JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

Published by the JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY Inc. • 330 Seventh Ave. • 11th Floor • New York, N.Y. 10001 • (212) 643-1890

Volume 75, No. 40 **Friday, February 28, 1997** *80th Anniversary Year*

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied reports that Israel cut a deal with the Palestinians linking the next Israeli redeployment in the West Bank to the building of a new Jewish neighborhood.** The reports said Israel had agreed to withdraw from 10 percent of the West Bank, a much larger chunk than expected, if the Palestinians quietly accepted the Har Homa project.

■ **Israeli police may file charges against some senior government officials in connection with a probe into allegations of a political deal surrounding the appointment of an attorney general, Israeli media reported.** **[Page 2]**

■ **Militant Palestinian groups met with Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat in an apparent effort to establish a consensus position for the permanent-status talks with Israel.** Hamas was among the groups attending the session.

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk to discuss Israel's decision to build on Har Homa, which has elicited U.S. criticism.** Meanwhile, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan criticized the Israeli decision.

■ **The head of the Tunisian interest office in Israel returned, dispelling concerns in Jerusalem that Tunisia had withdrawn its diplomat from Israel.** The official, Hamias Jinawi, said he had left for work-related reasons.

■ **The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations will begin its annual mission to Israel on Sunday.** Dozens of delegates will meet with top Israeli officials.

■ **Several French museums will launch a special exhibit in April of works of art taken during the World War II German occupation of France and later returned.** Organizers hope that some of the works will be claimed by their owners.

■ **Germany's national soccer team visited Yad Vashem before its match against Israel. The game is the first between Israel and a unified Germany.**

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Polish Jews aim to overcome discord in building community

By Ruth E. Gruber

WARSAW (JTA) — A joke told by Polish Jews describes how if the last remaining Jew leaves town, 20 other Jews go to the station to bid him goodbye.

Two speakers at a recent conference of Polish Jews referred pointedly to that joke when describing the current situation of Jews in Poland.

The conference, sponsored by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, gathered more than 150 Jews of all ages late last month in Warsaw for five hours of sometimes heated debate about the future of Polish Jewry in the coming decade.

The meeting proved a vital indicator of Polish Jewry's resolute intention to survive into the next millennium.

But it also highlighted organizational and generational conflicts that complicate the building of that future as the Holocaust survivor generation gives way to a generation of Jews now claiming its Jewish identity with few concrete links to the traditional past.

A Jewish future in Poland seemed unthinkable less than a decade ago. In the eyes of some, including some Polish Jews themselves, it is still far from certain.

Nearly 3.5 million Jews lived in Poland before World War II. More than 3 million were killed in the Holocaust.

Most survivors emigrated after the war, in the wake of anti-Semitic attacks by Poles.

An anti-Semitic campaign by the Communist government in 1968 forced another 20,000 Jews to emigrate, including most of the Jewish intelligentsia.

Today, some 10,000 to 15,000 Jews live in Poland, though only a few thousand are actively affiliated with the community.

Particularly since the fall of communism seven years ago, there has been an explosion of interest in Judaism, especially among younger people from the postwar generations who only recently discovered that they are Jewish or only recently became involved in Jewish activities.

New organizations have been founded and new Jewish programs have been initiated, including clubs, youth groups, publications and leadership training programs.

A new Jewish day school in Warsaw run by the U.S.-based Ronald S. Lauder Foundation boasts 70 pupils.

Tensions between older and younger generations

"Ten years ago, the common question was: When will the last Jew in Poland be buried?" said Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Poland director of the Lauder Foundation, which sponsors many of the new educational and youth activities.

"Five years ago, the common question was: Are there any young Jews in Poland? Today, we don't have this type of question."

Nonetheless, tensions between the older generation of Holocaust survivors and the younger generations of emerging Jews have hindered the community's development.

Sociologist Pawel Spiewak described a tendency for the older generation to question the Jewishness of the younger Jews, even going as far as to set up barriers to their entering the traditional Jewish fold.

He described a parallel tendency among young Jews to ignore or reject the views, needs and traditions of the elderly.

"The young can't find leaders in the older generation," Spiewak said.

As an example, he cited how Chief Rabbi Menachem Joskowicz, a white-bearded Chasid, appeared to emphasize generational barriers by making pronouncements in Yiddish — a language spoken by the old, but not the young.

"The young live beside the elderly, but they live alone," Spiewak said. "They seek their own identity."

Jerzy Filipowicz of the Union of Polish Jewish Students spoke out on

behalf of the younger generations' interests. "The future is in our hands," he said. "We are the ones who will create it.

"I hope that all Jewish organizations can see the need of involving young people to create a mutual society, that they can see that young people are the future. It is worthwhile to invest in this community."

How to resolve the generational conflict — and the related conflict between older Jewish organizations and new groups — dominated debate at the conference.

Concerns over the weakness of the community and the lack of unity and cooperation among its factions were apparent.

Although there were calls for unity and cooperation from all generations, no concrete solutions emerged.

The conference marked the first time that representatives of all major Polish Jewish organizations, old and new and representing all generations, were gathered together formally to discuss a common Jewish future.

Organizations represented at the gathering included the Jewish religious community, mainly consisting of elderly members, and the secular Jewish Socio-Cultural Association, which is the largest Jewish organization in Poland, but is seen by many in the younger generation as a tainted holdover from the Communist era.

Also participating were representatives from the newly formed Union of Jewish Students and organizations such as the Jewish Historical Institute, Hidden Children of the Holocaust, Association of (Wartime) Combatants and the Jewish Forum, a new association linking adult professionals and businesspeople.

Most of the overflow crowd appeared to be from the post-World War II generations. Some participants traveled hundreds of miles from such cities as Szczecin, Krakow, Katowice and Wroclaw.

Most speakers, old and young, stressed that the future of Polish Jews would ultimately depend on themselves.

Stanislaw Krajewski, president of the Jewish Forum and Poland consultant for the American Jewish Committee, described two basic, sharply differing approaches.

The first, he said, espoused mainly by older people and members of traditional organizations, concentrated on using funds for support of these groups and their mainly elderly members.

The second approach involved concentrating on outreach.

"We have considerable potential, but we have to make the Jewish organizations attractive to the unaffiliated," he said. "For the majority of the postwar generation, their Polish identity is a given. Gaining a Jewish identity is an effort."

Manlio della Riccia, Poland country director of the JDC, which is a key funder of Polish Jewish welfare, religious and educational activities, said he found that the conference itself, with all its discussions of the community's future, provided ample reason for optimism.

"I strongly believe that the fact that we are here today is the answer to those who wanted to destroy the Jewish people," he said. □

Israeli media: Justice Minister may be charged in Bar-On affair

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli police investigators may recommend that charges be filed against Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi in connection with corruption allegations surrounding the short-lived appointment of an attorney general.

Shas Knesset member Aryeh Deri and even Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could also face charges, according to Israeli media reports Thursday.

The reports indicated that Netanyahu may face a second round of police questioning.

Leaks to the media that he and other officials may face charges of breaching the public trust drew an angry response from Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani, who said he would like to "personally question" the source of the leak, if indeed it came from police officials involved in the investigation.

Officials at the State Attorney's office strongly denied that any charges were being drawn up, and lashed out at the ongoing leaks that have accompanied the police investigation into the January appointment of Jerusalem lawyer and veteran Likud activist Roni Bar-On as attorney general.

Bar-On won Cabinet approval Jan. 10, but stepped down two days later amid growing charges in political and legal spheres that he lacked the experience to hold Israel's top legal post.

Two weeks later, the Cabinet unanimously approved District Judge Elyakim Rubinstein to serve as Israel's attorney general.

The police investigation was launched after an Israel Television report alleged that Bar-On was appointed as part of a deal to provide a plea bargain to Deri, who is on trial for corruption. In turn, Deri allegedly promised his party's support for the Hebron agreement, which was coming up for Cabinet approval at the time, the report said.

According to Israeli media reports this week, police were considering whether there were grounds to charge Hanegbi with breach of trust because of the way he presented Bar-On as a candidate for attorney general.

In January, when they were about to vote on Bar-On's nomination, a number of Cabinet ministers said they were led to believe that Chief Justice Aharon Barak had approved of Bar-On.

But Barak had opposed Bar-On's appointment at the time, according to subsequent reports, which prompted questions whether Hanegbi had accurately conveyed to the Cabinet Barak's sentiments.

This week's reports said police were investigating whether Deri had conveyed threats via mediators or otherwise to the prime minister that Bar-On should be appointed.

When Netanyahu was questioned last week, senior police detectives formally advised him of his rights — a procedure followed when the person under questioning is formally suspected of having committed a crime.

It was not clear whether police found any basis for charges that he had breached the public trust by capitulating to any alleged threats, or that he was aware of any deal surrounding the appointment.

Alongside the escalating media speculation, it was also reported this week that police were having trouble finding evidence to back up some of the key allegations in the case. □

Israel continues to hold 6 Iraqis

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's High Court of Justice has refused to release six Iraqi citizens held in Israeli jails for the past three years.

The court, ruling Wednesday on an Iraqi petition, said the Iraqis could pose a security threat.

The court ruling came in response to a petition from the Iraqis, who said they had fled Iraq for their lives. While denying the petition, the justices instructed the Israeli government to make efforts in the next three months to find other countries that would accept the Iraqis. □

Turkish official gets earful about direction of his country

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Turkey's chief foreign policy emissary was sorely mistaken if he thought that the American Jews sitting around a table with him last week were there to compliment his government's increased military cooperation with Israel.

One by one, the eight Jewish officials gathered at the Turkish Embassy ticked off recent anti-Semitic and anti-Israel statements by senior Turkish officials and in the media.

Abdullah Gul, Turkey's minister of state with close ties to the prime minister, listened patiently at the one-hour session, which was arranged by the American Jewish Committee and attended by representatives of the Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"We certainly got our message across," said Jason Isaacson, director of the AJCommittee's office of government and international affairs.

The meeting came at a time when Turkish society is wrestling with the thorny question of whether to maintain its secular traditions or move toward an Islamic state. Last year's election saw the rise of the highest ranking Islamist to government, Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan.

Erbakan's embrace of Libya and Iran has further fueled concern over the direction of the country.

At the same time, however, Turkey has continued on its path of warming relations with Israel. This week a high-level Turkish delegation visited the Jewish state to strengthen Israeli-Turkish military relations.

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said after meeting with the Turkish chief of staff that military cooperation would deepen through bilateral strategic contacts and joint maneuvers.

Although Erbakan's government, which shares power with the secular True Path Party, has been more open to Israel than many had feared, some Jews are worried about the overall atmosphere.

'Jew assigned to create mischief'

"None of us left the meeting confident that this government will make the gestures, statements or take the actions necessary to alleviate the concerns about the growing climate of intolerance," Isaacson said.

Since his election, Erbakan has blamed Turkey's economic woes on "the Wall Street Zionists who control Western imperialism," according to a report in The European newspaper. Before his election, Erbakan's Welfare Party platform pledged to end "world imperialism and Zionism as well as Israel," Reuters reported last year.

The Milli Gazete, Erbakan's party paper, published a column discussing the "nature of the Jew."

"When you treat them humanly, you have to expect them to act like an animal," the December 1996 column states. "A snake is assigned to market its poison, just in the same way a Jew is assigned to create mischief."

When confronted with these statements, Gul asked the group to "focus on the positive aspects of Turkey's relations with the United States, the West and Israel," Isaacson said.

Gul's reassurances did not satisfy the concerns of those in the meeting. The anti-Semitic statements "have not been denounced by the government other than a bland reassurance to American Jews sitting around a table at the embassy that Turkey is a tolerant society," Isaacson said.

Upset with Gul's response, American Jewish groups will continue to press the issue with Turkish officials. □

Lubavitch movement organizes to reclaim properties in Russia

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Lubavitch movement is planning to ask the Russian government for properties that used to belong to the group.

With this goal in mind, the movement is reorganizing itself in an effort to show the government it is far from being a new group in Russia and that its current activities represent the continuation of a 2-century-old Lubavitch presence in the country.

Lubavitch representatives working in Russia gathered last month in Moscow to set up a new body, Agudas Chassidei Chabad Russia. The new organization will serve as a Moscow-based umbrella group for all Lubavitch-affiliated institutions now operating in Russia.

It will also seek to demonstrate to Russian authorities that the Lubavitch movement, despite its global operations, is working in Russia as a grass-roots movement, Lubavitch officials say.

Russian officials do not "like it much when foreigners come and tell them what to do," said Berel Lazar, chairman of the Rabbinical Alliance of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the organization of Lubavitch rabbis working across the former Soviet Union. "Our message is that we are not foreign in this country, we are local, we are based on the local communities."

After the Russian body is created, Lubavitch officials want to launch an even broader organization that would operate throughout the former Soviet Union, where the movement runs dozens of Jewish day schools and Sunday schools. Most rabbis now working in the former Soviet Union are emissaries of the Lubavitch movement.

While some work in the vast region's largest cities, others serve in far-flung communities, including towns in Siberia and the Caucasus Mountains.

Lazar said the activity is to let the government know that the Lubavitch movement in the former Soviet Union is thriving and that "all that once belonged to it should be given back." The properties that the movement wants returned includes buildings that once housed Lubavitch facilities and buildings associated with the succession of Lubavitcher rebbes.

Collection had been confiscated

Among those buildings is a house in the southern Russian town of Rostov-on-Don that once belonged to the fifth Lubavitcher rebbe, Sholom Ber Schneerson. The building is now used as an apartment building. But the efforts may be stymied by Russian law, which allows religious groups to reclaim houses of worship that had been confiscated during the Communist era, but says nothing about other kinds of former communal property.

Lubavitch officials also seek the return of archival documents — most importantly, the Schneerson library. The library, which consists of 12,000 volumes of books and manuscripts that had been collected by five generations of rebbes, is now stored in the Russian State Library, formerly known as the Lenin Library.

The disputed collection had been confiscated in the early 1920s by Soviet authorities and transferred to the Lenin Library. The Lubavitch movement has been battling in the Moscow courts since 1990 for the return of the books. Last month, a Lubavitch delegation was allowed to see the books. Shalom Levine, head librarian at the Lubavitch worldwide headquarters in Brooklyn, N.Y., was among the movement's officials who visited the library. He later said of the meeting he and his colleagues had with library officials: "They are not ready to talk seriously. The library is playing cat and mouse with us." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD [Part 3]

Vibrant Serbian community enjoying Jewish resurgence

By Ruth E. Gruber

BELGRADE (JTA) — Last summer, crisis-ridden Belgrade was the scene of a particularly joyous simcha.

Two young members of the Belgrade Jewish community celebrated their wedding in the city's sole synagogue.

It was the first full-scale, traditional synagogue wedding in the city in many years.

"You start a new life when you get married," 29-year-old Dejan Petrovic, who works as the activities organizer for the Belgrade Jewish community, said half a year later. "My wife and I decided to start to keep kosher, to keep Shabbat. We can't do everything, but we try."

The turmoil, economic hardship, isolation and trauma associated with the bloody break-up of the former Yugoslavia have led to a strengthening of Jewish identity and a remarkable revival of Jewish community life and activities in Belgrade and elsewhere in Serbia.

In the words of Aca Singer, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, "Every bad thing has a good aspect."

Others agree.

Jews here "survived very difficult times and even maybe have gotten stronger," said Sonja Licht, a Yugoslav Jew who is president of the board of the Belgrade division of the Soros Foundation's Fund for an Open Society.

Rabbi Yitzhak Asiel, who arrived as rabbi in Belgrade two years ago, said the war caused people to see that "time is the main tissue of life."

"They may have lost all their property and suffered other hardships, but what they lament is not lost property, but the lost time they didn't spend with their family and friends," he said.

Despite continuing upheaval — exemplified by the recent daily mass anti-government street demonstrations against the government of President Slobodan Milosevic — Serbian Jews have ambitious plans for new cultural, social, educational and religious endeavors.

Project to preserve Ladino

These include a new culture center in Belgrade to serve both Jews and the general public; a project to preserve Ladino, the Jewish language spoken by the traditional Serbian Sephardi community; and a project begun a year ago to help the revival of four small communities in the provinces.

Already, the monthly Jewish Federation Bulletin reads like the community newsletter to be found anywhere in the organized Jewish world, with descriptions of board meetings, sisterhood activities, sports clubs and other community organizations.

It announces the schedules of classes, concerts, lectures and children's camps; reports on Holocaust commemorations; and runs death notices and announcements of other events of significance to the community.

This month, the Belgrade Jewish Historical Museum helped organize a major exhibit on Belgrade's pre-Holocaust Jewish quarter. The event drew big crowds and widespread publicity.

About 3,000 to 3,500 Jews live in what today is called Yugoslavia, which is made up of Serbia and Montenegro. The total includes about 250 refugees from neighboring Bosnia. Many community members, particularly younger and middle-age people, left for Israel or elsewhere after war broke out in Bosnia in 1992.

Parents sent dozens of Yugoslav Jewish children to Israel for safety, and some remained.

"We now have the situation that our children speak Hebrew and we don't," said one mother. "But it's important for our survival — our children have a new identity."

At the same time, a number of younger Jews who stayed in Serbia began to take an increasingly active role in community life. Much of the community leadership now comes from the post-World War II generation. "With the rise of nationalism" at the start of the war, said Singer, a retired bank director in his 70s, "many Jews recognized their Jewish identity and returned to their roots."

Asiel's arrival two years ago as rabbi was a key catalyst for religious and educational development, and provided a new spiritual reference point for a secular community, many of whose members are partners in, or children of, mixed marriages.

"This new, young rabbi has been very important for us," said Milica Mihailovic, director of Belgrade's Jewish Historical Museum. "He has organized a school, holds Shabbat services. He has great ideas and is an active worker."

Bespectacled and soft-spoken, the 32-year-old Asiel is a Serb who converted to Judaism and studied in Jerusalem for nearly seven years with the financial support of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which finances the day-to-day operations of the community and most of its special projects.

With his arrival, Asiel took over much of the hands-on work of Belgrade's long-serving Rabbi Cadik Danon, who at 78 is in frail health and semi-retired. "I see my mission to be the saver of individuals," Asiel said.

"I can teach them tradition in a real traditional way. For people who have been standing in one place and not moving for a long time, one step is big. If you look at what's happening from a distance, maybe it's nothing. But from the inner point of view, it is something — and at least it's hope."

Reintroduced ritual slaughtering

Working with Danon, Asiel undertook a series of initiatives to celebrate Shabbat and holidays and to teach Hebrew and religious traditions at an afternoon Jewish school and various clubs for youngsters and adults.

He travels regularly to provincial communities, and in Belgrade gathered a group of 10 young men for cantorial studies. Asiel also reintroduced "shechitah," or ritual slaughtering, into the community, even if only he and a few other people keep kosher.

Throughout the years of crisis, the Jewish community has maintained a strict policy of steering clear of nationalist politics, and community leaders remain anxious that Jews not be manipulated by any side in the conflict.

The conflict, however, including the international isolation of Serbia, produced lasting effects among Jews who are Western-oriented and who before the war enjoyed close, open contacts with world Jewry, particularly with communities in other parts of the former Yugoslavia.

"We miss these regular connections," said Petrovic, the activities organizer.

He and other community members expressed the hope that conditions would improve, particularly if peace holds in the Balkans.

But Asiel noted that in working for the future, he found it difficult to rely even on the present.

"It's very interesting to be a rabbi in the Balkans," he said, "because nothing is stable here. You can't plan your life."

Asiel said he plans "for the short term, but with a maximum input" in his work with the community because "I live with the possibility that tomorrow my life could go into a complete new direction without my will." □