



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Switzerland agreed to establish a fund to begin compensating Holocaust victims or their heirs who might be entitled to assets deposited in Swiss banks during the World War II era. The move was welcomed by Switzerland's foreign critics. [Page 3]

■ Madeleine Albright, the new secretary of state, named two figures well-known in the Jewish community to top posts at the department. Thomas Pickering, a former ambassador to Israel and the United Nations, was appointed undersecretary for political affairs. Stuart Eizenstat, who most recently has been the administration's point man on restitution issues, was named undersecretary for economic affairs.

■ The United States initiated deportation proceedings against a Philadelphia man who served the Nazis as an armed SS guard for the Buchenwald and Auschwitz camps. Johann Breyer, 71, a native of Slovakia, was stripped of his American citizenship in July 1993.

■ Maurice Papon, the former French Cabinet minister accused of World War II crimes against humanity, was ordered to stand trial by the nation's Supreme Court. Papon is accused of deporting more than 1,500 Jews to Nazi death camps.

■ Natan Sharansky, a former Soviet dissident who now serves in Israel's Cabinet, is set to make an official trip to Russia beginning Monday. The four-day official visit is Sharansky's first time back to the country where he spent nine years in prison.

■ An Israeli educational program about AIDS is being presented in the Libyan capital of Tripoli, Israeli media reported. The Arabic-language program, "Youth Learns About AIDS," is based on a program used in Israeli high schools since 1987.

■ A chemical found in hyssop plants grown in China might serve as the basis for a new medication to treat Alzheimer's disease, according to Israeli researchers. Scientists at the Weizmann Institute of Science found that the chemical is capable of strengthening memory.

Jewish, Protestant leaders still sparring over Jerusalem

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — In an unlikely turn of events, the same national Protestant leaders lobbying for more U.S. pressure on Israel to share control over Jerusalem with Palestinians are planning to develop a joint statement — with Jewish leaders — supporting the current Middle East peace process.

The effort to effect U.S. policy being waged by the liberal Churches for Middle East Peace, a coalition of 15 Christian organizations, continues at full throttle.

Among the participants is the National Council of Churches, the umbrella group that represents some 52 million people in 33 mainline Protestant and Orthodox Christian denominations.

They kicked off the campaign with a full-page ad in The New York Times on Dec. 21 calling for "shared" control over Jerusalem and urging readers to lobby the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee to that end. Some 700 people responded, according to Churches for Middle East Peace press materials.

And this week, the push continued, three days after a meeting between Jewish representatives and the National Council of Churches that was intended to mend relations.

At last Friday's meeting with the National Council of Churches, members of a Jewish delegation from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations asked the head of the influential Christian group to retract its call for a shared Jerusalem.

The Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, the group's general secretary, said the group could not because that view was consonant with its Middle East policy.

With a few exceptions, the relationship between the National Council of Churches and the Jewish community over the years has been strained and difficult, Jewish sources say, primarily because of what they characterize as the liberal Protestant group's consistently anti-Israel positions.

There has been cooperation on issues of common concern, such as lobbying for domestic policy legislation, and around aiding black churches that have been destroyed by arson. But by and large "we've had poor relations for quite some time with mainline Protestants," said Rabbi Mark Winer, president of the National Council of Synagogues.

His group, a recently formed organization representing the Reform and Conservative movements, has started a dialogue process with the National Council of Churches.

Unhappy about ad's reappearance

Meanwhile, the ad was reprinted in Monday's edition of Roll Call, the Capitol Hill chronicle. Twenty-five thousand copies were distributed to government leaders and other influential people on Inauguration Day.

While Jewish participants in the meeting said they were not happy about the reappearance of the ad, they said it could not be used to judge the National Council's future intentions because it was already in the works before their session.

Leaders of Jewish groups expressed confidence that the ongoing campaign would not affect U.S. support for Israel, but one rabbi who participated in last Friday's meeting said the ads could still be harmful.

"In the Middle East, it encourages the anti-Israeli groups," said Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of interfaith affairs for the Anti-Defamation League.

In a gesture of goodwill, Campbell suggested to representatives of the Conference of Presidents that they work together to issue a joint statement supporting the Middle East peace process and the Israeli-Palestinian agreements, known as the Oslo accords.

The Conference of Presidents, which represents 53 Jewish organizations, expects to hammer out a mutually agreeable statement with the group that has long criticized Israel — and continues to.

"I'm sure that we will come up with a statement that will be jointly accepted by the two parties," Leon Levy, chairman of the Conference of

Presidents, said in an interview. He said the meeting with the leaders of the National Council of Churches "opened their eyes in many respects."

"I think the NCC will be more responsive than they have been," he said.

But Jay Rock, director of interfaith affairs at the influential Christian group, said the meeting with Jewish leaders "didn't do a thing to change our mind about participating in the shared Jerusalem campaign."

"We have some feelings about wanting to do things differently, like consulting with people beforehand, but we don't have a problem with the position of the ad," he said, adding, "It's well within our Middle East policy statement."

Rock said he would like to see a joint statement in which both parties agree to support "the peace process that is currently under way and particularly the central role the Palestinians and Israelis have in finding a negotiated solution for their own future."

Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, asked Christian participants at the meeting whether there were any conditions under which they would accept sole Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem.

After a lengthy pause, Campbell said there were not, according to participants at the meeting. She was not available for an interview.

"They have a lot of trouble with Jewish power, and that's very clear," said one Jewish participant.

"Once again it is the teaching of contempt of Judaism," Klenicki said. "They are always denying our existence. Before it was our spiritual existence and now it is our physical existence in Jerusalem."

Klenicki said he was "fatigued" by the lack of progress after years of dialogue with the National Council.

The National Council of Churches recently began reviewing its policies on the Middle East and, unrelated to the current imbroglio, is planning a fact-finding trip to Israel later this year, Rock said.

While a more positive relationship between Jews and Protestants in the future is a possibility, it rests in the hands of Protestant leaders, Meyers said.

"Will the Christians be somewhere else the next time we sit and talk? That's the question." □

Heirs of Holocaust victims sought for unclaimed accounts

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The World Jewish Congress is looking for the heirs of 53 Polish Holocaust victims whose Swiss bank accounts were declared ownerless and turned over to the Polish government after World War II.

Switzerland last week released a detailed list of the account holders, many of whom died in Nazi death camps.

The move is significant because it marks the first time that the Swiss government has handed over the records of Swiss bank accounts belonging to Jews from the Holocaust era.

The search for the heirs of Polish Holocaust victims comes as Poland and the United States move forward on an unprecedented joint project to construct a major Holocaust memorial at a site of a Nazi death camp in Poland.

The release of the list followed an official Swiss report issued last month showing that Switzerland used dormant Jewish accounts to pay Poland 464,000 Swiss francs in 1975.

The money — worth between \$4 million and \$5 million today — was transferred under a pact that settled

Swiss claims for property seized by Poland's postwar Communist regime.

"These assets were illegally and immorally seized by the Swiss government, and then illegally and immorally transferred to the Communist Polish regime," said Kalman Sultanik, vice president of the WJC.

Switzerland never supplied the account holders' names at the time, and Poland simply deposited the money into its treasury without searching for heirs.

The list, released this week by the WJC, cites heirs for many of the account holders, as well as contact addresses in such cities as Paris, New York and Haifa, Israel.

Switzerland began reviewing its pact with Poland — as well as a similar deal with Hungary — after U.S. Senate Banking Committee Chairman Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) accused Bern of using unclaimed Jewish accounts to pay off Swiss citizens whose assets were seized by the Communists after the war.

Thomas Borer, head of a Swiss task force on the country's wartime financial role, said Switzerland also intends to ask Hungary to provide a similar list of Jewish account holders.

Bern agreed to pay Hungary 325,000 francs in 1975 under a similar arrangement, which is worth between \$3 million and \$4 million today.

After Switzerland's decision to release the once-secret list of names, Sultanik hailed it as "a very positive step" and commended the Polish government, which, he said, "pressed the Swiss government very hard on this issue."

Meanwhile, the joint U.S.-Polish Holocaust monument will be built at Belzec, south of the city of Lublin in eastern Poland, where an estimated 600,000 Jews were murdered.

A small memorial erected in the 1960s has been falling apart from neglect, and the area around it is overgrown with weeds and strewn with garbage. The monument also does not mention that nearly all those killed there were Jews.

When some family members of victims of Belzec complained about the decaying site, officials from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum began working with Polish authorities to construct a new memorial.

A panel of Polish and American experts will choose a design this spring.

"Belzec neither has a proper monument nor is very often visited," said Jacek Nowakowski, director of collections and acquisitions at the museum, who lost family members at Belzec.

"We are hoping that" the Belzec memorial "will be as important and as poignant as the monument in Treblinka," he said, referring to what is widely regarded as the most moving concentration camp memorial.

Those seeking more information about the Swiss bank accounts belonging to Polish Holocaust victims can write to the World Jewish Congress, Attn: Polish Account Claim, 501 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022. □

Israeli perfume nosed out in Bahrain

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Customs officials this week in Bahrain confiscated some 450 bottles of Israel-made perfume, citing a violation of an Arab trade boycott of Israel.

A Palestinian living in the Persian Gulf state had alerted officials about the product, whose label was in Hebrew, according to Bahraini media.

Although the Arab League has lifted secondary and tertiary boycotts of Israel, Bahrain still observes a direct trade boycott of the Jewish state. □

After months of pressure, Switzerland agrees to fund

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — After months of resistance, Switzerland has agreed to set up a fund to begin compensating Holocaust victims and their heirs whose assets disappeared into the Swiss banking system during the World War II era.

Special Ambassador Thomas Borer, head of a Swiss task force on the country's wartime financial role, announced the decision Thursday, after discussions with Swiss banking officials, the central bank, insurance companies and other businesses. "We certainly hope that this" fund "will be understood as a sign of our goodwill," Borer told reporters in Zurich. "All the major banks support this idea, as well as other companies."

The decision comes as Switzerland continues to reel in the face of allegations that it hoarded the wealth of Holocaust victims while helping to finance the Nazi war effort.

Borer said the government and Swiss banks have yet to arrive on a fixed amount for the fund. "It would be premature to bring numbers into play," he said.

However, one of Switzerland's top bankers, Credit Suisse Chairman Rainer Gut, called Wednesday for a Holocaust memorial fund in excess of \$100 million.

The World Jewish Congress welcomed the Swiss decision, which comes six weeks after WJC President Edgar Bronfman publicly called on Switzerland to make a "good-faith financial gesture" to Holocaust survivors and the world Jewish community.

"The principle is one we have long endorsed," said Elan Steinberg, WJC's executive director. "We expect and hope in the next few days to begin the process of cooperating and working out the precise details."

Senate Banking Committee Chairman Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) called the Swiss plan a "step in the right direction."

"It is troubling that it took so long," D'Amato said. "It is a relief that it happened at all." □

Anti-Semitic Polish priest is facing criminal charges

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A prominent Polish priest who made highly publicized anti-Semitic remarks during a 1995 sermon is now facing criminal charges.

Father Henryk Jankowski, a former ally of previous President Lech Walesa, likened the Jewish Star of David to the Communist hammer and sickle and the Nazi swastika.

During the sermon, which was attended by Walesa, Jankowski also said the Polish people should not allow those who owed secret allegiance to Israel or Russia to remain in government.

"Father Jankowski is alleged to have violated the criminal law article" that deals with "insulting and humiliating persons of other nationalities," a spokeswoman for the prosecutors' office in the northern city of Gdansk was quoted as saying.

At the time of the incident, Walesa was criticized for failing to instantly condemn Jankowski's remarks, which Walesa said he had not heard. He later issued a statement condemning anti-Semitism.

Jankowski could face up to three years in prison if convicted. Speaking to reporters, he said the charges against him show that there is no freedom of speech in Poland. "It is a return to a Communist totalitarianism," he said. "As a Polish citizen I feel persecuted by the Jewish minority." □

N.J. man who aided Nazis allowed to remain in U.S.

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK (JTA) — The United States has 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.

The U.S. government, however, agreed that it would not act to remove Koreh, 87, from the United States unless his rapidly deteriorating health improved. Koreh has a blood disorder and requires transfusions.

A number of cases have been settled this way, Eli Rosenbaum, director of the Office of Special Investigations, the U.S. Justice Department's Nazi-hunting arm, said in an interview. He added that his office would monitor the status of Koreh's health. The U.S. legal system has the "highest standards of morality," Rosenbaum added.

From 1941 to 1944, Koreh was an editor of Szekely Nep, the largest provincial newspaper in Axis Hungary.

In an agreement with OSI, Koreh admitted that he was deportable for having assisted in persecution and for lying about his wartime activities to gain admission in 1950 to the United States.

The Jan. 13 agreement states that Koreh does not contest that he was responsible for the publication of some 200 racist articles that helped create a climate in Hungary that made the Nazi persecution of the Jews acceptable.

In June 1994, as a result of his activities, he was stripped of his American citizenship by a U.S. District Court in Newark. The judge said in making that decision that articles in the Hungarian newspaper for which Koreh worked advocated the "de-Jewification of Hungarian life."

That decision was upheld in February 1995 by a federal appeals court.

The Office of Special Investigations, began denaturalization proceedings in 1989 against Koreh, a retired Radio Free Europe producer and broadcaster who resides in Englewood, N.J.

The deportation order also cancels Koreh's Social Security benefits, a Justice Department official said.

About 435,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Nazi camps between May and July of 1994. □

Holocaust denier from Britain pursuing case against premier

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — David Irving, a Holocaust denier from Britain, has said he is taking legal action against Australian Prime Minister John Howard as part of his struggle against the nation's authorities.

Irving said the premier had not apologized for the immigration minister's comments about his criminal record, Australian media reported.

The immigration minister, Philip Ruddock, had said that in November, Irving had been refused a visa to enter Australia for the third time in four years.

However, Irving is not appealing the November decision to refuse him entry, and he owes Australian courts tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees.

In 1993, Irving launched a number of legal actions on defamation grounds against journalists and publications that opposed his 1992 visa application. None of his efforts was successful.

Irving, the author of several books that deny that the Holocaust took place, has spoken at rallies and meetings of Holocaust deniers and other extreme right-wing groups in Europe and the Americas. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Jews in Estonia, Moldova harmed by language laws

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The language laws of two former Soviet republics are blocking employment opportunities for their respective Jewish communities and in one case impeding their chances of obtaining full citizenship rights.

In Estonia, most of the country's Jews do not have passports and are not eligible for citizenship, according to a human rights group based in the Estonian capital of Tallinn.

The Roundtable on Ethnic Minorities' Rights noted at a meeting last month that Estonian Jews are mostly Russian-speakers and therefore could not pass the language test required to obtain citizenship.

As a result, many Estonian Jews are seeking Russian passports or want to leave the country, the group said in a statement.

The roundtable was set up by the president of Estonia four years ago to monitor human rights violations of the nation's minorities.

Estonia's Jewish community numbers about 3,500 and is concentrated mainly in Tallinn. Having settled in Estonia after World War II, the majority of Estonian Jews had neither the need nor obligation to master the country's language during the period of Russian dominance.

But after Estonia attained its full independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, many Jews received a non-citizen status and have found themselves with fewer employment opportunities than those available to ethnic Estonians.

Jews are not the only group who found themselves given this non-citizen status, which affects about 28 percent of Estonia's 1.6 million population and primarily includes ethnic Russians.

The language provisions of Estonia's citizenship law have been sharply criticized by Moscow as discriminatory and have strained Russian-Estonian relations.

In its statement, the roundtable said Jews were not to be blamed for their lack of fluency in Estonian. The fault lies with the state for not creating favorable conditions for Estonian-language training, the statement added.

A week after the human rights group met, the European Union agreed to subsidize Estonian-language lessons for minorities in order to smooth ethnic differences in the Baltic nation.

Campaign to test knowledge

In Moldova, formerly the Soviet republic of Moldavia, the language issue has also caused concern for the local Jewish community.

Earlier this month, Moldova launched a campaign to test its citizens' knowledge of Moldovan, the country's official language. Moldova's language law includes provisions supportive of minority languages, including Yiddish and Hebrew.

But at the same time, according to the decision passed by the Moldovan Parliament, every citizen should show a good command of the country's language if he or she seeks new employment or a renewed contract with a current employer.

Planned language-proficiency tests may drive as many as 500,000 citizens from their jobs, including several thousand Jews.

Moldova, which is located in southeastern Europe and borders Romania to the west, has an estimated 60,000 Jews, or about 1.5 percent of the general population.

As in many other former Soviet republics, the

majority of the Jewish community in Moldova is Russian-speaking.

At least one parliamentarian spoke out on behalf of those unable to speak Moldovan.

"There is no fault for the half-million non-Moldovans who did not master the official language," Valeriu Senik was quoted as saying at the Parliament session earlier this month. Senik said the state did not have enough funds to pay for language courses for minorities.

He added that the language-proficiency tests should be suspended until the country's financial situation improves enough to allow the government to help people learn Moldovan. □

Belarus Jewish statement on anti-Semitism published

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Jewish community of Belarus has issued a statement calling on the government to condemn recent anti-Semitic acts in the country.

The statement was adopted earlier this month by the Association of Jewish Communities of Belarus, but was only released last week.

The statement is significant because Jewish leaders have traditionally been reluctant to speak about anti-Semitism or any special Jewish concerns, particularly after a controversial November referendum gave President Alexander Lukashenko virtually unlimited powers.

In past months, he has cracked down on the opposition and curbed civil liberties, prompting outrage from human rights watchers.

In the statement, the Jewish association said it had reacted with alarm to the ongoing dissemination of anti-Semitic views in the Belarus media.

Other manifestations of anti-Semitism that evoked Jewish concerns included last year's desecrations of two provincial Jewish cemeteries and of the Holocaust memorial in the capital of Minsk.

The statement also mentioned anti-Semitic graffiti that occasionally appear in Minsk.

It came in the wake of an arson attack earlier this month that destroyed the vacation cottage of Mikhail Nordshtein, editor of *Aviv*, the monthly Jewish newspaper published in Minsk. When vandals daubed a swastika on the Nordshtein's Minsk apartment a day after the arson attack, Jewish communal leaders believed that both incidents were anti-Semitic acts.

But in light of recent disclosures, the leaders now believe that the arson was an act of Mafia-style revenge on the editor's son, who had borrowed a significant sum for his business and had failed to pay the debt on time.

"Whatever the reasons behind the arson, the daubed swastika wounded Nordshtein's national pride," Leonid Levin, leader of Belarus' 100,000-member Jewish community, said in an interview after the statement was published.

Despite the recent disclosures about the editor's son, the arson attack had prompted the Jewish leaders to issue the statement on anti-Semitism.

The attack, which has been widely publicized in Belarus and Russia, "involved a well-known activist of our community," said Levin. "We wanted to use this case to call on the government to condemn anti-Semitism and to ban anti-Jewish propaganda in Belarus."

At the same time, Levin said he did not believe that anti-Semitism was on the rise in Belarus.

By raising the issue of anti-Semitism in its statement, the Jewish community wanted to remind the authorities that "the state should support" the Jewish community and "defend its rights," said Levin. □