

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Palestinians warned that plans to build Jewish housing in an eastern Jerusalem Arab neighborhood would provoke violence and lead to the "Hebronization" of Jerusalem. The plan is currently before a municipal committee. [Page 2]**

■ **A Bedouin soldier in the Israel Defense Force was killed when a bomb exploded in the southern Lebanon security zone. In response, Israel shelled a number of villages in southern Lebanon. [Page 4]**

■ **Labor and Social Affairs Ministry inspectors raided snack bars and newsstands in the Tel Aviv area that were open on the Sabbath. The ministry's enforcement of "blue laws" came days after an Orthodox rally in Tel Aviv called for an end to local businesses desecrating the Sabbath.**

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Finance Minister Dan Meridor discussed additional cuts of about \$700 million in the 1997 budget. The government has already approved a total of \$1.6 billion in cuts from the \$64 billion budget.**

■ **Turkey's prime minister approved a long-delayed \$650 million deal for the upgrade of Turkish fighter jets by Israel. The accord, which was delayed by financing problems, still requires the approval of the Turkish president.**

■ **The mayor of Moscow joined hundreds of Jews in a city square for the lighting of the first Chanukah candle. Mayor Yuri Luzhkov's participation in the Lubavitch-sponsored event marked the first time a high-ranking Russian official attended a public Jewish religious celebration.**

■ **David Bar-Illan said he was speaking privately when he criticized the Anti-Defamation League's choice of New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman as a speaker for an ADL function in Los Angeles. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "does not feel the Israel government has a right to express an opinion about such matters," said Bar-Illan, a senior adviser to the premier.**

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Israeli teen-agers agonize as military service beckons***By Michele Chabin*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Abigail Hoffman, a student at Jerusalem's High School of the Arts, is feeling a lot of pressure these days.

By the end of the school year, Hoffman, a high school senior with dreams of becoming a professional dancer, will be drafted into the Israel Defense Force.

Hoffman admits that she is dreading military life.

"I'm a dancer, and I dance most of the week," she says. "Dancing once a week, when I have a break from the army, won't be enough."

Even beyond her professional goals, Hoffman does not want to spend the next two years in khaki — which is one year less than her male counterparts — for an additional reason.

"I grew up around people who believe in doing what they want to do. This generation isn't the generation of the Yom Kippur War," she says.

"We appreciate our quality of life. I want freedom. I just want to have fun."

Torn between her personal desires and her legal responsibilities as an Israeli citizen, she says, "I'm not motivated to serve. There was a time when I definitely didn't want to go, but now I think maybe I will. I'm not sure what to do."

There is only thing in this matter that Hoffman is sure of: "If everyone felt the way I do, it would be very dangerous for the country."

Indeed, since the summer, when the Israeli media first publicized widespread motivation problems among teen-age draftees and reserve soldiers, the IDF has warned of dire consequences.

"This erosion in national motivation is dangerous," Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai told reporters in September.

"We not only reduce the national ability to defend ourselves, but we are sending a message of weakness to our neighbors."

According to opinion polls, the IDF has ample reason to worry.

Although the percentage of Israelis who actually serve — 82 percent — has not dropped significantly during the past five decades, the number of young men wishing to serve in combat units — the heart and soul of the IDF — has dropped significantly.

'Not easy being a pacifist'

In interviews with teen-agers, it becomes clear just how many hope for an exemption on medical or other grounds.

"I'm hoping I won't have to go, first on moral grounds and also for practical reasons," says an Orthodox 18-year-old male who declined to give his name.

"I'll do anything I can, except for getting a psycho exemption, because no one will give you a job if they think you're psycho."

Says 17-year-old Orly Nurany: "I'm not going into the army because I'm a pacifist."

"It's not easy being a pacifist in this country, and all my friends go into the army, but I just can't do it. I'm going to tell the draft board the truth, but if they still insist, I'll get off on the grounds that I have mental problems."

In the most comprehensive survey on motivation to date, the Carmel Institute of Social Research reported last week that only 52 percent of Jewish high school students would opt for combat assignments, compared with 63 percent in 1988.

The study, which reflects data from 1994, found that religious students who are not fervently Orthodox tend to be more motivated than their secular peers.

While 67 percent of religious students, as compared with 68 percent in 1988, would serve in combat units, only 48 percent of the secular respondents said they wanted to go into combat, compared with 60 percent in 1988.

On the other hand, the survey found that most young Israelis accept the need to do military service. Of those about to be drafted, 86 percent said

they "want" or "very much want" to join the IDF, compared with 84 percent in 1988.

While the IDF finds the latter statistics encouraging, it is finally acknowledging what most Israelis have suspected for years: that a large and growing number of draft-age teens would rather program IDF computers than command IDF tanks.

Many attribute this trend to the fact that Israelis, who no longer fear annihilation from their Arab neighbors, have embraced many Western values.

"What has happened is that many Israelis are drowning in a sea of indulgence," Education Minister Zevulun Hammer recently wrote in a Jerusalem Post op-ed piece.

"And the chief victim has been a widespread abandonment of our national and community responsibilities."

Army spokesman Oded Ben-Ami agrees. "The change can be seen in the openness of Israeli society.

"During the '50s, '60s and '70s, people felt the very existence of the state was in jeopardy.

"Since the mid-1970s, there has been no such fear, and individuals have been trying to improve their own personal situation," he says.

"The state and security have taken second place on their priority list."

Ben-Ami says teen-agers are not the only ones with motivation problems.

"The majority of soldiers called for reserve duty don't want to serve, and much of it is society's doing," he says, noting that employers and others, such as university professors, do not support the soldier who needs exemptions to serve.

For example, he says, "An employer will tell a worker, 'Do whatever you can not to go.' Employers don't want to hire paratroopers because they serve a lot of reserve duty."

While acknowledging that there is little they can do to improve the lot of reservists, at least in the short term, the IDF and the Ministry of Education are working in tandem to boost motivation among high-school students.

In one new program, combat soldiers, rather than senior officers, spend a day with 12th-graders.

"When I was younger," says Ben-Ami, "they sent high-ranking officers. Now we're sending 19- and 20-year-olds who can speak their language. They can tell the class all the special things about being in their kind of unit."

'Can't blame people for wanting a life'

Even in this environment of low motivation, many young Israelis say they do not need a pep talk.

"Of course I'll go into the army," says 15-year-old Nili Yisraeli with an air of impatience.

"It's a tradition in our house and I've been brought up to want to serve.

"The kids are all motivated to join the IDF, at least until they put on a uniform. I'm not sure what I want to do, but I'm thinking about communications."

Shmuel Greenberg, who describes himself as Orthodox and politically left-wing, says he is "anxious to go into the IDF, despite the fact that society has attached the left with a stigma, saying we don't want to serve.

"That's really not true. My 13-year-old sister is already studying Arabic so she can one day go into intelligence."

Still, Greenberg understands why some of his peers are less than excited about donning a uniform.

"Many people feel the jobs they do in the army are a waste of time. If they're not motivated, they certainly won't be prepared to die for the country."

Sounding a bit wistful, he adds, "In most other countries, people our age are thinking about choosing a university, not an army unit. You can't blame people for wanting a life." □

Palestinians object to building Jewish homes in Arab district

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian officials warned this week that a plan to construct some 130 housing units for Jews in the heart of an Arab neighborhood in eastern Jerusalem could spark another wave of violence similar to the riots that erupted in September.

The plan, which calls for the building of homes in the Ras Al-Amud neighborhood, was presented Sunday to the Jerusalem Building and Planning Committee.

The plan was linked to a building project for Arabs in the same community.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert and Deputy Housing Minister Meir Porush have backed the plan.

The committee was expected to make its decision soon. If accepted, the plan would be sent on for further government consideration.

Palestinian opponents of the plan warned that building Jewish homes in the heart of the Arab neighborhood would lead to a "Hebronization" of Jerusalem.

Israeli and the Palestinian negotiators have held two months of intensive talks in an effort to agree on the logistics of a transfer of power in the tense West Bank town of Hebron, where some 500 Jewish settlers live among 130,000 Palestinians.

Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat held weekend consultations in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak regarding the stalled talks, as American officials were reportedly pressing to arrange a summit between Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

According to reports of the American plan, Israel would redeploy its troops from the nearby Arab town of Halhoul in exchange for broader security powers for Israel in Hebron.

Netanyahu suggested the summit with Arafat last week, saying that the two leaders could resolve the few remaining issues.

Arafat sent mixed signals to the invitation, first saying that he was ready for the meeting, but later reversing his position.

Meanwhile, each side blames the other for holding up the agreement for implementing the Israeli redeployment in Hebron.

At last Friday's weekly Cabinet meeting, Netanyahu reiterated his view that the accord was nearly 98 percent complete.

He added that it was time to look toward the next step in the peace process, the permanent-status talks.

Netanyahu told his ministers that he had a clear view of a permanent agreement with the Palestinians that would ensure Israel's vital interests.

He promised to present his views to the Cabinet for a full discussion in the coming weeks.

In Hebron, meanwhile, the Israel Defense Force removed concrete barriers from a main street there, but was not allowing any travel on it.

Shuhada, or Martyrs, Street was closed to Palestinian traffic after the February 1994 Hebron massacre, when Jewish settler Dr. Baruch Goldstein killed 29 Muslim worshippers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

The Palestinians have demanded the street's reopening as part of the redeployment agreement that is being negotiated. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Local communal leaders, WJC disagree on restitution effort***By David Landau*

OSLO (JTA) — The leader of French Jewry does not like the idea of a high-profile campaign to obtain compensation from the French government for Jewish assets seized during the Holocaust.

In sharp exchanges with leaders of the World Jewish Congress in Oslo, Henri Hajdenberg, president of CRIF, the umbrella group of French Jewish secular organizations, said he would oppose "Jews from America or from Israel coming in and speaking to our government" because they do not comprehend the situation in France.

Hajdenberg's recent remarks echoed the ongoing controversy in several countries across Europe, where local Jewish communities and the WJC are at odds over who should spearhead restitution efforts and who should receive any payments that are offered.

Delegates from several European countries applauded Hajdenberg when he insisted that indigenous Jews must head the Jewish representation in any negotiation with governments of Western European countries and that they must set the direction of such negotiations.

For their part, both WJC President Edgar Bronfman and Secretary General Israel Singer insisted that their policy was to coordinate with the local Jewish communities prior to any WJC action on restitution or any other matter.

Yosef Burg, longtime leader of Israel's National Religious Party, told delegates from small European communities that the intervention of WJC officials from abroad lent much weight to claims and positions put forward by these communities.

But Jewish representatives from Poland quibbled with WJC officials over the right to represent Jewish claims in their country.

Singer declared that whatever the letter of the Polish law, it was not acceptable that the 2,000 Jews now living in Poland speak as the representatives of the 3.5 million Polish Jews who lived in that country before the Holocaust. Most of them died there.

'Avoid triggering backlash'

While Hajdenberg of France praised the WJC's ongoing high-profile campaign against Swiss banks to track looted Jewish assets, he said in an interview that the French Jewish leadership favored a "gradual process" of exposing wartime archives and acquainting the general French public with the truth of what had happened.

French Jews, who have often been more cautious in public campaigns, needed to avoid triggering an anti-Semitic backlash, he said. This was especially true in today's political climate where extremist right-wing factions were becoming more powerful.

The CRIF president said President Jacques Chirac's public statement acknowledging for the first time the French nation's responsibility for what had been done to French Jewry during World War II represented a major moral achievement.

Until that statement more than a year ago, the official position was that Vichy France was a historical aberration and therefore its crimes against the Jews were not the responsibility of the French Republic that existed before and after the war years.

Steady Jewish lobbying for it had helped to bring about the president's statement. Now, Hajdenberg said, it would be difficult for the Jewish community to present French public opinion with monetary demands.

Ultimately, he said, the French Jewish community would like to see the government make a lump-sum

payment for the benefit of persons who were hidden as children during the war. Many of them remain today in difficult personal or financial straits.

As to monetary restitution for property illegally taken and never returned, he said: "We will see."

The reparation issue made headlines recently when French journalist Brigitte Durant disclosed in a book that apartments in the now-fashionable Marais quarter of Paris, currently put up for sale by the municipality, had been owned or occupied by Jews before the war.

But Hajdenberg, in the interview, said the extent of Jewish ownership of these apartments had been exaggerated, both in the French and Israeli media.

Hajdenberg noted that wealthy, established French Jewish families, such as the Rothschilds, had regained their properties after the war. Those who lost properties tended to be small-business owners, many of them among the 75,000 French Jews who were deported and never returned.

Sources in the WJC leadership sought to dismiss Hajdenberg as not representative of French Jewry, despite his position as head of the CRIF. They accused him of misplaced apprehensiveness.

But Hajdenberg said he did represent other Jewish leaders.

As for Hajdenberg's concerns about an anti-Semitic backlash, the WJC maintains that anti-Semitism is caused not by Jews claiming what is theirs — but by anti-Semites.

Anti-Semitism is likely to erupt regardless of what Jews do or do not do in any particular country or situation, the WJC said.

One goal of the WJC has been to encourage European governments to establish their own investigative bodies to track the whereabouts of looted Jewish assets.

Bronfman said repeatedly during the Oslo conference late last month that the example of Norway, which has set up a state commission to examine the loss of Jewish assets during the war, should be emulated by other Western European countries.

Flew to Stockholm

After the conference, Singer flew to Stockholm, where, together with leaders of the Swedish Jewish community, he urged the foreign minister to set up a state commission to investigate charges that Jewish deposits and German Reich deposits were held in Swedish banks.

Meanwhile, the Argentine Jewish community is being actively encouraged by President Carlos Menem to file, catalog and selectively publish wartime archives that the government began releasing four years ago, Reuben Beraja, head of the Argentine Jewish umbrella group DAIA, said in an interview.

The first volume of "Testimony," a collection of this archival material, is due to be published next March.

According to Beraja, it will detail the massive investments by leading Third Reich companies in the Argentine economy.

It may also shed light on rumors of Nazi gold having been deposited in Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay.

And it may also trace the Nazi officers who took refuge in Latin America after the war.

Indeed, a 1945 document recently released by the WJC said that recent reports "indicate clearly that Argentina is not only a likely refuge for Nazi criminals but also has been and still is the focal point of Nazi financial and economic activity in this hemisphere."

The document was recently uncovered in the U.S. National Archives.

Beraja is one of the three Jewish members of the commission appointed by the Swiss banks and the WJC to oversee the investigation into claims that Swiss banks still hold Jewish assets deposited before and during the war. □

Labor legislator's bill backs Orthodox religious councils*By Michele Chabin*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Labor Knesset member Avi Yehezkel has introduced a bill that would require all members of the country's religious councils to declare that they are Orthodox.

The bill, which last week passed its first of three required Knesset readings in a vote of 22-5, apparently came as a shock to many parliamentarians, including those in Yehezkel's own Labor Party.

If the bill ultimately passes all three readings by the 120-member Knesset — something that is considered highly unlikely — it would invalidate several High Court of Justice rulings that have paved the way for non-Orthodox Jews to sit on religious councils.

In one of those rulings, issued in January, the court reaffirmed an earlier ruling that local religious councils cannot bar candidates from non-Orthodox denominations solely on the basis of their religious affiliation.

In its ruling at the time, the court rejected the Jerusalem municipality's decision not to appoint Reform and Conservative rabbis to its council.

The local religious councils, supervised by the Religious Affairs Ministry, have exclusive jurisdiction over marriage, kashrut, burial and other religious matters for all Jews living in Israel.

The services provided by the councils are rendered according to Orthodox practice regardless of the affiliation or religious customs of the individual receiving the service.

Anat Galili, spokeswoman for the Reform movement, said Yehezkel's action had come as a total surprise.

Last week, "the Labor Party declared that it would not support legislation that would change the religious status quo. How can we believe what the Labor Party says when it lets its members do what they want?"

Although Galili expressed the view that "the bill will never pass because Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, The Third Way and most members of the Labor Party won't support it," she added that once legislation is introduced, "there is always some risk."

Labor faction Chairman Ra'anah Cohen said most Labor Knesset members had been caught off guard, adding that nobody had read Yehezkel's bill "or knows what it says." Noting that the measure must first be approved by members of the Knesset's legislative committee before being eligible for its final two Knesset readings, Cohen said, "we'll stop it in the committee. In a few days, no one will remember that this bill existed." □

Israeli Bedouin soldier killed by Hezbollah bomb in Lebanon*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli soldier was killed and another was wounded when a roadside bomb exploded during the weekend in southern Lebanon.

Mohammed Hujirat, 27, a Bedouin tracker from the Galilee, was killed Saturday while leading a patrol in the eastern sector of the southern Lebanon security zone.

Another tracker who was with him suffered light to moderate shrapnel injuries.

An initial inquiry conducted by the Israel Defense Force found that the bombs were set a day or two before by members of the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement and that the charges were detonated by remote control. Several other explosive devices, which did not go off, were found in the area.

The inquiry indicated that the Hezbollah members had come from the nearby Tivnit village.

In retaliation, Israeli forces shelled the area, causing the injuries of seven Lebanese civilians.

Lebanon filed a complaint against Israel with the United Nations and called for a meeting of the five-nation monitoring group that was established in April to oversee a cease-fire ending cross-border fighting at the time between Israel and Hezbollah.

A senior Israeli military source said Hezbollah, not Israel, had violated the truce by opening fire on the IDF from civilian areas. Under the terms of cease-fire, the two sides agreed not to launch attacks from or target civilian areas on either side of the border. □

Russian officials investigate Jewish cemetery desecration*By Lev Krichevsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — For the first time, Russian federal officials are launching an investigation into the desecration of a Jewish cemetery.

The office of Russia's Prosecutor General initiated a criminal investigation after 16 graves were destroyed recently in the Jewish cemetery of Saratov, located some 450 miles southeast of Moscow.

The move came in response to a letter by Vladimir Goussinsky, president of the Russian Jewish Congress, who urged the prosecutor general to investigate the crime and to take measures to prevent such incidents in the future.

Several dozen Jewish graves at the same cemetery were desecrated a few months ago.

Although the cemetery belongs to the municipality, Jewish leaders in Saratov said they could not rely on the authorities to protect the cemetery.

The Jewish community had to hire special guards for the cemetery in the town that is home to 8,000 Jews.

In a separate case, two suspects in the April bombing of the Jewish community center in the town of Yaroslavl will face trial Dec. 23.

Parts of the 80-year-old building housing the community center suffered serious damage as a result of the explosion, which caused no injuries. Along with a synagogue, the center houses local organizations that serve the needs of the Jewish community in Yaroslavl, located about 130 miles northeast of Moscow. □

Israeli navy to investigate deaths of 2 divers in accident*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's navy has appointed a commission to investigate the deaths of two commandos during a routine diving exercise last week in Haifa Bay.

The bodies of the two — Petty Officer Yair Engel, 19, of Kibbutz Ramat Rahel, and Petty Officer Matan Polivoda, 20, of Mevasseret Zion — were found Dec. 5.

The two were found about three feet below the surface.

They were tied together by a cable, which is standard procedure in diving exercises. The cable system helps ensure that if one of the divers is in trouble, the other can respond.

Both commandos had taken part in similar exercises in the past and were approaching the end of the course. According to an initial inquiry, weather conditions were normal for the drill, which took place the night of Dec. 4.

The two had apparently completed half the exercise when they carried out a status check at a little after 10 p.m. When they failed to surface as scheduled 50 minutes later, the drill commander called for them twice, then declared a state of emergency. □