "without any factual or legal merit."

The statement also said the bureau's actions in the matter were "entirely appropriate" and did not endanger Weiss.

Meanwhile, the Howard suit, filed April 12, is on hold until the university responds to the complaint, said Steven Lieberman, Weiss' attorney in the case.

The suit, which also names Howard security guard Robert Cyrus, alleges that Cyrus and District of Columbia police allowed observers to heckle Weiss at the April 1994 event.

The suit also accuses Cyrus of destroying several of Weiss' signs and forcing him to leave.

Weiss is seeking at least \$50,000 in damages, and has requested a jury trial, Lieberman said, adding that if his client wins the lawsuit, Weiss plans to donate the money to a charity that deals with black-Jewish relations.

A university spokesman refused to comment on the case. □

Professor not reprimanded; said settlers similar to Nazis

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 7 (JTA) — The Hebrew University of Jerusalem will not take any steps against a faculty member who compared children of Jewish settlers to Hitler Youth.

The university president, Professor Hanoach Geutfreund, met last week with Moshe Zimmerman, the professor who made the remarks.

Geutfreund, who said the university did not support Zimmerman's views, told Israel Radio that no action would be taken against Zimmerman.

In an recent interview in the weekly newspaper Yerushalayim, Zimmerman said he saw strong similarities between the two groups.

"There is a whole sector of Israeli society that without hesitation I would call a copy of the Nazis," he said.

"Look at the children of Hebron: They are exactly like Hitler Youth.

"They are brainwashed from age zero that Arabs are bad and about anti-Semitism, making them paranoid and racist — just like the Hitler Youth."

Zimmerman later said that his remarks had been misquoted and, in one case, fabricated.

However, Zimmerman did not withdraw his opinion that some similarities exist between Nazi hate propaganda and the ways settlers indoctrinate their children to hate Arabs.

Geutfreund said he thought that the headlines accompanying the newspaper article had distorted Zimmerman's comments, adding that this was not the first time a faculty member's comments had elicited a strong public reaction.

Zimmerman said the uproar surrounding his comments about the children of settlers overshadowed the primary content of the interview, which had to do with new findings he had made in his research on the Third Reich. □

'Holocaust in Hungary' has pupils looking beyond texts

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST, May 10 (JTA) — Two non-Jewish Hungarian girls who successfully dug up the pre-World War II history of their hometown's Jews took first prize in a student essay competition on the Holocaust.

More than 200 pupils took part in the competition, titled "Holocaust in Hungary," which was initiated by the Alliance of the Hungarian Jewish Communities and supported by the Ministry of Culture and Education.

The goal of the nationwide contest was to get young people to learn more about the local history and fate of Jewish communities.

An awards ceremony took place this week at the Budapest Ethnographic Museum.

In what they called a difficult effort, the two girls found that the small town of Mohacs in southern Hungary was once home to 564 Jews.

After the Holocaust, however, only 13 returned to Hungary, the girls found. Of the 13, three now live in Hungary.

Another winner, a 16-year-old Gypsy named Orsos Zoltan, said in an interview that he wrote his essay only because he has never seen a Jew.

His teacher sent him on Shabbat to a town synagogue to find a Jew.

There, Zoltan met an old Jewish man, who gave him a book describing the Holocaust.

Zoltan said only then did he realize that Jews and Gypsies were both scorned victims. He said he wrote his essay as if he were a Jew.

In a speech at the awards ceremonies this week, Peter Feldmayer, head of the Alliance of the Hungarian Jewish communities, said:

"Jews in Hungary are nothing more than memories, and if we cannot revive them, at least we should remember them."

The Hungarian Minister of Culture and Education, Gabor Fodor, said the competition "was very important because of the increasing number of young people who sympathize nowadays with doubtful values." □