

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **U.S. Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross** arrived in Israel for talks with Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres about the stalled peace negotiations with Syria. The visit comes amid reports that Syrian President Hafez Assad is ready to resume talks that were broken off in June. [Page 2]

■ **Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat** visited Jenin a week after Israel completed its withdrawal from the West Bank town. Arafat urged Palestinians to participate in their upcoming elections, which are scheduled for Jan. 20. [Page 2]

■ **Legal experts and politicians gathered in Nuremberg** to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the start of the war-crimes trial of the Nazi leadership. Twenty-two Nazi officials were prosecuted at the Nuremberg trials, which began on Nov. 25, 1945.

■ **Bezek, Israel's telephone company,** will reportedly issue a phone card commemorating Yitzhak Rabin a month after his death. The card will have a one-time printing of 500,000.

■ **Workers widening a road in central Israel** found burial caves with clear links to the Maccabees. A spokeswoman for Israel's Antiquities Authority said the find was the first archaeological proof of the ancient events that are celebrated during the Chanukah holiday. [Page 3]

■ **Israel's National Journalists Association** petitioned the Supreme Court to cancel Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair's directive that would block publication of any statements which could be considered incitement and would call for pressing charges against those journalists who breached the order. The association protested the move, calling it a direct blow to freedom of speech.

■ **A delegation of the Anti-Defamation League** met with Yasser Arafat in Gaza to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Days before meeting with the Palestine Liberation Organization leader, the ADL delegation met with Saudi leaders in Riyadh.

Israeli Cabinet set to devise plan to limit extremist Jewish groups

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Cabinet has agreed to initiate a crackdown on extremist Jewish groups that would include efforts to prevent supporters of the groups from entering Israel.

"Extremist violence, racist and terrorist organizations are a serious danger to the democratic rule of Israel, the security of the state and peace of the public," Cabinet Secretary Shmuel Hollander told reporters after the meeting. "The government will act to make them illegal."

The Cabinet move, taken in the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, coincided with the first hearings of Israel's three-member state commission of inquiry on the security lapses that led to the assassination.

In its efforts to combat subversive groups, the ministers agreed at Sunday's Cabinet session to appoint a special task force to look into the legal ramifications of the proposed crackdown.

The task force will be comprised of representatives from the attorney general's office, the police, the Israel Defense Force general staff and the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security service.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein elaborated on the plan to prevent supporters of extremist groups from entering Israel.

"People who support illegal organizations or their members cannot come to Israel, not as citizens, not as tourists, not as returning residents and not as immigrants," he said.

The Law of Return, which grants citizenship to any Jew who wishes to immigrate, includes a clause that allows the Interior Ministry to refuse entry if there is concern that an individual may pose a threat to public safety.

Last week, Interior Minister Ehud Barak barred a Kach activist from New York from entering Israel.

Rubinstein rejected complaints from the main opposition Likud Party that the crackdown on right-wing extremists amounted to a witch hunt in the aftermath of Rabin's killing.

"There is no shred of evidence to that effect," Rubinstein told Israel Radio.

"It is our duty to fight Jewish terrorism."

Meanwhile, the state commission of inquiry into the assassination heard the first secret testimony from security officials charged with the protection of Rabin and other Israeli leaders.

The three-member panel, headed by former Supreme Court Chief Justice Meir Shamgar, will convene in mostly closed door sessions three to four times a week.

Panel focuses on Shin Bet security lapses

The commission expected to conclude its work within two months, according to local press reports.

The panel commission will investigate the security lapses that enabled confessed assassin Yigal Amir to get within point-blank shooting range of Rabin at the conclusion of a Nov. 4 peace rally in Tel Aviv.

It will also address questions surrounding the security service's intelligence-gathering efforts.

Shin Bet officials have admitted that they failed to follow up on tips from people who knew Amir that an assassination was planned.

Amid heavy security, the head of the Shin Bet was among the security officials who appeared before the panel Sunday.

The commission convened amid reports that Avishai Raviv, leader of the extremist militant group Eyal, had been working for the Shin Bet for the past two years.

Raviv was among eight people arrested in a police crackdown on activists suspected of involvement in an alleged right-wing assassination conspiracy.

The Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported that Raviv knew Amir "but didn't know or didn't report his intentions."

The allegations were denied by government officials, the Shin Bet and Raviv, who is currently under house arrest at his parents' home in Holon.

Police Minister Moshe Shahal accused right-wing activists of spreading the rumors in order to discredit the Shin Bet.

In a related development, two suspects arrested in connection with the shooting, Ohad Skornick and Michael Epstein, had their detention extended as police continued investigating their involvement in the alleged assassination plot. □

Knesset expected to approve new government led by Peres

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres is expected to present a new government before the Knesset for ratification this week.

"I hope that if everything goes as anticipated, we shall bring the new coalition before the Knesset on Wednesday," he told reporters in Jerusalem last week.

But Peres was tight-lipped about the composition of his new Cabinet.

According to speculation in the Israeli media, Peres will follow the lead of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and retain the dual portfolios of prime minister and defense minister.

The move would enable him to oversee the Israeli troop redeployments in the West Bank that are called for under the terms of the recently signed agreement for extending Palestinian autonomy in the region.

Interior Minister Ehud Barak is widely expected to be named foreign minister.

Barak, a former Israel Defense Force chief of staff, fueled rumors that he would get the Foreign Ministry portfolio when he told Israel Radio last week that it was "likely I won't be interior minister two weeks from now."

Peres, who was asked to form a new government last week by President Ezer Weizman, refused to comment on the rumors. "All the reports and rumors have no basis," he told reporters, adding, "I have not spoken to anyone" about the Cabinet appointments.

Peres said that only on Tuesday night, when he is expected to present the coalition before the Labor Party's Central Committee for approval, "will everything be known."

Acceptance of the new government was assured last week when the main opposition Likud Party said it would not oppose Peres' Cabinet picks.

Political observers have noted that Peres, expected to keep the governing coalition in its current form, will opt to try to include some of the religious parties at a later date.

Peres met last week with Rabbi Yehuda Amital of the Yeshiva Har Etzion in the West Bank, creating some speculation that Peres had asked him to serve as a minister without portfolio in the new government.

But Amital, a leader of Meimad, a religious Zionist group that supports territorial concessions in the name of peace, denied that Peres had offered him a Cabinet position. The meeting, said Amital, was devoted to finding ways of reconciling different segments of Israeli society in the wake of the Nov. 4 assassination of Rabin. □

U.S. envoy visits Israel in effort to revive stalled talks with Syria

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross met with Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres on Sunday in a new attempt to find ways of reviving the long-stalled Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations.

Downplaying expectations of an imminent breakthrough in the talks, the State Department said over the

weekend that the meeting with Peres was intended simply to "touch base" with the new Israeli leader in the wake of the Nov. 4 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns added that Peres first had to have the opportunity to form his own government before "we can expect progress on the Israeli-Syrian track."

Ross' visit came amid reports that Syrian President Hafez Assad had not ruled out the possibility of a meeting between Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa and a leading Israeli official during a regional economic conference scheduled to take place next month in Barcelona, Spain.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported the possibility of the meeting, citing remarks made by the head of the Syrian Foreign Ministry's political desk, who met last week in Brussels with the deputy director general of Israel's Foreign Ministry, Eitan Bentsur.

The two officials met while participating in preparatory talks for the Barcelona conference.

Assad broke off discussions between Israeli and Syrian military leaders, who last convened in Washington in late June.

The two sides have long been at loggerheads over the terms of a peace agreement.

Syria has demanded that Israel state its intention to withdraw completely from the Golan Heights as a precondition for peace. Israel, countering that it will not accept any preconditions to negotiations, has offered a phased withdrawal from the Golan in return for the normalization of relations with Syria, including the exchange of ambassadors, open borders and free trade.

Another stumbling block has been the issue of security measures that would be put into place on the Golan in the wake of an Israeli withdrawal.

Israel has called for the establishment of a ground-based early-warning system on the Golan. Syria has countered that the move would represent an infringement on its territorial sovereignty, proposing instead a security system based on aerial reconnaissance. □

Arafat visits Jenin, appeals for participation in elections

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat visited Jenin a week after Israel completed its withdrawal from the West Bank town.

Thousands of cheering Palestinians welcomed Arafat on Sunday as his helicopter, which flew him in from the Gaza Strip, landed on top of the building that served as the Israeli army headquarters prior to the withdrawal.

In an address to the crowd, Arafat spoke of the dawn of Palestinian independence and urged a cheering crowd to participate in the Palestinian elections scheduled for Jan. 20. His trip to Jenin was his third visit to the West Bank since Palestinian autonomy was launched in Gaza and the Jericho enclave in May 1994.

After addressing the crowd, in what some viewed as an attempt to advance his own candidacy in the elections, Arafat convened a meeting of the Palestinian Authority leadership.

Jenin was the first of seven West Bank towns to fall under Palestinian self-rule under the terms of a recently signed agreement for expanding autonomy in the region.

According to the accord's timetable, Israeli troops will withdraw from six of the towns by the end of the year. A partial redeployment in the seventh, Hebron, is expected to be completed by March. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES [Part 2]**Israeli ministry gives funds to establish humanist yeshiva***By Debra Nussbaum Cohen*

FARMINGTON HILLS, Mich. (JTA) — Secular Humanistic Jews in Israel are establishing their own yeshiva — and getting funding from the Ministry of Education to do it.

The Israeli government historically has provided funding only to Orthodox yeshivas, but a recent Supreme Court decision paved the way for other Jewish denominations to receive support.

The court's ruling supported an action brought by non-Orthodox religious groups, including the Conservative, Reform and Secular Humanistic movements in Israel.

As a result, the movement of Jewish humanists, known in Hebrew as "Tnuat Hiloni Yisraeli," recently received the equivalent of \$16,200 from the government to aid in the planning of the yeshiva, which will probably be situated in Jerusalem.

Although the aid is a breakthrough, the money is a pittance compared to what Orthodox institutions receive from the government, said Zev Katz, a co-founder of the Israel Association for Secular Humanistic Judaism.

"The Orthodox get mind-boggling sums of money, hundreds of millions of shekels" each year, said Katz, who teaches at Hebrew University.

There are some 10,000 to 15,000 Israelis who are connected with the humanist movement in Israel in some way, he said.

They hope to have the yeshiva doors formally opened in a year or two and to be offering full-time study of Judaism to 30 to 50 people, one-third of them new immigrants.

The new yeshiva, once opened, will offer training in Torah, Talmud, Chasidism, Kabbalah and neo-Orthodoxy, Katz said.

Like Shakespeare is to English

"A secular Jew should be knowledgeable about what he rejects," he said.

"Tanach is to us like Shakespeare is to English," Katz said.

"It is a central part of our tradition. And there can be no Jewish continuity without tradition."

"Those who finish the yeshiva program will be the first formally trained cadre to teach Judaism from a humanist, pluralist point of view," he said.

In the meantime, however, the Israeli Jewish humanists offer lessons on Judaism from a nontheistic perspective to hundreds of Israelis each week.

In one program, held every other Friday, 30 students in each of nine Israeli cities take courses with humanistic teachers, Katz said.

Many of the students are recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

The groups visit museums and historical places, and meet with rabbis from Orthodox to Reform.

The movement gets about \$120,000 a year from the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Ministry of Absorption to run the Friday program, which is now in its fourth year.

In addition, courses are offered by the movement to about 75 university students in Tel Aviv as well as Jerusalem.

Several dozen native Israelis and about 18 immigrants from the former Soviet Union have already been trained to speak about humanistic Judaism to school and army groups, Katz said.

The movement was also recently invited by the

Ministry of Education to design a curriculum for pluralism that will be used in schools and the army, he said.

The movement is also planning to produce two new prayer books — one for daily use and another for the holidays.

Humanistic Jewish practice in Israel is substantially different from the way it is practiced in North America, said Katz.

Tradition is taken seriously by Israeli humanistic Jews, rather than rejected as it tends to be by their North American brethren, he said.

"Torah is not canon, but an inspiration. Torah was created in ancient times by the geniuses of my forefathers," said Katz, explaining the Israeli humanistic view. "That's why it is holy, not because it is endowed by supernatural qualities."

"The values of humanism are holy, like human life, not as supernatural mysticism, but because they represent the ultimate values. Judaism is blessed because it is an idea of genius," Katz said.

Traditional prayers are often adapted to be nontheistic and not completely eradicated from practice.

Many secular Israelis light Shabbat candles, Katz said.

Rather than recite the traditional blessing, which begins "Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe," they say, "Blessed is the sanctity of the Sabbath" and "Blessed is the Sabbath Day."

And one of the traditional Yom Kippur prayers of repentance, the "Al Chet," has been adapted to ask forgiveness from other people who the praying person may have hurt, rather than from God. □

Maccabees' burial caves discovered in central Israel*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Workers widening a road in central Israel last week found burial caves with clear links to the Maccabees, who rebelled against Greek rule in the 2nd century B.C.E.

Archaeologists from Israel's Antiquities Authority on Thursday described the find as extremely important.

The site includes three burial caves, with some 23 containers for human bones.

The tomb was found near the town of Modi'in, where the family leader of the Maccabees, also known as the Hasmoneans, revolted against the Greek Seleucids in about 170 B.C.E.

A spokeswoman for Israel's Antiquities Authority said the find was the first archaeological proof of the ancient events that are celebrated during the Chanukah holiday.

She said a number of the burial urns had Jewish inscriptions in Hebrew, adding that one had most of the word "Hashmonaim," the Hebrew for Hasmonean, on it.

The tomb was discovered three days earlier, but the find was not made public until Nov. 16, during which time archaeologists studied the bones, which were then passed on to religious authorities for burial.

Fervently Orthodox Jews clashed with police near the site last week, in an attempt to stop the continued excavations, saying that it was sacrilegious to disturb Jewish remains.

The Antiquities Authority and Public Works Authority decided to suspend the road construction work for a full two weeks, until the area could be further excavated.

The officials also said they would seek to have the proposed route of the road altered in order to preserve the site. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Following Mendelssohn's steps,
German group fosters 'Haskala'***By Ruth E. Gruber*

HANOVER, Germany (JTA) — Heinz Baldermann is a bearded 40-something man in wire-rimmed glasses who sports an unusual blue and white sweat shirt.

On the sweat shirt is a design of tiny Hebrew letters, with the word "Haskala" in both Hebrew and Latin characters superimposed on it.

Haskala was the name of the Jewish Enlightenment movement started more than two centuries ago by the great 18th-century German Jewish scholar Moses Mendelssohn.

Haskala is also the name of a new German Jewish cultural action group that Baldermann helped found in the northwestern German city of Hanover as a means for strengthening knowledge of the Jewish experience, both past and present, and for fostering a firm sense of multiculturalism in Germany.

He also helped found Haskala, he said, in order to help overcome what he and his Jewish friends saw as a problem among Jews in Germany: basing their Jewish identity on the destruction of the Holocaust and ignoring Judaism's rich and lively cultural heritage and contribution.

"I'm Jewish, and I'm part of the first post-Shoah generation," said Baldermann, using the Hebrew term for the Holocaust.

"My problem was that Jewishness for me was always sad — there was always the emphasis on Auschwitz and Majdanek. I have a daughter, and she says that if Jewishness is only sadness, then she doesn't want to be Jewish," said Baldermann, who directs an adult education program near Hanover.

"We Jews of the Diaspora have to remember where our sources are — in the Holocaust and recognition of the Holocaust, or in Torah and Jewish tradition?" he said, adding, "If Jews see their tradition only in the Holocaust, then Hitler invented the religion."

Baldermann stressed that Auschwitz and the Shoah must never be forgotten — but neither should Jewish life, both pre- and post-Holocaust.

Jewish life important for non-Jews

He said it was important to broaden knowledge of Jewish life and culture among non-Jewish Germans.

The result of these needs led to last year's founding of Haskala, "consciously putting ourselves in the tradition of Mendelssohn," he said.

One of its aims is to give Jewish actors, composers, artists, musicians and performers the chance to present their work to a broader public. During the past year, he said, Haskala has sponsored theater performances, classical concerts, literary evenings, debates and klezmer concerts.

Baldermann, whose family comes from Poznan, a city now in Poland but before World War I was part of Germany, was also involved in the organization of a weeklong workshop on klezmer music and Yiddish culture for 40 mainly German, non-Jewish participants.

The workshop, held earlier this month in nearby Bad Pyrmont, was led by the American klezmer group Brave Old World and other performers. A Haskala-sponsored public concert by Brave Old World drew a full house.

Most of the 40,000 to 50,000 Jews who live in Germany today came to Germany after World War II. This includes a large influx of Russian Jews who have come in recent years.

"Before 1990, about 300 Jews lived in Hanover," Baldermann said. "Now there are 800, thanks to the arrival of 500 people from Russia."

Baldermann, who also runs Jewish events and courses through his adult education program, said he and his Haskala friends are committed to building Jewish life in the Diaspora.

"We don't want to go to Israel," he said. "We want to stay in Germany as long as we can stand being in Germany in order to work on our identity as a permanent process."

Baldermann said his attempt to use Jewish culture as a means of fostering dialogue has had unforeseen results. "Five years ago, I used to get anonymous threats," he said. "Now I still get threats — but they are signed."

"I see something positive in this," he added. "I know who is my enemy. My offer of conflict — or dialogue — is accepted." □

**Navy officer accused of spying
for Saudis avoids court martial***By Shawn Cohen**Washington Jewish Week*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. Navy granted an "other than honorable" discharge to a commander who had been charged with passing secrets to the Saudi Arabian military, officials said.

By accepting this arrangement, Lt. Cmdr. Michael Schwartz, a 15-year Navy veteran, recently avoided a court martial.

Originally charged with mishandling classified documents, making a false official statement and espionage, Schwartz said he was guilty of the first two charges and agreed "to continue to fully cooperate with government investigators assigned to the case."

Under the agreement, Schwartz, 43, who is from El Paso, will lose his rank and the possibility of collecting retirement or other military benefits. Schwartz remains assigned to a command at the Norfolk Naval Base in Virginia pending his formal discharge, expected this month.

Schwartz, who is not Jewish, has been accused of disseminating classified intelligence documents to officials in the Saudi Arabian navy while he was assigned to the U.S. Military Training Mission in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, between November 1992 and September 1994.

He was arraigned in September after an Article 32 investigation — the military's form of a grand jury — which determined that there were sufficient grounds to proceed with a court martial.

Schwartz was charged with four violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice and other federal statutes in connection with willfully delivering national defense information to officers of a foreign naval service "with intent or reason to believe it would be used to the injury of the United States or to the advantage of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

The documents, which included classified messages to foreign countries, a series of military intelligence digests, intelligence advisories and tactical intelligence summaries, were classified up to the secret level and specified "no foreign disclosure."

Navy officials who handled the case were not available for comment.

An attorney for Jonathan Pollard, the Israeli spy serving a life term in the United States, said the outcome of the Schwartz case is troubling.

"The blatant discrepancy between the life sentence imposed on Jonathan Pollard for spying for Israel over an 18-month period and the absence of any penalty whatsoever for an American Navy commander who spied for Saudi Arabia over a two-year period only adds to the terrible stench surrounding the Pollard affair," said attorney David Kirshenbaum. □