

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy addressed the U.N. General Assembly, emphasizing Israel's "irreversible commitment and determination" to pursue the peace process. Speaking in French and greeted with polite applause, Levy also called on Syrian President Hafez Assad to return to negotiations. [Page 3]

■ Dennis Ross, U.S. special Middle East coordinator, is set to travel to Israel for Sunday's resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Israeli redeployment from most of the West Bank town of Hebron and security issues top the agenda. [Page 2]

■ A Tel Aviv court sentenced Yigal Amir, who is already serving a life term for killing Yitzhak Rabin; his brother, Hagai Amir; and friend Dror Adani to prison terms ranging from five to 12 years for plotting the murder of the prime minister. [Page 3]

■ A Ukrainian commission of Jewish and governmental officials reached an agreement to reclaim a Jewish cemetery in Lviv that was razed by the Nazis and has since become a commercial site. The agreement includes provisions that prohibit construction on the grounds of the former cemetery and seeks to find a new location for a large marketplace currently on the site.

■ The Ukrainian Jewish community is gathering archival documentation to prove communal ownership of properties that were confiscated by the state during the Communist era. Ukraine's Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage intends to seek restitution for some 2,000 communal properties. [Page 3]

■ London-based Holocaust denier David Irving again announced his intention to gain an Australian visa. Irving, who has failed a number of times since 1992 to enter Australia, maintains that his views on Jews have kept him out of the country.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**St. Petersburg's elderly Jews cling to tradition amid despair**

By Rachel Katz

ST. PETERSBURG (JTA) — As the faint aroma of citron wafted through the air, Sima Gersona nodded knowingly, smiling as she thought about the past.

"Yes, yes. An etrog," she whispered, even before the young students giving a presentation on Sukkot to the Golden Age Club in St. Petersburg could launch into their explanation.

For 78-year-old Gersona, life as a pensioner in Russia's second city is not easy.

She shares a communal apartment with another family and has no close relatives of her own. Nor does her monthly pension of \$68 provide much material comfort.

But she has found her people.

"My only joy is that I come here," she said, looking around at the 50 other elderly Jews who gather weekly to greet the Sabbath at the Chesed Avram charity center, which, along with other groups here, sponsors programs to make the participants' lives more joyful.

While a host of organizations are introducing Jewish traditions and Israeli culture to the young, it is in the elderly that the flame continues to flicker brightly.

Born about the time of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, elderly Jews in St. Petersburg are just old enough to remember the twilight of Jewish life in Old Russia.

Although the Communist regime kept open the city's Great Choral Synagogue as part of its lip service to supporting national culture, most elderly Jews returned in force only in the late 1980s with the rise of tolerance among Soviet authorities.

"There's no longer any Soviet Union, and these people are afraid," said Leonid Kolton, director of Chesed Avram. "They feel a need to be with Jews."

Life for many elderly Jews in St. Petersburg involves the same hardships and joys as in Russia's other cities. But St. Petersburg — known during the Communist era as Petrograd and Leningrad before it reverted in post-Soviet times to its former name — also has a character and challenges all its own.

Living in cramped communal apartments

A third of St. Petersburg's Jewish population is made up of pensioners, a slightly higher ratio than in other cities. Many still live in cramped communal apartments, sharing their life with anywhere from one to five other families.

In Moscow, by contrast, officials have managed to relieve the local housing shortage with an intensive building campaign.

A number of local organizations have come to the aid of St. Petersburg's aging Jewish population.

The first in a network of centers that opened across the former Soviet Union, Chesed Avram provides the bulk of services for the city's elderly Jews.

Volunteers offer home care for the bedridden and homebound; medical staffers provide consultations and lend medical equipment; and other programs attend to the needs of the hearing-impaired and visually impaired.

Across town, members of the pensioners' club meet at the Or Avner Jewish day school to celebrate holidays, learn Jewish cooking and socialize.

The combined efforts of Chesed Avram, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Lubavitch movement also feed more than 300 elderly at the school and the synagogue.

Another 75 meals are sent throughout the city with a Meals on Wheels program.

The biggest obstacle to expansion, said the director of the pensioners' club, Marina Ginzburg, is lack of space.

"If we had the space, we could feed 1,000 people," she said.

Many of these support programs are starting to attract local sponsors,

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according to St. Petersburg Chief Rabbi Mendel Pewzner. "They're learning that we must take care of our elders," he said.

The hubbub of Chesed Avram contrasts sharply with the silence of Lyubov Maksimova's apartment in the city center, where the ticking of an antique wall clock is the only sound.

Although Maksimova, 82, is bright and alert, she has been confined to her home for nearly a year because of blindness.

Her main contact with the outside world is when volunteers for Meals On Wheels bring her lunch and dinner three times a week.

Her first husband, a Russian, died at the front. Eight years ago, she lost her second husband to illness.

Emigration has never seriously entered her mind, though she has relatives in Canada and Israel.

"I'm blind. What could I do there?" she said with a shrug. "Here, at least, I'm used to everything."

Her comment echoes those of many others who have opted to stay in the city of their childhood.

Ties to Leningrad, as most elderly still lovingly call their city, run deep.

Most of them survived the brutal Nazi siege that encircled the city for 900 days during World War II. The siege caused 1 million deaths, but the city was never taken.

With a gold and red medal pinned on her beige sweater, Gersona recounted her days as a sanitary technician at a local hospital.

"One day, I just couldn't walk to work anymore," she said. "I just lay at home in my cold, communal apartment."

Gersona's husband survived the war, but her son died as a result of a nuclear accident in Chelyabinsk in the 1950s.

What unites these people is their Jewishness.

Maksimova buried the last of her family's Jewish possessions, a tallit, with her father decades ago.

Yet the faith that made her parents regular synagogue attendees, even throughout the Soviet period, never left her.

"I always went to the synagogue after the war," she said, her face brightening. "God gave me everything to get through."

With the fall of the Soviet Union, she can even catch Jewish songs on public radio from time to time.

"I just hope God gives me health in the future, and that's all," she added.

For the city's aging Jews, the passage of time has become their greatest enemy.

Every Saturday, a 79-year-old woman who identified herself as Liza peers down from the women's gallery in the Great Choral Synagogue, counts the congregants and sighs.

"Each week, less and less," she says. □

Netanyahu returns to Israel; reactions to D.C. summit vary

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Reactions to this week's Middle East summit in Washington were mixed as Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu returned home.

Israeli officials hailed the summit as a success and Palestinian officials expressed dismay as the two sides prepared to return to the negotiating table Sunday at the Erez Crossing.

The Israeli redeployment from most of the West Bank town of Hebron and other security issues are to top the agenda of the renewed talks, which are to be mediated by U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross.

Some officials here said they thought that Netanyahu and President Clinton had a tacit agreement on the date of an Israel Defense Force redeployment in Hebron.

And Israel Radio reported that Netanyahu was believed to have given the Palestinians a document outlining the government's security principles in general, and on Hebron in particular.

Clinton, who has since expressed disappointment that the negotiators were not able to reach any formal agreement at the summit, convened the Washington meeting to salvage the peace process after it was ravaged by last week's explosion of violence.

Rioting by Palestinians — touched off when Israel opened a new entrance to an archaeological tunnel alongside the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City — quickly escalated out of control, with Palestinian police and Israeli soldiers exchanging gunfire.

By the end of the week, 15 Israelis and 58 Palestinians were killed.

"The Israeli government's expectations for the Washington summit was that we would not conclude anything substantive, and that if any such progress is made, it will be around the negotiating table next week," Moshe Katzav, Israel's tourism minister, told Israeli media.

"In my opinion, Netanyahu successfully attained the objective he set for himself."

Knesset member Ehud Barak of the Labor Party said Netanyahu had succeeded in buying time, but real success would depend on what actions he takes.

Barak, also a former Israeli foreign minister, added, "Arafat and Netanyahu together maneuvered the peace process to the brink of explosion."

Palestinian Council member Ziad Abu-Ziad said he was disappointed with the summit's outcome.

"If Prime Minister Netanyahu remains a prisoner to his ideology, there will be violence," Abu-Ziad said.

"He must understand that the government must change its positions for the process to continue," Abu-Ziad added.

Meanwhile, the West Bank and Gaza Strip remained mostly quiet Thursday.

In Hebron, Palestinians threw stones at IDF soldiers when a curfew on the West Bank town was lifted to allow residents to purchase supplies.

Hamas calls for riot

One Israeli soldier was lightly hurt by stones near the A-Ram checkpoint north of Jerusalem, and an Israeli was lightly hurt by stones near Halhoul, in the Hebron area.

In addition, the Hamas fundamentalist group issued a statement in Beirut calling on Palestinians to riot and confront Israeli forces after Friday prayers.

In a related development, Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai agreed to take steps to ease restrictions in the territories, but said they were contingent upon the security situation.

He held security consultations in Tel Aviv, saying that he would move tanks farther away from where they had been stationed near Bethlehem.

Israeli security officials, however, remained on high alert.

A senior Israeli official source was quoted as saying that Israel could announce a number of measures Sunday as confidence-building gestures ahead of the negotiations.

These could include allowing the passage of products into the West Bank and Gaza, lifting the closure on the territories after last week's riots and gradually allowing Palestinians to return to jobs inside Israel, the source said. □

Levy strikes conciliatory note before U.N. General Assembly*By Cynthia Mann*

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) — Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy used his address this week before the United Nations General Assembly to emphasize Israel's "irreversible commitment and determination to pursue the path of peace."

Levy, who spoke in French and received mild applause at the conclusion of his remarks Thursday, struck a more conciliatory posture than the one he had adopted prior to this week's Washington summit.

The diplomat went on the offensive last weekend here when the U.N. Security Council approved a resolution criticizing Israel for the eruption of deadly violence after it opened a new entrance to a tunnel adjacent to Jerusalem's holiest sites.

The vote was 14-0, with the United States abstaining.

Levy returned to the United Nations from Washington still somewhat defensive.

He told the General Assembly on Thursday that the new government's efforts to reach peace had continually been "minimized" and that its concern for security "is neither an obsession nor a blind belief."

But his main thrust was to pledge his government's intention to honor its accords with the Palestinians and its desire to reach real peace in the region.

Levy also praised President Clinton and the U.S. administration for efforts to safeguard the peace process and said Israel would abide by the principles enunciated by Clinton at the summit: the need for direct negotiations between parties and the renunciation of violence as a means of resolving conflict.

Levy also stated the "important role" of Syria in the process of regional normalization and called on Syrian President Hafez Assad to resume negotiations with the Jewish state.

The foreign minister also called on the General Assembly to help Israel secure a place in a regional grouping, which it is currently denied.

Such placement is a prerequisite to serving on key U.N. bodies, including a rotating seat on the Security Council.

The absence of a regional grouping, said Levy, deprives Israel of a right to participate with other nations "on an equal footing." □

Court sentences Amirs, Adani for conspiring to murder Rabin*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Tel Aviv District Court has sentenced brothers Yigal and Hagai Amir, and their friend Dror Adani, to prison terms on charges that included conspiring to murder Yitzhak Rabin.

Yigal Amir, who is already serving a life sentence for assassinating Rabin, plus six years for wounding his bodyguard, was sentenced Thursday to an additional five years in prison on the conspiracy charges.

Amir told the court that he felt no remorse for his actions.

He added that he only wished he had killed the prime minister three years earlier because it would have prevented last week's violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Amir, who is now 26, shot Rabin in November at a Tel Aviv peace rally, saying that Rabin's policy of giving land to the Palestinians posed a threat to Jewish lives.

The Amir brothers and Adani were convicted last

month of conspiring to kill Rabin and of planning to murder Palestinians.

Hagai Amir, who was also convicted on various weapons charges, had faced 78 years in prison. He was sentenced to 12 years.

Adani, who had faced up to 29 years, was sentenced to seven.

Judge Amnon Strashnov described the three as "sons of evil" when he delivered the verdict.

"They are not simple criminals from the street," the judge said.

"They are educated and cultured." □

Jewish group in Ukraine seeks restitution for seized property*By Lev Krichevsky*

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — The Ukrainian Jewish community is quietly laying the groundwork for the restitution of communal properties that were confiscated by the state during the Communist era.

During the past three years, Ukraine's Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage, or KSEN, has been gathering archival documentation to prove communal ownership of the properties.

"We haven't been negotiating the restitution issue with national authorities yet," said Josef Zissels, chairman of the Ukrainian Va'ad, the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities, who added that Ukrainian officials are still not ready to deal with the issue.

One Jewish activist said, "When we try to put this issue to government officials, they react as if they have no idea what we are talking about."

But all that may well change, given recent Jewish restitution efforts in other ex-Communist countries. Earlier this year, for example, the Hungarian government reached a restitution agreement with the local Jewish community.

"After Hungary, Romania and Slovakia may sign similar agreements," Zissels said.

"When that happens, Ukraine will realize that its turn may come soon."

In the meantime, "we do not flaunt our activities," said Zissels, who noted that some local authorities may dislike the idea of ever making restitution to the Jewish community.

Zissels said that if the authorities in some regions understood the purpose of KSEN's activities, they might deny the researchers access to the archives.

According to Zissels, there are some 2,000 communal properties — including synagogues, cemeteries, old-age homes and hospitals — located in more than 80 Ukrainian cities and towns.

Of these, 250 properties have been thoroughly documented as belonging to the community, said Henry Filvarov, director of Ukraine's Institute for Urban Planning, who has been heading up KSEN's effort.

Ukraine's Jewish community, which numbers between 500,000 and 600,000, is the second largest in the former Soviet Union.

In 1992, Ukraine passed a bill for the restitution of houses of worship that formerly belonged to a variety of religious communities.

Since that time, more than 20 synagogues have been returned to local Jewish communities.

But some communities found it difficult to regain possession of the properties because implementation of the bill was left in the hands of local authorities.

Some communities did receive the synagogues, but they had no funds to maintain the newly acquired property.

The Jewish community in Kirovograd, for example, rents its synagogue to a local church. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES
**In the eye of the beholder:
Jewish identity through a lens**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Growing up in the Bronx, Ralph Lifschitz attended the Talmudic Academy in Manhattan. Later, as a college undergraduate, he studied at Yeshiva University.

When he was 16, he changed his name because he did not want a moniker that sounded like an epithet, he said. Five years later, he stopped keeping kosher.

Today, Ralph Lauren reigns as the monarch of a fashion kingdom.

“I’m very Jewish,” says the designer, when asked how he feels about his religious and cultural background.

“Changing my name had nothing to do with being Jewish,” he says as he crosses the river to Ellis Island to participate in an event orchestrated by French photographer Frederic Brenner.

“People always assume it was because I don’t like how Jewish it sounded, but that wasn’t it at all. My identity is not something I wanted to change,” Lauren says.

Lauren’s personal style epitomizes Americanness in a quintessentially WASPish way. For the journey to Ellis Island, he is fastidiously and fashionably attired in one of the broad-shouldered, narrow-waisted double-breasted pin-striped suits he is making famous this season.

The look of the models in his ads is similar. The athletic men are invariably broad-shouldered and strong-jawed. The women are always slim-hipped, straight-haired, blond beauties with narrow noses.

When asked whether he thinks there is any reflection of his religious background in his work, Lauren says “no,” but that his style is no less Jewish than it is Protestant. After all, he says, “what does Jewish look like?”

That is the point that Brenner, the photographer, wants to make. Brenner, 37, a Paris native, has been traveling for about two decades, photographing the Jewish people in all their diversity. Brenner, who holds a doctorate in social anthropology, says the camera is a “tool” through which he can communicate his observations.

Photos of prison seders

Many of the Jewish communities he has documented are now gone. Entire Jewish villages in the central Caucasus region of the former Soviet Union are empty now, Brenner says, as are the Jewish communities of Ethiopia’s mountain region, and of Belmonte, Portugal, where until recently the very last community of Marranos practiced their “hidden” Judaism. The photos Brenner took of these people are warm and loving.

Brenner’s photographs of American Jews, newly published in a book by Abrams, titled “Jews/America/A Representation,” are different. They are formal, distant, contrived, in stark contrast with Brenner’s images from other Jewish places.

The photographer agrees that there is a difference in his view of American Jews. The images “are what America is about,” he says during a recent interview. “It’s all smoke and mirrors, all contrived.”

He shows survivors of breast cancer — half a dozen women posed at a table naked from the waist up, each of their chests bearing the scars of their mastectomies. Another photo shows unidentified female prisoners at the maximum security prison in Bedford Hills, N.Y., lined up behind a seder table for the observance of Passover.

There is a photo of female Holocaust survivors with their lesbian daughters, posed in back-to-back pairs in a circle.

“Jews with Hogs” is the title of a picture of Jewish Harley-Davidson riders, posed in all of their Hells’ Angel-style regalia in front of a Miami Beach synagogue.

Another shows the teen-age members of Kahane Chai at their upstate New York summer camp, with the right-wing youth standing stiffly upright, their hands in fists at their sides, surrounded by tree trunks bearing paper gun-targets riddled with holes.

Brenner is fascinated by the mystery of Jewish survival in a non-Jewish world. “How does the Jew remain the Jew?” ponders the photographer, even as he attempts an answer: “Not by rejecting the society which wants to destroy us, but by swallowing it.”

The stars Brenner selected as “icons” of American Jewish life illustrate the degree to which different American Jews have assimilated each part of their identity. He invited about two dozen of those celebrities photographed for his book to participate in a well-publicized photographic happening on Ellis Island earlier this month.

The luminaries of North American art, music, literature, jurisprudence, business and sexology were posed in the corners of a waist-high labyrinth, which Brenner had constructed for the event.

Some were individuals whose Jewishness is part of the very essence of their public image: people such as Yitzhak Perlman, Isaac Stern, Ruth Westheimer and three generations of the Bronfman business dynasty.

There were also people who are not widely known as Jewish, people for whom Jewishness is just another part of their larger identity as Americans: people such as Ralph Lauren, Lauren Bacall and art dealer Leo Castelli.

Lauren, sitting on a grimy ferry boat navigating the choppy waters between Manhattan and Ellis Island with his wife, Ricky, who is also Jewish, and their three children, says he has always attended a Manhattan Conservative synagogue on the major Jewish holidays. They have a Passover dinner and light Chanukah candles, says his wife.

‘More about being an American’

Their two sons, David and Andrew, went to Hebrew school and became B’nai Mitzvah, though they did not require the same for their daughter, Dylan. Andrew, a 27-year-old movie producer and actor, says: “I consider myself Jewish but am open to other religions.”

When asked whether he feels it important to marry a Jewish woman, he says, “It’s not important. What matters to me is who you love.”

For Philip Glass, the avant-garde composer who was another of the “icons” who participated in Brenner’s event, being Jewish “doesn’t factor at all into my compositions.”

“I’d say that is probably true for most of the people here today. I’m not even a once-a-year Jew,” chuckles the craggy-faced, wild-haired composer, as he points out he has no intention of observing Yom Kippur.

So why was he taking part in the project about American Jewish identity? “Brenner asked me to. It’s more about being an American” than being a Jew.

Brenner says he plans to quit photography in a few years and turn to other pursuits, including poetry.

He has been single-minded about documenting Jewish cultures for the last 20 years because, he says, “we have been living in a time of mutation.”

“Two thousand years of history have disappeared before our eyes, and this has been the only possible moment to capture our exiles.”

In the end, Brenner says, he wants his work to be “about breaking stereotypes” as much as about documenting lost cultures. “There is not such a thing as ‘a’ Jew. I’m trying to put a face on all of our diasporas, on the many declensions of our Jewishness.” □