

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The Palestinian Authority blamed Israel's peace process policy for the fatal terror attack on an Israeli family in the West Bank. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility for the attack. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised to strengthen settlements in the West Bank. [Page 3]

■ The Union of American Hebrew Congregations is set to consider a resolution that would rescind the Reform movement's official opposition to rabbis officiating at interfaith marriages. But it remains unclear whether the reform movement's lay leaders can overturn a stance originally adopted by its rabbinic body. [Page 3]

■ Scotland Yard warned the London Jewish community that it could face retaliation after two Palestinians were convicted of conspiring to bomb Israeli and Jewish targets in London. [Page 4]

■ The Israel Defense Force freed a female soldier who was imprisoned for being absent without leave after the army refused to recognize her civil marriage to a British citizen. According to Israeli army policy, female soldiers who marry are to be released from service.

■ A 6-foot-4-inch menorah stolen from a holiday display at a park 30 miles northwest of New York City was found in a neighboring town. Police are investigating the theft from the New City, N.Y., park as a bias incident.

■ About 5,000 Muslim worshipers participated in the first mass prayer service at a renovated mosque in Solomon's Stables, a historic site located at Jerusalem's Temple Mount. During the services, Islamic leaders said Jerusalem is the "sole property of the nation of Islam."

■ The U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem took out ads in Jerusalem newspapers telling Palestinian Americans that Israel cannot force them to give up their U.S. citizenship. Critics charge that Israel has taken steps recently to revoke the residency rights of Palestinian Americans living in Jerusalem unless they surrender their American passports.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Return of Kazan synagogue expected to boost revival**

By Lev Krichevsky

KAZAN, Russia (JTA) — Isaac remembers the time when his father would take him and his younger brother to the synagogue in this city's downtown some 70 years ago.

Kazan's Jewish community had gained czarist government permission 100 years ago to open a synagogue, and the building was dedicated in 1911.

But in 1928, the Communist authorities confiscated the 3-story building and turned it into a teacher's club.

After the city's sole synagogue was shut down, "Father wouldn't take his kids with him when going to pray in a small private house," said Isaac, 79, a retired pharmacist.

"He was afraid that we could tell anyone at school or elsewhere that we were taking part in sort-of-illegal religious gatherings."

The struggle to regain ownership of the building that began in earnest five years ago, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, came to an end this week with the rededication of the synagogue in Kazan's historical center.

Hundreds of Kazan Jews packed the synagogue Tuesday to celebrate its official return to the Jewish community. They were joined by leaders of the Russian Jewish community, Jewish activists from across Russia, and Israeli and Tatarstan government officials.

Among those attending were Vladimir Gusinsky, president of the Russian Jewish Congress; Aliza Shenhar, Israel's ambassador to Russia; Rabbi Adolph Shayeveich, chief rabbi of Russia; Kazan Mayor Kamil Iskhakov; and emissaries of the Lubavitch movement.

Kazan is the capital of Tatarstan, formerly the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and now a part of the Russian Federation.

Tatarstan, with a population of 3.6 million, has a Jewish community of some 15,000, most of whom live here, in the capital city.

The reopening of Kazan's only synagogue is expected to boost efforts to revive the Jewish community.

When Avraham Lerer, a representative of the worldwide Lubavitch movement, first came to Kazan in 1993, he found a small group of elderly Jews praying in a private home.

"There was nothing here at that time except for a minyan of elderly Jewish men," said Lerer, now the chief rabbi of Kazan.

Community 'will rebuild itself'

Regaining possession of the synagogue building will help the Jewish community expand its activities, Lerer said.

"Having its own physical center, the Jewish community in Tatarstan will rebuild itself in a natural way," said Gusinsky, head of the Russian Jewish Congress.

According to Yuriy Pliner, a local businessman and community leader, the synagogue will become a Jewish community center serving various communal needs.

The building will be used for religious, cultural and educational purposes.

All the city's Jewish organizations, including local offices of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Russian Jewish Congress, will be located in the building.

It will also house the Sunday school, which now has 80 students, and a welfare facility providing hot meals and other assistance for those in need.

However, before these plans can be realized, Pliner said, substantial funds are needed to refurbish the building, whose bare walls have cracks and water damage from years of neglect.

The cost of renovations will be at least \$200,000.

Sponsors of the project are expected to include local Jewish business leaders, the Russian Jewish Congress, Chabad Lubavitch, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Tatarstan government.

Some Jewish leaders hailed the official return of the synagogue because it took place in a predominantly Muslim republic.

"Many doubted that this will ever happen in a Muslim country," said

Yevgeny Satanovsky, a member of the presidium of the Russian Jewish Congress.

While Islamic fundamentalism has attracted some followers in this republic since the fall of communism, Tatarstan officials pursue a policy of non-discrimination toward religious and ethnic minorities, said one Jewish official here.

About 40 percent of the Tatarstan population is not Muslim.

The cordial relationship between the Jewish community and the government was reflected in the meeting held between Russian Jewish leaders and Tatarstan President Mintimer Shaymiev.

The Tatar leader promised that the country would continue to be a safe and comfortable place for Jews.

Shaymiev asked Gusinsky, who headed the Jewish delegation, to help Tatarstan in attracting increased foreign investment.

Gusinsky is also president of Most Bank, one of Russia's leading financial institutions.

Some Moscow newspapers said Tatarstan's economic interests were behind the government's return of the synagogue.

Meanwhile, efforts are continuing to regain possession of synagogues in other parts of Russia.

The Russian law on restitution of property that belonged to religious communities was signed more than five years ago, but most of the country's synagogues still have not been returned.

In many places, the government is confronting problems in finding new homes for the institutions housed in buildings claimed by Jewish communities.

At the same time, some Jewish communities have been reluctant to reclaim ownership of confiscated synagogues because they lack the funds to maintain the buildings.

The Russian Jewish Congress has listed about 20 synagogues it wants to reclaim in the near future.

The community of the Siberian city of Novosibirsk is likely to regain possession of its synagogue next year.

The use of the old Novosibirsk synagogue during and after Soviet rule is probably the most unusual in the former Soviet Union.

Now encircled by barbed wire, this turn-of-the-century synagogue was incorporated after the Bolshevik Revolution into the local penitentiary complex.

For decades, it has been serving as the prison's dining facility. □

WJC publicly calls on Swiss to pay interim compensation

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The World Jewish Congress is openly calling on Switzerland to create a preliminary compensation fund to begin settling claims of Holocaust victims whose wealth vanished into the Swiss banking system more than 50 years ago.

"The time has come for the competent authorities to make a good faith financial gesture" so that "those who have suffered may yet see in their lifetime some measure of justice done," said Edgar Bronfman, WJC president.

Bronfman made the appeal in testimony before the House Banking and Financial Services Committee, which held a daylong hearing Wednesday to explore missing Jewish assets and the role Switzerland and its banks played during and after World War II.

His public appeal follows earlier indications that Jewish and Swiss officials were considering concluding a preliminary settlement.

Bronfman did not specify a dollar amount, but

informed sources said the total being considered was \$250 million.

The committee also heard testimony from Undersecretary of Commerce Stuart Eizenstat, on behalf of the Clinton administration; Paul Volcker, who is heading an independent international panel probing the issue; and Georg Krayner, chairman of the Swiss Bankers Association.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, who has been conducting his own investigation, echoed the request made by Bronfman.

D'Amato said in his testimony that the Swiss government should make a "goodwill gesture" in the face of what he called "damning information that is emerging" about Switzerland's wartime past.

Thomas Borer, head of a Swiss task force coordinating Switzerland's own investigation, pledged swift action from the Swiss government.

But he gave no indication that restitution would be made soon.

"Nothing is more important to the people and government of Switzerland than establishing the complete truth in this matter as swiftly and humanely as possible," Borer said.

"We are fully aware that nothing less than our reputation as an honorable country and reliable friend is at stake."

His words came as Switzerland's Parliament gave final approval this week to probe Swiss financial dealings with Nazi Germany and the fate of Jewish assets deposited in Swiss banks.

An independent commission, empowered to lift Switzerland's banking secrecy rules, is expected to start work next month.

Borer said the investigation would likely take between two and three years.

'Injustice is being perpetuated'

If assets belonging to Holocaust victims are still being wrongfully held in Switzerland, Borer said, his government will make "every effort to return them to their rightful owners" or "relevant charities."

Bronfman said Swiss officials had made a similar promise to him more than a year ago, but "not one franc has been transferred as restitution."

"Nobody should be allowed to make a profit from the ashes of the Holocaust," he added.

The WJC claims that Swiss banks hold \$7 billion in assets and interest belonging to Jews.

Swiss bankers have put the number at \$32 million, based on a 1995 investigation that turned up 775 dormant Jewish accounts.

In his testimony, D'Amato accused the Swiss government and Swiss banks of complicity with the Nazis.

"They hid in the shadows, concluding deals with the genocidal murderers of the Holocaust, and through administrative decrees and secret deals with Communist governments, acted to deny the rightful owners their assets in Swiss banks," D'Amato said.

He added that the "injustice is being perpetuated by an almost arrogant, contemptuous establishment that has repeatedly rebuffed" efforts to trace the missing assets.

Borer, who has accused D'Amato of using unverified documents and presenting them as facts, cautioned against "hasty conclusions and unsubstantiated claims."

Borer added that he visited the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum here prior to appearing before Congress in order to reflect amid the surroundings on the way the Switzerland has been handling the matter.

"I believe my country is doing everything it can," he said. □

UAHC to vote on presiding over interfaith marriages

By Leslie Katz

Jewish Bulletin of Northern California

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — Revisiting a question that has long plagued both rabbis and congregants, the Reform movement is set to decide this weekend whether to rescind its official opposition to rabbis officiating at interfaith marriages.

Delegates to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' national board meeting in Los Angeles are to vote on a resolution that, among other things, would revoke a portion of a 1973 resolution drafted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Reform movement's rabbinic body. That document declares its opposition to Reform rabbis' participation in "any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage."

How much clout the lay leadership's rejection of that stance would carry is unclear.

"It's like saying the state senate can make a determination the president needs to abide by," said Patricia Karlin-Neumann, former leader of Temple Israel in Alameda, Calif., and interim director of the UAHC's Northern California council. "I think most people feel like the lay organization can't tell the rabbinic organization what to do."

The author of the new resolution insists, however, that rejection of the 1973 passage is more than symbolic.

"I think that a lot of rabbis' decisions against officiating are made because of the CCAR resolution," said David Belin, former chairman of the UAHC's Strategic Planning Task Force on Jewish Continuity and Growth.

Despite the CCAR's 1973 resolution, the Reform movement has long asserted that rabbis must ultimately rely on their own judgment when deciding whether to officiate at interfaith weddings. Some Reform rabbis do officiate at mixed weddings, sometimes on the condition that the couple agree to raise their children as Jews.

Belin, an attorney from Des Moines, says the resolution he authored reflects the attitude of a majority of Reform Jews. He cites research from 1991 to 1992 by the Jewish Outreach Institute showing that 75 percent of Reform Jews — and nearly 60 percent of Conservative Jews — want rabbis to officiate at intermarriages in which there is a commitment to create a Jewish household.

Between 35 percent and 45 percent of Reform rabbis now conduct such marriages.

'For the rank and file'

"Religion is for people, the rank and file," Belin said. "What people do not like is the rabbinic organization saying that rabbis should not [officiate]. We're trying to move that to a neutral position."

The resolution would do that by restating, in official terms, the principle of self-determination.

"It is really urging that each rabbi has the right to determine in his or her conscience whether or not to officiate," said Dennis Bates, president of UAHC's Northern California council.

The resolution stems from demographic realities, say those familiar with it. The 1990 National Jewish Population Study said that during the past 30 years, the intermarriage rate has continued to rise. In marriages that have taken place in the last decade, 62 percent of those who identify as Reform Jews have married non-Jews.

The statement to be considered this weekend — titled "Resolution on Rabbinic Officiation at Intermarriages Where There is a Commitment to Identify as a Jewish Household and Raise Any Children as Jews" — urges CCAR's approximately 1,700 members to do "everything

possible" to encourage that commitment. It also urges CCAR members to be sensitive to the concerns of non-Jews marrying Jews who pledge to create a Jewish home but "often feel rejected and upset when rabbis assert that Jewish tradition does not permit them to officiate."

Said Belin: "Put yourself in the position of the non-Jew. They cannot understand if they've gone 90 percent of the way, why the rabbi can't bend to officiate."

George Markley said he understands why.

As part of a series of articles on the officiation debate in Reform Judaism magazine's fall 1996 issue, Markley, the former vice chairman of the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach, expressed his opposition to rabbis officiating in interfaith marriages.

"When rabbis officiate, irrespective of what conditions they impose," he wrote, "the message is that we have given up on ever stemming the intermarriage tide and our only hope is to engage in damage control, perform the ceremony and hope that the couple will establish a Jewish home and return to the synagogue someday."

Not surprisingly, opposition to the resolution is expected. Neither Belin nor Bates of the regional UAHC could predict the outcome of the vote. □

Palestinians blame terrorism on Netanyahu's peace policies

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Palestinian Authority said this week that the fatal attack on an Israeli family in the West Bank was caused by Israel's refusal to implement the Israeli-Palestinian self-rule accords.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu obviously has not "learned the lessons of last September's tragic events," the Palestinian statement said, referring to the Palestinian rioting that erupted after Israel opened a new entrance to an archaeological tunnel near the Temple Mount.

No condemnation of Wednesday's terror attack near the settlement of Beit El was in the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Information statement. The statement was issued Thursday, when thousands of Israelis went to the funeral of Ita Tzur, 42, and her son, Ephraim, 12.

Five other family members — the father, Yoel, and four daughters — were wounded in the attack. The family was returning by car to Beit El when terrorists opened fire.

Speaking with evident emotion at the funeral in Beit El, Netanyahu vowed to strengthen government backing for settlements.

"Our answer to these murderers," he said, "is that we are staying here. We are building here. We live here."

Netanyahu said Wednesday that Israel viewed the attack as a serious matter and that the Palestinian Authority must not give shelter to terrorists and child murderers.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility for the attack, which occurred on the 28th anniversary of the front's founding. The group vowed to carry out more attacks. The terrorists fled to nearby Ramallah, which is under Palestinian self-rule.

In its statement, the Palestinian Authority said, "For quite a long time, Palestinian officials and those in the international community have voiced their concern about the possibility of a strong popular reaction to the increasing Israeli measures on the ground, especially on the illegal settling activities being implemented by the hard-line Israeli government."

Netanyahu's government, "by contrast, has turned its back on these calls of warning," added the statement, which was posted Thursday on the Web site of the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Information. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

**Jewish community on alert
after Palestinians found guilty***By Bernard Josephs**London Jewish Chronicle*

LONDON (JTA) — Scotland Yard warned the London Jewish community this week that it could face retaliation after two Palestinians were convicted of conspiring to bomb Israeli and Jewish targets in London.

Samar Alami, 30, a chemical engineer, and Jawad Botmeh, 28, a businessman, were found guilty this week of planning the July 1994 bombings of the Israeli Embassy and the Joint Israel Appeal.

The two are due to be sentenced next week.

A third defendant, Mahmoud Abu-Wardeh, 25, was acquitted.

Charges against a Palestinian woman in connection with the embassy bombing were dismissed by the judge last month.

Fourteen people were injured in the July 26, 1994, embassy bombing; five people were injured in the next day's bombing of the Joint Israel Appeal.

Scotland Yard issued the warning to the Jewish community during a series of meetings with officials of the Community Security Trust, which oversees the safety of Jewish communal sites. Scotland Yard sources said this week that they were still searching for other terrorists.

A spokesman for the trust called for vigilance in the wake of the trial.

"We know without doubt that the defendants and other hostile forces were attempting to infiltrate the Jewish community," he said. "The picture which we are getting from various well-placed sources is that the situation is getting worse as far as communal security is concerned."

The trust spokesman said high-profile Jewish institutions were being closely guarded by police and by the trust's own security volunteers. □

**Intelligence reports indicate
Iran-Syria military cooperation***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has received Western intelligence reports that Iran recently dispatched a squadron of combat jets to Syria.

The reports were unclear whether the jets were intended as a potential strike force against Israel or were part of a joint training exercise.

Military ties between Syria and Iran have strengthened in recent months, according to recent assessments.

Earlier this week, Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai confirmed that the two countries cooperated in shipping military and civilian supplies to Hezbollah units operating in Lebanon.

Ongoing Israeli-Syrian tensions prompted the deputy Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Matan Vilnai, to state that Syrian President Hafez Assad knows he would be "pummeled" by Israel if war broke out between the two countries.

The comment prompted Foreign Minister David Levy to criticize Vilnai, adding that such statements only served to heat up tensions. In remarks Wednesday to Israel Radio, Levy also said peace with Syria would require Israel to cede the Golan Heights. "Whoever thinks it is possible to attain peace without any movement or compromise, I support him, but I just want to know how he is going to achieve this," Levy said.

His comments prompted angry responses from Golan settlement leaders and from the Third Way Party, which broke away from the Labor Party over the Golan issue and is a member of the current coalition. □

Getting their fill of doughnuts*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Amid an ongoing controversy over unauthorized activities of religious groups on Israeli army bases, members of the Reform movement were allowed to pass out jelly doughnuts to soldiers on the Golan Heights.

The food is traditionally eaten during the Chanukah festival.

The controversy has centered primarily on activities by the Chabad movement at Israeli bases.

The doughnut delivery was cleared after Meretz Knesset member Ra'anana Cohen intervened.

Meanwhile, Cohen had his own sweet snack, compliments of the Chabad, whose members arrived at the Knesset on Tuesday to present the treats to members of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

Cohen did not want the Chabad members to give the legislators the doughnuts directly. So the Chabad members handed the goodies over to committee Chairman Uzi Landau, who did the honors. □

Skinheads attack Bratislava rabbi*By Randi Druzin*

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (JTA) — Three skinheads have been detained in connection with an assault on Bratislava's Chief Rabbi Baruch Meyers, according to members of the Jewish community in the Slovakian capital.

The American-born Meyers was attacked by four skinheads Dec. 6.

The teen-agers' assault began with verbal abuse and culminated in physical violence, which ended when passers-by intervened. The attack took place at Rybné Square, where a Chanukah service was to take place the next day, and where a monument to Holocaust victims is to be erected next year.

"It is not anything new," Slovak Jewish Association secretary Jozef Weiss said of the incident. "These things have happened before."

Meyers, a Lubavitch rabbi, had been attacked in the Slovakian capital soon after arriving here in 1993. □

Israeli ties with Oman unchanged

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's representative in Oman said he had not received any word on a decision by the Gulf nation to freeze ties with Jerusalem.

Oded Ben-Haim told the Reuters news agency that activities to advance commercial ties were continuing, if on a small-scale.

He added that the trade mission had recently moved to new offices, which must be some indication of the stability of ties.

Oman's foreign minister was quoted earlier this month as saying that the Gulf Arab state was freezing ties with Israel to protest what it described as "unacceptable" policy regarding the Palestinians. □

Israel, Jordan sign accord

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel and Jordan have signed an agreement to enable the direct transport of goods between the two countries.

Until now, commercial goods had to be transferred between trucks at border crossings.

The accord, recently signed in the Jordanian capital of Amman, came after months of negotiations.

It does not include provisions for goods shipped between Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. □