



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross prodded Israeli and Palestinian leaders to reach an agreement on redeploying Israeli forces in Hebron. His visit coincided with unrest in the West Bank town during which three firebombs were thrown at Jewish targets. [Page 3]

■ A bomb exploded close to a hitchhiking post near a Jewish settlement in the Etzion bloc. The blast caused damage, but no injuries. [Page 3]

■ The Czech National Bank will not compensate Slovak Jews for gold that was taken from them by the Nazis. The Association of Slovak Jewish Communities received a message from the bank in response to a request for the compensation.

■ Gay activists in Israel demanded that President Ezer Weizman resign for calling homosexuals "abnormal" in a public speech. Weizman agreed to meet with a delegation of homosexuals, but would not retract his remarks. [Page 3]

■ Anti-Semitic slogans and swastikas were painted at the entrance to a Jewish cemetery in Petrozavodsk, a town in northern Russia.

■ More than one-quarter of Montreal's Jews expect to leave Quebec within the next five years, according to a recent survey. [Page 4]

■ Three kinds of mushrooms were found in the Dead Sea by an Israeli research team working with a botanical expert from Ukraine. The discovery is seen as further proof that the body of water does not deserve its name.

■ Israel's ambassador in Athens presented his credentials to the president of the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia. He will be the first non-resident ambassador to Macedonia since the two countries established ties in 1995.

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## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD [Part 2]

### Croatian Jewish community faces challenges to survival

By Ruth E. Gruber

ZAGREB, Croatia (JTA) — Croatia's Jews observed Chanukah this year by celebrating the 190th anniversary of the founding of the Jewish community here in the Croatian capital.

The Festival of Lights is a perfect example of the "ever-renewed miracle of the survival of the Jewish people, their resilience, optimism and courage," Paris-based historian Diana Pinto wrote in a letter to the Zagreb community on the occasion.

"If even the smallest quantity of oil could last eight days, so even the smallest of Jewish communities has within itself, provided it wants to, the power to endure," she wrote.

Decimated by the Holocaust, constrained during the Communist era and buffeted by the war in the former Yugoslavia, the 2,000-member Croatian Jewish community is struggling to endure.

Like almost all Jewish communities in former Communist Europe, it has undergone a revival in the past decade as people have attempted to rediscover their Jewish roots.

"We are very small in number," said Igor Francetic, the Zagreb community's vice president, "and thus have trouble finding Jewish marriage partners. We have not had a rabbi for the last 50 years. And then there is the question of identity. Still, we are trying to preserve Jewish culture and Jewish traditions."

These three issues — demographics, identity and the lack of a rabbi — as well as a lack of financial resources, are key to the community's continuity and loom foremost in local Jewish policy.

Although the chief challenges for the Croatian community are internal, the country's Jewish revival is taking place amid social and political conditions that also have an impact on the community's development.

The bloody breakup of the former Yugoslavia destroyed the Yugoslav Jewish federation and cut long-standing links between Jewish communities in Croatia and Serbia.

A wave of Jewish, as well as non-Jewish, refugees from the war in Bosnia came to both Croatia and Serbia. The war also prompted many younger Jews to emigrate as part of what one community member called a "very intensive" brain drain.

In addition, the nationalism of Croatian President Franjo Tudjman has raised concerns about apparent efforts to rehabilitate the World War II Ustashe regime, the homegrown Croatian fascists who ruled wartime Croatia as a Nazi puppet state.

The issue remains problematic, despite efforts by the government to demonstrate support for Jewish causes.

Nonetheless, said historian Ivo Goldstein, "there is little open anti-Semitism in Croatia."

### Investing in communal infrastructure

Some, particularly older, community members are skeptical of the chances of survival. Other members and observers are more optimistic.

"There is a community here which is aware of its roots, aware of how much damage has been done to those roots and, though it doesn't have all the answers, has some pretty good idea of how to repair some of that damage," said British Rabbi Walter Rothschild, who traveled to Zagreb to take part in the anniversary celebrations.

"It has invested a lot in recent years in communal infrastructure and in developing some very competent lay leadership, one that is honest enough to admit the gaps," he said.

Croatia had 25,000 Jews before World War II, most of them prosperous and largely assimilated. Some 20,000 were killed by the Nazis or the Ustashe regime. Postwar Communist Yugoslavia was not a member of the Soviet bloc, and local Jews were not persecuted or isolated, as were Jews in other Communist states.

But they further assimilated into society and lost contact with religious life. Of the community's 2,000 members today, about half are older

than 60, and many are poor and alone. Some 80 percent of community members are believed to be children of or partners in mixed marriages.

"What is happening today was unexpected and unforeseeable," said Dunja Sprajc, secretary general of the Zagreb Jewish community.

"The descendants of mixed families in the first, second, and even the third generation are coming to the Jewish community, with which they feel an inexplicable bond, and are working persistently to affirm their identity."

Although aware that some members may not be accepted as Jews elsewhere, Croatian community leaders took a definite decision to open its doors to people in this situation. "The Jewish world must understand that the Jewish community here will not survive if they have no mixed marriages," said Melita Svob, who has done in-depth research on the Croatian Jewish community.

"If we don't have mixed marriages, we don't have a community. It is not a question of whether they are Jewish or not [according to Jewish law], but if their children wish to be Jewish — that's the important part."

Historian Goldstein epitomizes the dilemma.

The son of a former community president, Goldstein himself is not Jewish, according to Jewish law.

"My young daughter is only one-quarter Jewish," he said, "but she still attends the Jewish kindergarten and other activities. When I was 6 or 7, I knew nothing of Jewish traditions. My daughter knows a lot."

Some 1,400 of Croatia's Jews live in Zagreb, with the rest scattered in eight other small communities.

The community center in the heart of the city includes a small prayer room, a bar, a clubroom, an auditorium and an exhibition gallery. There is also a library, a Jewish kindergarten and a computer center sponsored by ORT.

With support from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and other sources, the community publishes a bulletin, arranges cultural programs and runs an 80-bed home for the elderly.

But Zagreb is virtually the only Jewish community of its size in former Communist Central Europe that does not have a rabbi, and community leaders and members feel this lack acutely.

Currently, an Israeli teacher funded by the JDC who conducts Hebrew and other classes also leads services Friday nights and holidays.

"We need a rabbi to give us a real Jewish life, because of the young people," said one community member. "But there is a problem of language and of money — and of what kind of rabbi."

"If we bring in an Orthodox rabbi, the people will run away. They'll feel guilty that they don't know anything. The generation that was raised in atheism will not be able to adapt themselves to a strict rule. We must rebuild step by step." □

## Red Cross documents confirm knowledge of Nazi atrocities

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The International Committee of the Red Cross has released a collection of World War II documents showing that the organization knew about the persecution of Jews in Nazi death camps, but felt powerless to speak out.

One of the most startling revelations contained in the records is that the Nazis agreed to let Red Cross workers into German concentration camps in March 1945 to try to ensure the prisoners' safety.

Relief workers took advantage of the disarray

within the Nazi regime weeks before its defeat, pleading with concentration camp commanders to allow them access to Jewish inmates, according to the documents, which were given to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum last week.

But the arrangement prevented the Red Cross from removing prisoners.

After 18 months of prodding from Holocaust museum officials, the Red Cross recently agreed to change a long-standing policy and open up its wartime records to the public.

The 25,000 microfilmed pages turned over to the museum contain Red Cross workers' firsthand accounts of Nazi atrocities.

Red Cross workers "are the most credible witnesses to these crimes," Miles Lerman, chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, said at a ceremony marking release of the documents.

"Your representatives were permitted into the camps and you saw the unbelievable and recorded it and kept it in your files."

The Red Cross has long acknowledged that it knew about the Nazi persecution of Jews.

But the organization has maintained that if it had disclosed that knowledge during World War II, its ability to monitor prisoner-of-war camps on both sides would have been compromised.

"The International Committee of the Red Cross has shared responsibility for the silence of the world community," said Georges Willemin, the organization's archivist. "Could we have gone further? Could we have done more? I don't know."

Lerman said the documents would help answer that question, adding, "How can one be satisfied when a world perished while the other half of the world looked on?"

When asked why it took the Red Cross more than 50 years to make the records available, Willemin said, "It takes time to face your own history."

He added that the decision to release the records "was an important change for an organization that through its history has been inclined to protect the privacy of its records so as not to run any risk of impairing its humanitarian work and its reputation for impartiality and neutrality."

Museum officials have so far only superficially examined the Red Cross records, which are expected to provide details on rescue missions, visits to concentration camps and ghettos, deportation operations and Jewish emigration during and after the war.

The documents will be available at the Holocaust museum and on the World Wide Web early next year. Copies will also be kept at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and at the Center for Jewish Documentation in Paris. □

## Court sentences 2 for suicide bombs

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli court has sentenced two Hamas terrorists to consecutive, double-life sentences for their involvement in the Feb. 25 suicide bombings in Jerusalem and Ashkelon.

A Hamas suicide bomber claimed 26 victims in the February bombing of the No. 18 bus near Jerusalem's central bus station, an attack that wounded 48 others.

Less than an hour later, a second Hamas bomb exploded at a soldiers' hitchhiking station near Ashkelon, killing two, including the bomber, and injuring 31.

The two Palestinians sentenced Sunday were convicted of driving the suicide-bombers to the attack sites.

The two, Akram Ibrahim Kawasama and Imand Rassam, were residents of eastern Jerusalem's Ras Al-Amud neighborhood, an army spokesman said. □

## U.S. envoy prods Palestinians, Israel to reach deal on Hebron

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross met with Israeli and Palestinian leaders this week in an effort to get the two sides to reach an accord for the handover of most of Hebron to Palestinian self-rule.

Shortly after arriving late Saturday night, Ross met here with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Ross later met with Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat in the Gaza Strip.

On Sunday, he held a series of meetings with other officials from both sides, including Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

His visit coincided with weekend unrest in Hebron.

On Sunday, three firebombs were thrown at Jewish targets in the West Bank town. No injuries or damages were reported. Soldiers in riot gear subsequently arrested scores of Palestinians and clamped a curfew on Hebron.

On Saturday, scuffles broke out between Palestinians and Jewish settlers, with each side accusing the other of provoking the violence.

Meanwhile, a homemade bomb exploded Sunday at a hitchhiking post used by Israeli soldiers. The blast, which took place near Bethlehem, caused damage, but no injuries.

Ross brought with him demands for both Israel and the Palestinians. He called on Arafat to sign the Hebron agreement without further delay, citing recent flexibility from the Israeli side in the negotiations. He also warned Arafat that additional delays would create tensions between the United States and the Palestinian Authority.

With regard to Israel, the American mediator came with a clear warning that expanding Jewish settlements could seriously damage U.S.-Israeli relations.

President Clinton said last week that Netanyahu's settlement policy was "absolutely" an obstacle to peace. Clinton's criticism came after Israel decided to reinstate subsidies for Jewish settlers.

Israeli political sources said Netanyahu told Ross that Israel would not accept Palestinian attempts to change understandings already reached regarding security and civilian matters related to the Israeli redeployment in Hebron. The sources said the Palestinians were trying to delay an agreement so that they could say Netanyahu was not ready to commit to a continuation of the peace process.

The Palestinians, who have blamed Israel for the delay, were encouraged by Clinton's criticism of Israeli settlements. But when Clinton administration officials subsequently began prodding the Palestinian side, Arafat complained that the United States was partial toward Israel and called for European mediation in the talks.

"I am ready for any European representative to mediate the talks — anyone but Dennis Ross," Arafat told a visiting delegation of Israeli opposition members last Friday. After meeting with Ross, however, Arafat adopted a more conciliatory tone, describing the session as "fruitful and a very important meeting." □

## Israeli president's remarks incur anger of gay community

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's outspoken president has agreed to meet with representatives of the homosexual community after anti-gay remarks he made to Israeli students sparked a public controversy.

Speaking last Friday at Haifa's Reali High School, Weizman said he considered homosexuality abnormal.

"I like it when a man wants to be a man and a woman wants to be a woman," Weizman told the packed auditorium.

"I personally view homosexuality as something negative. The question is how to deal with this phenomena, this social anomaly."

His remarks were met with applause and some laughter from the students.

The comments also prompted calls for his resignation from civil rights activists and liberal Knesset members.

Some 300 people demonstrated outside the president's residence Saturday night, demanding that Weizman resign.

"This president has managed to insult just about every sector in Israel," said Meretz Knesset member Naomi Hazan.

Although Weizman agreed to meet this week with representatives from Israel's gay community, a spokesman for the president said he would not retract his statements.

The World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations demanded that Weizman retract his remarks and apologize.

"That there are gay and lesbian Jews is a reality," Jack Gilbert, president of the congress wrote in a letter to Weizman. "Your dehumanizing comments on Friday could act to encourage further violence."

The controversy comes days after Weizman informed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he would seek another term.

Weizman, whose current term ends in May 1998, told the premier that he plans to run again in an effort to preserve national unity as Israel travels the rocky road to peace with its Arab neighbors.

The nephew of Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann, he took office in 1993 after serving in the military and holding political office for 15 years.

Social activists warned this week that Weizman's remarks at the high school would hurt efforts to end discrimination and prejudice against homosexuals and lesbians.

"The president's sexual and social preferences don't interest me. Nor am I interested in what he likes or doesn't like," said Labor Knesset member Yael Dayan.

"In Israel, under law, homosexuals and lesbians are equal in all matters. The president's remarks will cause a regression, including incitement against an entire community."

Israel's Chief Sephardi rabbi, Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, agreed with Weizman.

"Homosexuality is not normal. It's not wanted and it's not good. Period," he told reporters. □

## Tunisia slows ties with Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Tunisia's prime minister said last week that his country was slowing normalization of ties with Israel to protest the lack of progress in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

But Prime Minister Hamed Karoui said Tunisia had no plans to freeze its ties to the Jewish state altogether.

Speaking last week in the Jordanian capital of Amman, Karoui said he was unaware of reports that Tunisia's foreign minister, Habib Ben Yahia, had declared the ties frozen.

Israel and Tunisia opened interest sections in each other's countries earlier this year.

The move, a preliminary step toward full diplomatic relations, had reflected Israel's increased ties with the Arab world as a result of the progress made at the time in the peace process with the Palestinians. □

## Three teen-agers charged in attack on Jewish home

By Marilyn Silverstein  
Jewish Exponent

PHILADELPHIA (JTA) — Three teen-agers have been arrested in connection with a Chanukah vandalism attack on a Jewish home in the Philadelphia suburb of Newtown.

In the early-morning hours of Dec. 8, vandals attacked the home of Martin and Judith Markovitz, shattering a front window and destroying a Chanukah menorah displayed there.

After the incident, two non-Jewish neighbors, Lisa Keeling and Margie Alexander, decided to display menorahs in their own front windows and to encourage others to do so as well.

The two women purchased and distributed electric menorahs to more than a dozen other non-Jewish neighbors, who also placed them in their front windows during the remaining days of Chanukah.

Just after Chanukah ended Dec. 13, Keeling and Alexander were honored during Shabbat services at Shir Ami-Bucks County Jewish Congregation in Newtown.

Meanwhile, just a few hours before those services, Newtown police walked into a local high school and arrested three teens for the hate crime — Richard Daniel Hudson, 18, and two 17-year-olds.

"One of the decisions we made was that these three — all high school seniors — would be arrested while in school," said Alan Rubenstein, Bucks County district attorney. "We wanted to send a strong message that this type of conduct will not be tolerated."

Newtown Police Chief Martin Duffy said all three teens had confessed to the crime.

They have been charged with ethnic intimidation and possession of instruments of crime — in this case, two baseball bats used to smash the window and menorah — as well as loitering and criminal mischief, said Rubenstein and Duffy. Those charges carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine for each of the teens, none of whom has a prior record.

The 17-year-olds will be dealt with in juvenile court.

The Newtown police chief credited the strong community response as a factor in the speedy arrests.

"I think the response was outstanding," Duffy said. "As a police chief, it's heartening to know we have residents who will rally around neighbors and not stand for this."

Barry Morrison, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, also heralded the community's response.

"The experience serves as a textbook lesson of how a community should be dealing with a hate crime," said Morrison. "Ultimately, this experience shows how an act of hate can turn into an opportunity for virtue."

Alexander also said, "I'm incredibly proud of my neighborhood for being able to pull together and react as quickly and as strongly as we were able to do. In light of the season, it has been heartwarming for basically everybody." □

## Montreal federation survey shows Jews intend to leave

By Bram Eisenthal

MONTREAL (JTA) — More than one-quarter of Montreal's Jews expect to leave Quebec within the next five years, according to a recent survey.

The survey, conducted by the Montreal Federation

CJA, comes amid the tense atmosphere surrounding Quebec's separatist movement. Some of the movement's leaders have made disparaging remarks about Jews.

But the survey showed that anti-Semitism was not a large concern among Montreal's Jews. A majority of the respondents — 81.5 percent — said there was some or little anti-Semitism in Quebec. About 14.8 percent said there is a great deal of anti-Semitism in the province.

"All the problems experienced here by the Jewish community are connected to the secession issue and political uncertainty," said Jack Jedwab, director of the Quebec region of Canadian Jewish Congress.

Concerns about the separatist debate's impact on the Quebec economy are behind the move to leave Montreal.

The survey showed that during the next five years, 13 percent of Montreal's Jews expect to move to another Canadian province, 8.1 percent to the United States, 3.3 percent to Israel and 1.8 percent to another country.

Some 23 percent of the respondents said they were unsure where they would be living in five years.

Community leaders were not alarmed by the survey's findings.

A 1991 survey of the community also showed a "significant number of people considering leaving," but fewer actually did leave, said Maxyne Finkelstein, the federation's associate executive director for community services.

"Mobility is part of North American Jewish life," Finkelstein said. "But we here in Quebec are sensitive to this right now, because of the political situation."

The survey was conducted by phone and mail between May and August.

More than 500 of the 44,000 Jewish households in the Montreal area were contacted. □

## Israel, Palestinian Authority discuss cooperation on tourism

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli and Palestinian officials met last week to discuss coordination on tourism projects.

The discussions took place during a visit to Bethlehem by Tourism Minister Moshe Katsav, who met with the city's mayor, Elias Freij, who is also the Palestinian Authority official in charge of tourism.

Katsav's visit came a week before the Christmas holiday.

Freij said Israeli closures of the territories were having a detrimental impact on tourism and called for a separation of politics from tourism.

"There has to be a total separation," he told reporters. "People come to this country because it is the Holy Land."

Katsav called for closer cooperation with the Palestinians in this area, adding that coordination on tourism would serve as proof that Israeli-Palestinian relations were back on track, despite obstacles in the peace negotiations.

In a separate development, Israeli business leaders met with the Palestinian Authority official in charge of trade to discuss cooperation.

Israel Chamber of Commerce President Danny Gillerman expressed concern about new Palestinian trade regulations that he said could lead to a boycott of Israeli distributors and agents selling in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But Maher al-Masri said the regulations would be implemented gradually and would not bar the sale of Israeli products. □