



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Senate Republicans introduced a bill that would create vouchers for lower-income Americans to attend private and parochial schools. The measure was one of the GOP's Top 10 initiatives introduced on the first working day of the 105th Congress.**

■ **Poland and the United States are cooperating in an unprecedented project to build a Holocaust memorial on the site of the Belzec camp in Poland. About 600,000 Jews were murdered during the Holocaust at Belzec, where the Germans first erected permanent gas chambers.**

■ **The United States won a court order of deportation against New Jersey resident Ferenc Koreh, who worked as a propagandist during World War II in Nazi-allied Hungary and publicly advocated the persecution of Jews.**

■ **Israel and the Palestinians signed a mandate for an expanded international observer force in Hebron. Under the agreement, the group of Norwegian observers already stationed in the city will be joined by representatives from Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, Italy and Turkey to form a 160-member force.**

■ **Dan Shomron resigned as head of the steering committee for the implementation of the Israel-Palestinian peace accords. Shomron said he always intended to serve in the post until a Hebron agreement was signed.**

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak are set to meet next month at an international economic conference in Davos, Switzerland. The annual World Economic Forum brings together some 2,000 business, government and academic leaders.**

■ **Regional presidents of the Jewish National Fund of America met over the weekend at Chicago's airport and determined that reforms are being implemented as promised by the charity. Reform plans were adopted in November in response to disclosures of serious accounting and management problems.**

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD [Part 1]

### Serbia's Jews skirt politics, hoping for improved situation

By Ruth E. Gruber

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (JTA) — At 5 o'clock on a recent Friday evening, a score of Jews gathered in Belgrade's synagogue for Shabbat services.

At the door, one man reached into his pocket and showed a friend a handful of badges bearing slogans from the mass street demonstrations that have been sweeping Belgrade on a daily basis for more than two months.

The synagogue is located only a few hundred yards from the downtown square where the main afternoon demonstrations take place, and the man had come directly to the synagogue from a rally.

"Look," he said, "there are new badges!"

Hundreds of thousands of Belgrade citizens have taken part in the mostly peaceful demonstrations against the regime of President Slobodan Milosevic that have been organized by opposition political parties and university students.

The demonstrations, which began in November after the government refused to accept opposition victories in some local elections, have included daily mass rallies at which the crowds blow whistles and use noisemakers, as well as marches and other protests.

As they have throughout the recent years of turmoil in Yugoslavia, Jewish groups here maintain an official policy of strict neutrality on political issues — including the protests.

As Jewish representatives "we don't want to be involved with any party," said Aca Singer, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia. "Although personally one can be for or against a party."

About 2,000 Jews live in Belgrade, out of about 3,000 to 3,500 in Yugoslavia, which is composed of Serbia and Montenegro.

"Our community includes a variety of opinions," said a member of the Jewish community. "There are those who are against the demonstrations, as well as those who support them."

Still, like their non-Jewish fellow citizens, many Belgrade Jews — particularly those of the postwar generation and younger — have become swept up in the excitement.

"I spend my days with one ear on the opposition radio station and one ear on the state-run television, and with me at my computer in the middle," said a middle-age woman. "My daughter is out on the streets every day."

Said a man in his 50s: "Every day, either my wife or I attend the rally."

Given their scope and duration, the protests, have become an integral part of the city scene.

### Protests are inescapable

Massive contingents of riot police prevent most mass marches — known as walks — through the city, limiting the main daily demonstration to a rally in and around central Republic Square.

Throughout the day, however, downtown Belgrade's pedestrian shopping district is alive with street vendors selling badges, whistles, noisemakers, protest postcards and opposition newspapers.

Walls are plastered with opposition political posters. Near the university, a large wall is covered with dozens of posters and placards bearing satiric cartoons and graffiti.

Even outside the city center, the protests are inescapable.

Every evening from 7:30 until 8, during the state-run television news program, for example, people in all parts of the city go to their windows and make noise — blowing whistles, tooting horns, banging pots and pans — as a protest against the state-controlled media.

"I didn't think that these people, who for years were so apathetic, could react," said one Jewish community member. "It all makes me feel good. After so many years it makes me feel proud and happy again to live here."

But, like their non-Jewish counterparts, Jews are also concerned about

where the protests might actually lead. They have few illusions.

The Yugoslav economy is in a dire condition after years of U.N. sanctions, which were imposed in 1992 as a means of ending the bloodshed in Bosnia. The sanctions were lifted in October.

"People are fed up," said Singer, the Jewish federation president, also a retired bank director in his 70s. "They want change. But even if the opposition is successful, what comes afterward?"

Singer noted that the members of the Zajedno (Together) opposition coalition were deeply divided on policy matters.

He described them as people who were united only in the face of what they perceived as a common enemy: President Milosevic.

"I don't support any party," said another Jewish community member who is in his 20s. "All of them were communists before. I don't see that any of this will bring big changes for Serbia — the economic situation is too bad."

Nonetheless, for many Jews and non-Jews, the mere fact that demonstrations are being held is viewed as a sign of hope — or at least a sign of something. "The hardest thing is to convince ourselves that change is possible," said a Jewish community member in his 70s.

Said a Jewish university student: "Maybe the next leader will be worse than Milosevic. But still we will show that there can be change here. We feel a sense of being able to do something." □

#### **BEHIND THE HEADLINES**

### **Hebron's Jews grieve alone after Israel redeploys troops**

*By Gil Sedan*

HEBRON (JTA) — They looked like a family in mourning, albeit a large family.

Several hundred Jewish settlers had come to the ceremony to express a kind of tribal grief that many outsiders fail to share or understand.

They came to Hebron on Monday night in buses that traveled through dark, empty roads, escorted by army jeeps. Four days after the Israeli army redeployed from most of Hebron, local residents felt the need to lament "the pain of the city."

On a stage adjacent to the eastern wall of the Tomb of the Patriarchs, speeches were given under a pouring rain.

Among the speakers was Rabbi Moshe Levinger, the founding father of the modern Jewish settlement in Hebron, established after the 1967 Six-Day War.

As he spoke, firecrackers exploded in a nearby Arab neighborhood. Children were celebrating the end of Israeli rule in 80 percent of the city.

For the settlers, the firecrackers were a loud, unpleasant reminder of the new reality.

The settlers had come to mourn the transfer of most of the city to Arab hands. They knew that the majority of Israeli society did not grieve with them.

"It is from our sorrow that we derive the yearning to build Hebron and Eretz Yisrael," said Dov Lior, rabbi of the nearby settlement of Kiryat Arba.

"We will build Hebron out of the sorrow."

For the settlers, the transfer of control in Hebron represented nothing less than a betrayal by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the man they had voted for in the belief that he would never abandon the dream of a Greater Israel.

But last week, rather than halt or perhaps even reverse the previous Labor government's transfer of

Palestinian population centers in the West Bank to self-rule, Netanyahu agreed at a summit with Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat to take the long-delayed step in Hebron.

Knesset member Rehavam Ze'evi, leader of the far-right Moledet Party, spoke in political terms.

"A government comes, a government goes," Ze'evi said.

"A Jewish government can also pass away, if it acts against the interests of the State of Israel."

"Just as we have brought this government to power, we may topple it," he added.

The climax of the brief ceremony was the "keriah," the traditional rending of clothing at a time of mourning.

At Lior's prompting, the men in the crowd pulled out scissors and small knives and tore their shirts.

Levinger then offered a few words, saying that he could not bear the "nonsense" about Israeli acceptance of an eventual Palestinian state, an idea floated in recent days by some Likud leaders — including Netanyahu spokesman David Bar-Illan and, in an interview with the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, by Netanyahu himself.

Then the crowd dispersed. The buses pulled out of the well-guarded parking lot near the tomb and the local residents returned home to what was for them a highly unpleasant reality.

"Our biggest disappointment is Benjamin Netanyahu, the man who made the agreement with the Palestinians, the man we had all voted for," said Moshe Ben-Zimra, one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Hebron.

But there was little outward evidence of the deep frustrations in Hebron's Jewish Quarter.

The area around the quarter is separated from the rest of Hebron by roadblocks that no Arab dares cross, unless he or she has specific — and authorized — business inside the quarter.

A large number of soldiers patrol the area separating the Jewish and Arab sections of the volatile city, intent on preventing acts of violence by one side or the other.

Traffic on Shuhada Street, which runs past a number of settlements in the Jewish Quarter, is restricted to authorized vehicles and there are few that pass through.

At the western end of the street stand Palestinian police officers with green, black and red berets, guarding the entrance into the Arab area.

As a group of visitors arrived at the Palestinian roadblock, a plainclothes officer asked firmly, with the voice of someone who has just acquired a new dimension of authority: "Where to?"

#### **'Everything will explode'**

Members of the group identified themselves as journalists.

"Journalists. OK," he said.

Other Jews are not welcome here. Certainly not Hebron Jews.

Only days earlier, Jibril Rajoub, who is in charge of all Palestinian security forces in the West Bank, described the Hebron settlers as a "brick on Palestinian chests" that needed to be removed.

He softened his comments in subsequent days, but there are many who echo his original sentiments.

"I want to tell the settlers they better behave," said Abdul Hai Sider, a garage owner. "Because if God forbid they do something — they know very well what we can do to them."

"And if Hebron explodes," added Ramzi Abu-Awn, a Palestinian police officer, "everything will explode, including Haifa and Tel Aviv." □

**NEWS ANALYSIS****Ross' hand in Hebron deal signals enhanced role for U.S.***By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The tireless work of President Clinton's Middle East peace envoy has, at least for now, transformed the American role in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

"We were not an intermediary. We were in fact a broker," Dennis Ross said after receiving a hero's welcome at the State Department upon his return from the Middle East.

Some are concerned that the change in role, necessitated by the mistrust that had developed between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, could bode ill for additional progress.

"There obviously was a very different kind of American role in this negotiation than has been the case previously," Ross said, referring to the Hebron deal completed last week between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat.

As reward for his work, Clinton awarded the 48-year-old father of three with prime viewing seats in the presidential box for the Inaugural Parade on Monday.

Ross, who also played a key role in Middle East peacemaking in the Bush administration, made the inaugural rounds with his family over the weekend, including a stop at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum for a speech by Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel.

Ross' role in transforming the history of the Middle East both abroad and at home has won him widespread praise.

He is hailed for helping to change perceptions and personalities of key Middle East players.

But he is also known for bringing his gift at the negotiating table to his own back yard.

**Ambassadors went to Bar Mitzvah**

Three years ago, at a time when the United States was trying to bring Israel and Syria together, Ross brought the Syrian and Israeli ambassadors together at his son's Bar Mitzvah.

Indeed, last week's deal on Hebron, which allowed for the transfer of 80 percent of the town to Palestinian self-rule and for future Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank, has created a new window of opportunity for progress on the long-stalled Israeli-Syrian track, several U.S. officials said in recent days.

"We have an opportunity now to advance the peace process," Martin Indyk, U.S. ambassador to Israel, told reporters in Jerusalem on Tuesday.

"As part of that process, we will be looking at ways of developing a formula that will make it possible to resume negotiations between Israel and Syria."

Talks between Israel and Syria were suspended last spring, after a spate of Palestinian suicide bombings against Israel.

But while the United States has always played a critical role in the tenuous Israeli-Syrian talks, such an enhanced role on the Israeli-Palestinian front is new.

When Israelis and Palestinians launched their secret negotiations in Oslo in 1993, American officials were made aware of the details only when the deal was done.

When the time came to negotiate interim agreements, Palestinians and Israelis holed up together to hammer out the details.

Ross and his peace process team remained close by and offered suggestions, but never took the lead twisting arms and proposing specific solutions.

This time around, a change in Israeli government and the ensuing strained relations with Arafat, led to the increased U.S. role. Most significantly, neither side would pen the deal without side letters crafted by Ross and signed by outgoing Secretary of State Warren Christopher. The letters lay out what moves Washington expects from Arafat and Netanyahu. While the letters fall short of an explicit guarantee, the U.S. commitment gives both leaders a new address for protests if either side falls short of its promises.

The Palestinians pledged to stop terrorism and take more steps to replace the Palestinian Covenant. For its part, Israel promised the United States that it would withdraw from more of the West Bank in three stages, beginning next month and completing its redeployment by mid-1998.

The American correspondence marks the first time that the sides required such assurances since they signed the 1993 Oslo accords on the White House lawn.

"The United States has now taken a role that it has not taken in the past," said Joel Singer, former chief Israeli negotiator with the Palestinians and now an attorney practicing in Washington. "The United States will now, so to speak, be the keeper of the record in terms of monitoring the compliance of both parties and the judge of whether this side or that side is complying with the commitments included in the Hebron package."

Said Adam Garfinkle, director of the Middle East Council of the Foreign Policy Research Institute: "Now, every time there is a problem in relations with Israel, Arafat will turn to the United States for the heavy lifting."

The change in strategy has opened the question of whether such intense involvement in the peace process will continue.

Ross said he would like the parties to reassume the lead. "In the long run, it's not the kind of role that we want to be playing," he said. "I think it's better for everybody concerned if our role returns to that of being much more the facilitator, much more the supporter."

At the same time, he said, as long as "this kind of a role is necessary, we'll play it."

The enhanced U.S. role could also mean that differences in the future could lead not only to renewed strains between Israel and the Palestinians but also between Washington and Jerusalem.

**A 'mixed bag'**

For Singer, the new U.S. role represents a "mixed bag."

While Ross' involvement was positive in that it led to an agreement, "the bad element is that the two sides are back to the pre-Oslo days" where there is no agreement "face-to-face without a third-party involvement."

The real danger could come over a full-blown disagreement about Israel living up to its promises, Singer said.

There is a "potential here if there is an allegation of non-compliance against Israel, and the United States determines as the keeper of the record" that Israel has not complied, "then a dispute that would have been limited to Israel and the Palestinians would now be an Israeli-United States dispute."

For the time being, however, last week's accord improved relations between Netanyahu and Clinton, who had clearly been pushing for a deal on Hebron. Plans are in the works for a February visit to the White House for the Israeli premier.

And while Christopher, who officially ended his duties on Monday, has returned to private life, Ross will continue his quest for a comprehensive Middle East peace.

In one of the first personnel decisions by the new secretary of state, Madeleine Albright asked Ross to remain in his position as U.S. special Middle East coordinator. □

**ADL to aid Swiss bank guard who turned over documents***By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Anti-Defamation League has set up a \$36,000 fund to assist the night security guard who rescued documents from the shredder at Switzerland's largest bank.

Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director, said the fund was established to aid Christoph Meili with any legal or personal problems resulting from his decision to blow the whistle on Union Bank of Switzerland.

During his regular rounds earlier this month, Meili discovered two bins bulging with documents in the bank's shredding room. Suspecting that something was amiss, he turned the archival material over to the Israeli Cultural Center in Zurich.

"If God puts these documents in my hands, then I have to do something," said Meili, who was suspended from his job pending an investigation.

Swiss law provides for fines or jail sentences for people who disclose banking secrets. The bank acknowledged that it made a "deplorable mistake" and last week suspended its chief archivist, Erwin Haggenmueller, in connection with the destruction of documents.

The Swiss government recently approved a law banning the destruction of bank records that might reveal details about wartime transactions. And an independent Swiss-Jewish panel examining whether Swiss banks are holding onto the wealth of Holocaust victims will meet in Zurich later this month to discuss the Union Bank of Switzerland's destruction of documents.

Hundreds of pounds of documents were shredded before Meili intervened, the bank said.

But bank officials maintain that the documents were unrelated to the ongoing search for Jewish assets deposited in Swiss banks in the World War II era.

Meili, however, said he recognized the documents as important "historical material."

"There were more than 40 pages about real estate and they were from 1933, 1934, 1937," he told *The New York Times*. "I saw the dates of payments and credits. I saw street names and numbers, and I saw that some of them were from Berlin."

The ADL last week sponsored television and radio spots in Switzerland asking citizens to contribute to its Save the Honor of Switzerland Defense and Support Fund.

Beyond the material needs of Meili, who is 28 and has a family to support, Foxman said the fund was established "in recognition of the courage of one individual who should become the model for moral behavior in Switzerland."

**Upsurge in anti-Semitism**

Two Swiss Banks, Credit Suisse and the Swiss Bank Corporation, agreed to administer the account, but Foxman said several other major Swiss banks declined.

Foxman, who was in Switzerland last week with an ADL delegation, said he observed a reluctance among the Swiss to come to grips with their past.

He expressed concern about an upsurge in anti-Semitism, particularly in the wake of comments made by the ex-Swiss president, who accused Jewish officials of trying to "blackmail" Switzerland into paying Holocaust victims compensation. "There's a feeling out there that the Jews are the enemies of Switzerland," Foxman said.

A widely read weekly newsmagazine last week contained a picture of a Jewish star on the cover with the headline: "We Against the Jews." An ad in a Zurich newspaper, meanwhile, read: "If the Nazi gold teeth caused you a headache, take Siniphen."

"It's there, one sees it," Foxman said of the anti-Semitism. "Letters to the editor are full of very, very angry anti-Semitic utterances and they're being published."

"What's missing," he added, "is the voice of the moral leadership, whether it's political or otherwise. The churches are silent. That's what's troubling, because if it's met with silence, it continues to legitimize it."

ADL leaders appealed to top Swiss officials in a series of meetings last week to raise a voice of conscience. The Swiss Parliament responded by issuing a statement expressing concern about the rise of racism and anti-Semitism. □

**South African Jews join protest against arms to Syria***By Suzanne Belling*

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — South Africa's Jewish community has registered its sharp disapproval of the government's proposed \$650 million sale of tank-firing systems to Syria.

"We earnestly request that the proposed reported arms deal be rescinded," top Jewish leaders here wrote in a letter to South African President Nelson Mandela.

The sale "would contribute towards a negation of all efforts towards the establishment of Middle East peace and stability," the letter added.

The United States has threatened to cut off aid to South Africa if the sale occurs. U.S. law forbids assistance to countries that provide military equipment to nations designated as state sponsors of terrorism. Syria is one of seven such countries designated by the U.S. State Department. Aid to South Africa totaled \$82 million this year.

Officials in Israel, which also has protested the deal, fear that the weapons would give Syrian tank gunners greater accuracy. The weapons, modern firing control systems that South Africa reportedly crafted with the help of Israeli technology, will also give Syria greater night-fighting capabilities.

A partially state-owned company in South Africa, Denel, has been exploring the proposed deal with Syria.

Mandela, incensed by U.S. official remarks on the matter, has said his country would make its own decision. The South African Cabinet was to vote Wednesday on the sale. If it approves the transaction, it would not take place until at least 1999. Opposition parties have labeled the proposed deal as counterproductive to Middle East peace and South African interests.

The letter to Mandela, written by Marlene Bethlehem, national chairwoman of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, and Joe Simon, chairman of the South African Zionist Federation, also stated, "The South African government has always expressed its support of the Middle East peace process and has, on many occasions, stated a policy of even-handedness in the Middle East. The proposed sale of these arms is in direct contradiction to these views."

According to the letter, "We express these views as South Africans in the full acceptance of the concept that the country determines its own foreign policy in the context of its interests and the values enshrined in the constitution."

The South African Union of Jewish Students also condemned the proposed deal. David Bilchitz, an official for the student group, said in a statement that "given the fact that South Africa is in the process of ushering in a new human rights culture," South Africa should only supply arms, if at all, to "those states which are stable, have a good human rights record and which wish to live in peace with other nations. Syria fulfills none of these criteria." □