



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israel is not expected to meet a deadline for carrying out the first of the further redeployments that are called for under the terms of Hebron accord. The government is scheduled to discuss later this week the extent of the troop pullback from rural areas in the West Bank. [Page 2]

■ The Likud Central Committee rallied behind Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The gathering comes soon after Netanyahu was questioned in the probe into allegations of corruption surrounding the short-lived appointment of an attorney general. [Page 3]

■ Israeli officials rejected a High Court of Justice compromise on Shabbat traffic on a Jerusalem thoroughfare that cuts through religious neighborhoods. Israeli Transportation Minister Yitzhak Levy and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert did not accept a proposal that would close Bar Ilan Street to traffic on Shabbat and other holidays in exchange for the opening of a nearby street.

■ Israeli planes hit Hezbollah targets just days after an Israeli soldier was killed in a clash with the Islamic fundamentalist group. [Page 4]

■ The Executive Council of Australian Jewry reported a rise in anti-Semitic incidents in Australia in 1996. About one-third of the 299 reported incidents involved anti-Semitic mail and some 20 percent involved threatening telephone calls. [Page 4]

■ Thousands of neo-Nazis marched through Munich to protest a new exhibit that implicates Adolf Hitler's regular armed forces in wartime atrocities. At least 47 people were arrested, most of them neo-Nazis carrying banned Nazi symbols.

■ Scotland Yard is investigating a neo-Nazi group's "hit list" that targets more than 100 celebrities, including prominent Jewish leaders, union officials and politicians. The extremist group, Combat 18, takes its name from Adolf Hitler's initials, which are the first and eighth letters of the alphabet.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Isolated mountain Jews carry small brooms on way to Israel

By Lev Krichevsky

MAKHACHKALA, Russia (JTA) — Customs officials at the airport here are used to seeing short-handled brooms in the luggage of Jews leaving for Israel.

The brooms reflect a custom practiced in the southern Russian republic of Dagestan, whose capital is Makhachkala.

When moving to a new home, people bring along a broom and some dust from the old home.

Merom Nazarova, a 63-year-old Jewish woman from the nearby town of Derbent, explained that before entering her new house in Israel, she will scatter the dust in a doorway and then sweep it away.

This is to ensure, as she says, that "life in the new home will be not worse than in the old one."

Jewish emigration from Dagestan, which is located on the Caspian Sea in the Caucasus region of southern Russia, began a few years later than in most of the former Soviet Union.

But emigration from this region, in contrast to the rest of Russia, is now accelerating.

Dagestan, with a population of 2 million, has dozens of ethnic groups and is known as one of the most ethnically diverse regions in the world.

Dagestan's Jewish roots run deep. A Jewish community that traces its origin to what is now northern Iran appeared in the region as early as the 7th century.

According to the last Soviet census, which took place in 1989, Dagestan had a 30,000-strong Jewish community, which included about 10,000 Russian-speaking Ashkenazi Jews who settled in Dagestan after World War II.

Most of the Russian-speaking Jews already have left by now, and the autonomous republic's Jewish community now numbers about 3,000, two-thirds of which lives in Makhachkala.

Jews here say that by the end of this century, one of the oldest Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union — the Mountain Jews of Dagestan — will disappear.

"Everyone will leave," says Larissa, a woman in her 40s from the town of Khasav Yurt. "Our children will grow up in Israel."

Says Rabbi Daniil Kazakov of Buinaksk: "The last Jew will leave our town probably next year."

2,000 Jews left for Israel last year

Kazakov, the third generation of Buinaksk rabbis, says he will emigrate to Israel this spring. After his departure, there will be only one remaining Dagestani rabbi, in Derbent.

Last year, about 2,000 Jews from Dagestan left for Israel.

"There is not a single Jewish family in Dagestan that has no relatives in Israel," says Micha Spiegel, the Jewish Agency in Russia's representative in Dagestan.

Four years ago, Khasav Yurt, one of the largest Jewish communities in Dagestan, had 3,000 Jews. Now there are only 180 Jews, says Iosif Kardashov, who is the leader of the Khasav Yurt community.

Khasav Yurt is located just seven miles away from the republic of Chechnya, site of the 20-month war between local separatists and Russian troops that ended in August.

"The main reason why people are leaving is the rise of crime" that has taken place after the collapse of the Soviet Union, said Kardashov.

Very often, criminals target Jews because of the popular belief that they are better off than the general population.

"There is virtually no Jewish family in town that has not been robbed during the last four years," says Ovadis Yakubov, a high-ranking Dagestani government official from Makhachkala. Yakubov's family was the victim of a nighttime holdup by armed robbers last winter.

Dagestan shares the same problems that are felt across the former Soviet Union — among them unemployment, corruption at all levels of

society, a spectacular rise in organized crime and easy access to guns.

Dagestan, which has no significant natural resources, also struggles with the legacy of being one of the poorest regions of Russia.

Almost 60 percent of Dagestan's people live in scattered villages, many of which are located in the mountainous areas that suffer extreme isolation, especially during the winter.

Jews lived in rural areas until the 20th century, when most of them became urban dwellers.

After the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, Dagestan was proclaimed an autonomous republic within Soviet Russia, a status that conferred special privileges upon the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus, but which often led to discrimination against thousands of Jews on the grounds of their non-local origins.

During the Soviet era, many Jews preferred to register as Tats, a small ethnic group that shared the same Persian dialect that Jews spoke.

With recognition as an indigenous nationality of the Caucasus, Jews could have a share in the system of ethnic quotas that developed in Soviet Dagestan.

Nearly 95 percent of the Dagestani population is Muslim. Although only a handful of mosques survived the mass destruction of the Bolshevik atheistic campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s, Islam has retained a central role in social life.

In every village in Dagestan, there is a new mosque being built or one that was just completed.

There has been almost no anti-Semitism in Dagestan, but Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise, a development that makes many Jews feel insecure.

Talk of a jihad

Last year, the Dagestan chapter of the Muslim Union of Russia proclaimed a jihad, which they described as a call to all Dagestani Muslims to spiritual self-improvement.

"Today Muslims are talking about the first step of jihad, which they say would not harm us," says one Jewish official in Makhachkala.

"Tomorrow they can turn it into a holy war against non-Muslims."

The Jews of Dagestan boast strong ties to Jewish traditions.

Unlike what is taking place in many places in the former Soviet Union, "there is no such thing as a Jewish renaissance" in Dagestan, says the Jewish Agency's Spiegel.

"Tradition does not have to be revived here since most of it has been kept throughout Communist rule."

Virtually every Jew in Dagestan seems to be preoccupied with only one problem these days — how to sell one's property before moving.

Many are remaining here because it is virtually impossible to sell a home in Dagestan, where as a result of mass Jewish emigration home prices have fallen dramatically.

Those Jews who are "still here would have left almost immediately if they were able to sell their houses," says Bagrat Abiyayev of Makhachkala.

The family of Asher Shuvayev, 45, from Buinaksk, left for Israel two years ago.

He remained in order to sell his spacious 100-year-old brick house in the center of Buinaksk's former Jewish quarter.

But he may soon give up the attempt and leave without making the sale.

"It looks like I will just leave it as it is," he says of his unsuccessful attempts to sell the property. □

IDF pullback from rural areas in West Bank may be delayed

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel is not expected to meet this week's deadline for carrying out the first of three redeployments from rural areas of the West Bank.

Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh said Sunday that "logistical delays" could result in the postponement of the Israel Defense Force redeployment.

Under the terms of the Hebron agreement signed in January, Israel is to carry out the first of those redeployments by the end of the first week in March.

The final redeployment is scheduled to be completed by mid-1998.

The Cabinet was scheduled to discuss the scope of the pullback later this week.

Two Cabinet ministers from the immigrant-rights Yisrael Ba'Aliyah party, Natan Sharansky and Yuli Edelstein, said last Friday that they would not vote in favor of the first withdrawal unless they were told the full extent of all three redeployments.

Naveh would not say Sunday how long it would take to implement the redeployment once a government decision was made.

Nor would he elaborate on the redeployment's estimated scope, saying only that it would be determined by security considerations and Jewish settlement concerns.

He dismissed reports that Israel had agreed to a larger troop withdrawal in the first phase — up to 10 percent of the West Bank — in exchange for a muted Palestinian response to Israel's decision last week to build a new Jewish neighborhood in southeastern Jerusalem.

Palestinian and other Arab officials have condemned the decision to start construction at Har Homa as a violation of the peace process.

At an urgent meeting over the weekend of Arab League members in Cairo, Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat suggested that he might declare the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital in retaliation for the Israeli move.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that such declaration would bring the peace process to a halt.

American officials also have been critical of the Har Homa decision.

But they also criticized recent Palestinian warnings that a go-ahead for construction at Har Homa could lead to violence.

Despite the tensions, the Palestinian reaction to the Har Homa project was relatively restrained over the weekend in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. □

Victims of terror remembered

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The more than two dozen people killed in a Jerusalem bus bombing a year ago were remembered by family and friends at a memorial service at the attack site.

Among those present was the sister of Sara Duker, one of two American students killed in the suicide bombing by Islamic fundamentalists on Feb. 25, 1996. The other student was Duker's boyfriend, Matthew Eisenfeld.

At last week's ceremony, Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert dedicated a plaque.

Also on that date one year ago, a suicide bomber blew up a soldiers' hitchhiking station near Ashkelon. Exactly one week after the February attack, a suicide bombing occurred on another bus on the same early morning route — No. 18 — in Jerusalem. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

One Palestinian self-rule town reaches out to Israeli neighbors

By Gil Sedan

KALKILYA, West Bank (JTA) — Abba Cohen of Petach Tikva sat at the Abu-Flash restaurant in this West Bank town, wiping the last remains of hummus from his plate.

"They treat me here like the sheik of Petach Tikva," he says. "Everyone greets me, asks how I am. They like me here."

Cohen has made it a habit to visit Kalkilya at least once a week, for lunch, shopping or to repair his car.

The prices are good, he says, the people are friendly, so why not come?

Most Israelis do not agree with Cohen.

Kalkilya, with a population of 75,000 and located just across the Green Line, the pre-1967 border, from the Israeli town of Kfar Saba, used to be a mecca for Israeli shoppers.

Thousands of Israelis used to visit here on weekends to do their shopping at half the prices they would expect to pay in Israeli stores.

But then came the intifada, the six-year Palestinian uprising that began in December 1987, and Kalkilya became one of the trouble spots in the territories.

Israelis stayed away from the town, a bypass road was paved, the weekend shopping trips ceased.

Now, some 15 months after Israeli troops withdrew and Kalkilya came under Palestinian self-rule, local leaders are urging the Israeli public to return.

"The mayor of Kalkilya understands that only employment will guarantee peace and quiet," says Mayor Yitzhak Wald of neighboring Kfar Saba.

Kalkilya Mayor Ma'aruf Zaharan says the need to improve the standard of living of his people lies behind the drive to get Israelis to visit.

'Could be fuel for peace process'

"Of course, this is the reason," Zaharan says in an interview. "Money makes the world go 'round, and it could be the fuel to keep the peace process running."

Zaharan stood in the midst of Kalkilya's vegetable market, where tomatoes, potatoes and cucumbers are piled high on the stands, priced far below Israeli standards.

Two pounds of cucumbers, for example, were selling at the equivalent of 70 cents.

Across the Green Line, at Kfar Saba, they would sell for \$2 and more.

"The intifada is over. We have signed a peace agreement," says Daud Mansur, a vendor at Kalkilya's vegetable market. "The Israelis are welcome."

A garment store near the vegetable market was selling top Israeli clothing brands at prices 30 percent to 50 percent below what they would sell for in Tel Aviv discount stores.

But the store was empty.

Local residents cannot afford the prices, and there were no Israeli shoppers.

Most of the Israelis who visit Kalkilya nowadays are Israeli Arabs, who feel safer here than Israeli Jews do.

Except of course, for people like Abba Cohen.

"I feel totally safe in this town," says Cohen. "I have been coming here for the past 25 years — except when entry was banned by the army — and never has any harm been done to me."

"Why, I couldn't feel safer in Tel Aviv," he adds.

Kalkilya's police commander says it is his job to ensure that Israelis feel safe in the town.

"We have specific orders from our commanders to

do our utmost to guarantee the security of every Israeli citizen who visits," says Col. Azzam Daka.

Kalkilya may well be the pioneer among Palestinian population centers in seeking Israeli business.

Bethlehem, for example, Jerusalem's neighbor to the south, has not taken a similar initiative.

Nor has Jenin, to the north.

Local officials give Kalkilya's mayor full credit for the initiative.

Zaharan, a former Fatah activist who spent two years under administrative detention in an Israeli jail, understands that whatever political developments take place, the future of Kalkilya is tied to Israeli business.

Zaharan has initiated a number of meetings with Kfar Saba's mayor in an effort to build that future.

Wald says in an interview, "We are now discussing ways to create a joint workshop zone on the Green Line."

The two towns have also joined efforts to secure a \$20 million loan from the International Bank in New York to cope with local environmental problems, according to Wald.

Kalkilya residents, meanwhile, hope for an upturn in Israeli business.

"I remember the days Premier Yitzhak Rabin and Defense Minister Shimon Peres used to come here, back in 1975, and eat shishlik at our restaurant," says the owner of the Abu-Flash restaurant.

With a little bit of luck, he adds, other Israelis may soon return to his establishment. □

Likud Party members hold solidarity rally for premier

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Members of the Likud Party rallied in a show of support for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose political stature has been shaken by a police investigation of alleged corruption surrounding the appointment of an attorney general.

Members of the Likud Central Committee packed the Tel Aviv Conference Center on Sunday night to cheer Netanyahu and other key party figures who have been questioned in connection with the investigation.

Israeli media reported over the weekend that Netanyahu might be questioned again by police regarding an alleged deal tied to the appointment of Jerusalem lawyer Roni Bar-On as attorney general.

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

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 one of Netanyahu's political allies, Shas Knesset member Aryeh 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.

Netanyahu drew enthusiastic applause from the crowd at Sunday's rally with his attacks on the Israeli media, which he criticized for its non-stop coverage of the investigation.

Despite the show of solidarity, there were nonetheless rifts within Likud.

This became evident when one of Netanyahu's severest critics appeared at the conference center.

Knesset member Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, who resigned his Cabinet post after the other ministers approved the Hebron agreement in January, was greeted with boos and catcalls when he first arrived. □

French museums to exhibit 900 works taken during WWII

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — Four French museums have announced special exhibits for next month of some 900 works of art that the Nazis took from France during World War II.

Some of the works might have been looted from Jews, and organizers of the exhibits said they hoped that such pieces would be claimed by their rightful owners.

The exhibits — which include works by Picasso, Cezanne and Matisse — will open April 9 at the Louvre, the Musee d'Orsay, the Pompidou Centre and the Musee National de la Ceramique.

The event comes in the wake of a report by France's state spending watchdog accusing the national museum network of having made little or no effort to return some 1,995 works of art that were entrusted to them shortly after the end of the war.

The museums were required by law to try to locate the owners or heirs of the art.

In addition, the French government recently announced that it would conduct a probe into Jewish property seized during World War II.

Jewish leaders welcomed the decision to hold the exhibits.

"The fact that the state museums are exhibiting these paintings, whose origins remain unknown, and even shady, can be considered as a necessary step forward," said Marcel Goldstein, vice president of CRIF, France's umbrella group of secular Jewish organizations.

French Jewish leaders had been astonished at recent revelations that French national museums had failed to seek the rightful owners of the precious works.

The 900 works will be displayed with a record of historical background that might help in locating their rightful owners.

Some of the works are believed to have been seized from Jews who were deported to concentration camps or fleeing persecution. Others might have been sold to German officers by art dealers who collaborated with the wartime regime. □

Australia sets new record for anti-Semitic incidents

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Almost 300 anti-Semitic incidents occurred in Australia in 1996, according to information released last week by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

The 299 incidents include such acts as vandalism of synagogues and other Jewish communal property, verbal and physical harassment and anti-Semitic graffiti.

About one-third of the incidents involved anti-Semitic mail and some 20 percent involved threatening telephone calls.

But the incidents reported in 1996 also included the desecration of Jewish graves in two cemeteries, the smashing of synagogue windows in five cities and various bomb threats to Jewish institutions.

"In 1996, anti-Semitic groups and individuals became more brazen in their rhetoric, more confident in their public posturing and more willing to directly harass Australian Jews," said council President Diane Shteinman.

The council's information comes from reports from areas with Jewish communities.

The previous highest total was in 1995, when 243 anti-Semitic incidents were recorded, according to the council.

Israeli planes hit Lebanon after Hezbollah kills soldier

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli fighter planes struck Hezbollah targets Sunday in southern Lebanon in retaliation for earlier clashes that left one Israeli soldier dead and another seriously wounded.

Sgt. Lior Shabtai, 19, was killed and an officer was wounded last Friday when Hezbollah gunmen fired a missile at an Israeli tank.

Shabtai was buried Sunday in the military section of the cemetery in his hometown of Rishon le-Zion.

Last Friday's battle was a continuation of clashes the previous night. During the exchanges, some 20 Hezbollah gunmen tried to overtake an Israeli position in the security zone. At least four Hezbollah gunmen were killed, according to an army spokesman.

During last Friday's battle, Hezbollah forces launched rockets and mortars at the Israeli position from a number of locations, some of them residential.

Israel later filed a complaint with the five-nation group monitoring the cease-fire that went into effect last April after Israel's 16-day Operation Grapes of Wrath. According to the terms of the cease-fire, neither side was to launch attacks on or from civilian locations. □

Agreement reached on frozen eggs

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An estranged Israeli couple has reached a compromise in their lengthy legal battle over the fate of frozen eggs fertilized while they were still together.

The agreement comes after more than five years of court battles.

At the Supreme Court's suggestion, Danny Nahmani agreed to give his estranged wife, Ruti, possession of the eggs and to allow her to continue to pursue having a child through a surrogate mother.

In return, Ruti Nahmani agreed to give Danny Nahmani visiting rights and drop all financial demands of him. The two also agreed that the in-vitro fertilization process would take place after they were formally divorced.

The couple had married more than 12 years ago, but remained childless. After a bout with cancer, Ruti Nahmani had a hysterectomy, and the couple later decided to attempt in-vitro fertilization.

At that time, surrogate motherhood was not yet legal in Israel, though a law has since been enacted to make it so. □

Artists gives sculpture to Israel

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The artist Roy Lichtenstein has donated one of his sculptures to Jerusalem's Israel Museum in memory of slain Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The modern steel sculpture will stand in Daniel Park, in the Jerusalem municipality complex.

Lichtenstein, 73, was one of the founders of the 1960s Pop Art movement.

Known as "Modern Head," the 10-yard-high sculpture depicts two simplified heads in profile, combined with other abstract shapes often seen in Lichtenstein's paintings.

The sculpture, which was donated jointly by Lichtenstein and art dealer Jeffrey Loria, is said to be worth \$2.5 million. □