



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ President Clinton said U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross was "encouraged by the response" he got during his meeting with Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat in Morocco. Ross, in the region to help defuse tensions, also met with Israeli officials. [Page 3]

■ Violence continued in the West Bank as Israeli soldiers and Palestinian police worked together in Ramallah to disperse hundreds of Palestinian protesters. Meanwhile, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai ordered the deployment of army tanks around Palestinian cities in the West Bank, in the event of an escalation of violence. [Page 3]

■ Ancient caves that were possibly used for burials were discovered at Har Homa, the site of the controversial new Jewish neighborhood in southeastern Jerusalem. Orthodox groups asked the Housing Ministry to examine whether the caves were used for burying humans.

■ Two justices on the Argentine Supreme Court suggested that a group of Jewish extremists might be behind the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy. Twenty-nine people were killed and more than 200 wounded in the blast. [Page 3]

■ President Clinton should ask Israel to release Mordechai Vanunu, an Israeli who is in prison for revealing nuclear secrets, 12 members of Congress urged in a letter this week. Earlier this month, Israeli President Ezer Weizman rejected a similar plea from Sens. Russell Feingold (D-Wis.) and Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.), calling Vanunu a "traitor."

■ Jewish groups proposed that Elie Wiesel, U.S. official Stuart Eizenstat and Israeli Knesset member Avraham Herschson be named the Jewish representatives to the committee directing the Swiss memorial fund for Holocaust survivors.

■ Some of those rallying in Moscow as part of a nationwide protest organized by the Russian trade union movement carried anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic banners.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Jews of Hong Kong taking transition of power in stride

By Mark Joffe

HONG KONG (JTA) — It's Barbecue Night at Hong Kong's Jewish Community Center, and the lower-level function room is packed.

Jews ranging in age from toddlers to septuagenarians, and in religious observance from completely secular to fervently Orthodox, are lining up at the buffet tables.

They are seeking their fill of steak, turkey shashlik, corn, pasta, salad, halvah and more — all under the watchful eye of the island's mashgiach, or kosher supervisor.

Anyone who belongs to one of Hong Kong's four Jewish congregations is entitled to membership in this resplendent community center, which also houses a Jewish day school, two synagogues, a kosher restaurant and a deluxe swimming pool and health spa complex.

It is less than four months until the British turn over control of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China; a large digital clock in Beijing's Tiananmen Square counts down the seconds until July 1.

But there are few signs of anxiety about the transition among those partaking of the Sunday night smorgasbord.

"I'm not worried," says Yaron Meir, an Israeli from the town of Hadera who came here with his wife, Ziv, five months ago to open a candle-making factory in the neighboring Chinese province of Canton.

"I don't think it will affect foreigners."

Stephane Wilmet, whose cosmetics firm transferred him here from Paris in 1994, agrees.

"Nothing's going to happen," he says confidently. "There's going to be a big party, and that will be it."

"I think I'll be here a long time," he adds.

But pressed a little further, Wilmet concedes that the new regime will not be as democratic as its British colonial predecessor.

"It will be authoritarian rule in Hong Kong for sure," he says. And he also believes that the transition will "further close China for foreigners. Foreign companies are going to have a tougher time doing business in China. It's going to be China for the Chinese."

That should be a concern for Hong Kong's Jews, many of whom do business with or on the Chinese mainland.

But Wilmet's friend, Axelle Sznajer, sees the Chinese takeover of Hong Kong as a business opportunity. People see it as a way to get easier access to the enormous Chinese market, she says.

Sznajer, a Belgian native, came here a year ago with her husband Michel after working in London for three years. She is in finance; he is a management consultant.

Like many of the expatriates in Hong Kong, they are young — in their mid-20s — and ambitious. They come here planning to spend a year or two, end up staying a little longer, but always know that they can return home if the going gets tough.

Jewish center is home away from home

And that, in fact, seems to be why the Jews of Hong Kong are not worried.

There are no Jewish "natives" here to speak of, other than a handful of Sassoons and Kadoories, the Iraqi Jews who came here decades ago and made vast fortunes.

This makes Hong Kong basically a business opportunity for most of the Jews here, rather than a homeland to which they have deep emotional ties.

For the time that they are here, their home away from home is the Jewish community center.

The center was built two years ago as part of a complex that includes two 47-story towers of luxury apartments with a breathtaking view of Hong Kong's Central District.

The land it sits on was a barren lot, in the center of which stood the historic Ohel Leah Synagogue.

The majestic Sephardi-style synagogue is still there — the architects

simply built the housing and community center complex around it.

And now this piece of prime real estate has netted the Jewish community trust a sum reputed to be in the millions of dollars.

For Hong Kong's tiny but affluent Jewish community, what matters more is that they now have a place to worship, educate their children and swim.

"It's a great community," says Sznajer, the Belgian native. "I love the feeling of being at home — that's important."

"The strength of the community," she says, "is that you have one center for everyone."

Looking around the dining room, where 50 or 60 people have gathered for the weekly get-together, one sees a woman with a sheitel, the wig worn by many married Orthodox women, in one corner; a secular Israeli in jeans and a T-shirt in another corner; and plenty of people who seem to be somewhere in between — some with head coverings, many without.

These various types of Jews share not only the same swimming pool, but also the same restaurants and day school.

But this diversity is also a source of tension. The old joke about two Jews needing three synagogues certainly applies to Hong Kong.

On an island where the Jewish population is at best a few hundred, there is a Reform congregation, a mainstream Orthodox one and a Chasidic one that holds Shabbat services in a converted suite of the luxurious Hotel Furama Kempinski. Across the bay in Kowloon is a fourth, fervently Orthodox congregation.

The largest one at present is the Reform congregation, whose rabbi for the year is Levi Weiman-Kelman, founder and religious leader of the Progressive congregation Kol Haneshama in Jerusalem.

Weiman-Kelman had decided last summer to take a yearlong sabbatical and was trying to figure out how to spend it when he got a call from Ben Frankel, one of the most active lay leaders of the Hong Kong Jewish community.

Frankel asked Weiman-Kelman whether he would consider coming, even for just a few months.

Less than four weeks later, Weiman-Kelman, his wife Paula and their three children arrived here.

Seven months later, they have settled in well and are enjoying it.

"The way things work here," he says, "if you're here for six months, you're an old-timer."

In fact, many people come for much shorter stints, though they may do so repeatedly.

'Frumkeit has increased'

Take Eli Mirzoeff, who has been coming to Hong Kong to do business for a week or two at a time since the early 1970s.

This time he brought his son Adam and his daughter-in-law Chavi.

All three are fervently Orthodox and live in New York.

Whenever they are here, they stay at the Furama Kempinski and daven in the Lubavitch synagogue there.

In the 25 years that he has been coming here, Mirzoeff has seen the Jewish community grow stronger. "The 'frumkeit' has increased," he says, using the Yiddish word for religious observance.

Speaking of the upcoming transition to Chinese rule, Mirzoeff says, "We don't know what will happen. I personally believe it will not affect our business, but it all depends on how the Chinese behave."

His son Adam, who has visited once before, agrees.

"There's a lot of doubt" about the future, he says, but "overall, I don't think it will change."

Rabbi Netanel Meoded, leader of the fervently Orthodox congregation in Kowloon, is even more at ease. "I'm absolutely not concerned about the changeover," he says emphatically.

Meoded, who came here from Jerusalem a year and a half ago, says he believes that the new government will be even friendlier to the Jewish community.

"The Chinese people like the Jews," he says. "If there's a change, it will be good for the Jews." □

Rejection of anti-fascist bill upsets Russian Jewish leaders

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian Jewish leaders and anti-fascist activists are voicing deep concern over the lower house's opposition to a measure to bar fascist propaganda.

The bill was rejected last week by Communists and ultranationalists, who make up more than half of the Parliament's lower house, known as the Duma.

Some of the measure's opponents described the bill as "Zionist."

A Jewish community activist in Moscow, Alla Gerber, said she doubted that the Duma would ever pass an anti-fascist bill.

The Communist and ultranationalist majority "will never pass such bill because they are scared of the very term 'fascism,'" said Gerber, a former member of the Duma.

Gerber helped draft an anti-fascist measure in 1994, when such a measure was first proposed.

Two readings of the bill considered last week had been approved earlier this year. But the Duma's final approval was needed for it to ultimately pass.

The measure included a new definition of fascism that would have made it easier to prosecute extremists.

Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky, a member of the Duma and leader of what is known as the Liberal Democratic Party, said Russian lawmakers should prevent the nation from becoming "an anti-fascist country like most of Europe."

Alexander Osovtsov, executive vice-president of the Russian Jewish Congress, said legislators sympathetic to Zhirinovsky "rejected the measure because a ban on fascist propaganda might be applied" to much of what they say.

Earlier this year, some liberal politicians and anti-fascist activists criticized the bill, saying that it was vague and inaccurate.

"If the bill was passed I would have been the first to urge [Russian President Boris] Yeltsin to nix it," said Yevgeny Proshechkin, chairman of the Moscow-based Anti-Fascist Center.

The proposed measure would not have barred fascist propaganda per se, but would have prohibited the use of fascist ideas and propaganda "for mass circulation," Proshechkin said. He added that the measure also did not define "mass circulation."

Proshechkin pointed out that the Duma rejected the measure not because it was developed insufficiently, but because the ultranationalists and Communists do "not want to deal with this problem."

It was not clear whether liberal politicians and the Jewish community would take any other steps to have the Duma reconsider the bill.

The Anti-Fascist Center has recently drafted a bill making Holocaust denial a crime, Proshechkin said. The Duma is expected to debate it later this year. □

Both unrest and diplomacy cap a most volatile week in Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's most volatile week to date this year has ended amid an atmosphere of continued unrest and diplomacy.

As U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross held talks aimed at defusing the tensions, Palestinian demonstrations spread to the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Hundreds of Palestinians burned tires and threw stones as Israeli soldiers and Palestinian police worked to calm the situation.

Meanwhile, Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai boosted forces in the West Bank and ordered tanks to be stationed around Palestinian towns in the event of an escalation of violence.

Thursday's clashes marked the eighth day of clashes, which were sparked by the start of construction of a new Jewish neighborhood on the southeastern boundary of Jerusalem.

The Palestinians claim that the move alters the status quo of the city, whose future is to be determined in final-status negotiations.

Security forces were on heightened alert in anticipation of Land Day demonstrations Sunday, when Arab Israelis have traditionally protested what they view as land expropriations by Israel.

Israeli security officials said that while they expected Arab Israeli demonstrations to be peaceful, it was unclear whether the Palestinians would use the day to create further unrest.

'Encouraged by Arafat's response'

President Clinton dispatched Ross to the region this week, saying that he was concerned about the deterioration of relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and the evolution of a "very dangerous" situation.

Ross met for two hours Thursday in Rabat, Morocco, with Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat.

Neither one spoke after the talks, but in Washington, Clinton told reporters that Ross was "encouraged by the response of Chairman Arafat."

Officials in Washington had said the U.S. envoy would make clear to Arafat that he must take an unequivocal stand against terror, and show his commitment to fight it.

This comes against the backdrop of last week's suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, for which Israel had blamed the Palestinian Authority, saying that it gave Islamic militant groups the green light to carry out attacks in light of the political impasse.

From Morocco, Ross flew to Israel, where he was scheduled to hold a late-night meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The two were due to meet again Friday, along with Foreign Minister David Levy and Defense Minister Mordechai. Ross was scheduled to return to Washington on Friday night.

Officials said Ross was also carrying a message for Netanyahu, stressing that it was up to both Israel and the Palestinians to stop the violence and get the political process back on track. The message also asked Israel to halt its construction at Har Homa, according to a U.S. official.

Meanwhile, Levy on Thursday accused the Palestinian Authority leader of using the Palestinian public and Arab states to isolate Israel. He said Har Homa was just an excuse to create a crisis.

Levy met Thursday with the European Union envoy to the Middle East, Miguel Angel Moratinos. □

Some Argentine justices blame Jews for 1992 embassy bombing

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Two justices on the Argentine Supreme Court are saying that a group of Jewish extremists may be behind the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy.

Justices Adolfo Vazquez and Carlos Fayt claim that "no hypothesis should be discarded" and that "Jews might be the guilty party." The two justices maintain that the bomb was planted by "a group of Jewish extremists, right-wing dissidents opposed to the peace process."

Other justices harshly criticized the two justices.

"It is shameful to say that a Jew would plant a bomb and indiscriminately kill a group of Jews," Justice Gustavo Bossert told his colleagues in a meeting this week, according to the Argentine newspaper Clarin.

"The notion reminds me of the times of military dictatorship in our country, when the government claimed that the [disappeared] had been killed by their own comrades."

"That is called blaming the victim," Bossert said.

The Supreme Court was charged with investigating the March 17, 1992, bombing because it has exclusive jurisdiction over diplomats and foreign offices. But after five years, the justices have little to show.

While the Israeli and Argentine governments have blamed Arab terrorists for the deadly attack, no suspects have been apprehended.

The Israeli Embassy was destroyed by a bomb that left 29 dead and more than 200 wounded.

It appears now that the issue has become highly contentious among the justices.

According to sources close to the Supreme Court, the justices quarrel regularly over what happened.

There are three views held by justices, according to the sources and articles published in the local press.

Some justices believe that the attack was carried out by Middle Eastern terrorists using a car bomb. They cite three technical studies conducted by Argentine police and security agencies with the help of American and Israeli advisers. The studies concluded that a truck carrying hundreds of pounds of high-power explosives was parked at the building entrance and detonated.

A second group of justices say the bomb was planted by Arab terrorists inside the building. They refer to a recent study by the Argentine Academy of Engineers. However, the study was carried out four years after the bombing, and the professionals involved did not specialize in explosives.

The third view is the one advanced by Vazquez and Fayt.

The investigation of the attack has been criticized in the past by local Jewish leaders, Israeli officials, American Jewish groups and even by members of the Argentine Cabinet. Last week, the Supreme Court formally protested a statement by the Argentine foreign minister, Guido di Tella, who called the investigation "pathetic." □

Razing of bomber's home blocked

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's High Court of Justice has issued an interim order preventing the destruction of the West Bank home of the suicide bomber who carried out last week's attack in a Tel Aviv cafe.

The order was to last until Sunday, when the justices will hear a petition submitted by the bomber's family. Family members have said that because the bomber lived in only one part of the house, demolishing it would punish innocent people. □

**Swiss guard faces hostility
for saving bank documents***By Fredy Rom*

ZURICH (JTA) — Special security arrangements are being provided for the Swiss bank guard who was dismissed after saving wartime documents from the shredder and giving them to the Jewish community.

The arrangements were put in place after Christoph Meili received death threats, his lawyer, Marcel Bosonnet, said this week.

"The life of my client is in danger," Bosonnet said.

Bosonnet would not provide details of the security arrangements, but said Meili had received threats from various anti-Semitic groups.

"I had to act before it was too late," Bosonnet said.

"Neo-Nazis and others have accused my client of being an agent of the Israeli security service."

In February, Meili was fired from his job as a night guard at the Union Bank of Switzerland after he rescued sensitive Holocaust-era documents from the shredder and turned them over to the local Jewish community.

The documents could have bearing on allegations from Jewish groups that the bank was withholding from their rightful owners the assets of accounts opened by Jews during World War II.

Bank officials said at the time that Meili was not fired because he rescued the documents.

The officials said Meili was dismissed because he turned them over to a third party, which they said represented a possible violation of Switzerland's bank secrecy laws.

Meili may face charges under those laws.

His case prompted the Anti-Defamation League to establish a \$50,000 legal defense fund, his lawyer confirmed this week.

The 27-year-old Meili became something of a hero in Jewish circles after he rescued the bank documents.

The Knesset invited him to come to Israel, and he was invited to Washington by Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee and one of Switzerland's harshest critics.

"It was always a dream of mine to see the United States.

"I talked to Senator D'Amato and thanked him for the invitation," Meili said in an interview.

'Did not want him in D'Amato's hands'

But leaders of Zurich's Jewish community pressured Meili not to travel, apparently fearful that he would become a pawn in a campaign to discredit ongoing Swiss investigations of how the country's banks handled Jews' wartime bank accounts.

"We did not want Meili to get into D'Amato's hands to be used against Switzerland," said a spokeswoman for the local Jewish community.

In the last days of February, Meili's long-held dream of traveling to the United States almost was fulfilled.

According to the spokeswoman, Meili boarded a Feb. 27 flight to New York to meet with D'Amato without informing either his lawyer or the local Jewish community.

Also aboard the plane, by coincidence, was Edward Fagan, a lawyer who has filed a \$20 billion class action suit against Switzerland on behalf of Holocaust survivors who were unable to reclaim their wartime accounts.

Fagan, who recognized Meili, then called the guard's lawyer as well as Zurich Jewish community leaders

during the flight, according to the spokeswoman. When the plane landed, Bosonnet and the leaders were able to reach Meili by phone and convince him to return home.

Meili's trip to the United States lasted only one hour, after which he boarded a return flight without meeting D'Amato — or seeing much of anything of the New World. □

**Priebke relocated to monastery
on eve of massacre anniversary***By Ruth E. Gruber*

ROME (JTA) — Italy this week marked the 53rd anniversary of the Nazi massacre of 335 men and boys at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome.

The victims, who included about 75 Jews, were ordered killed by the Nazis in reprisal for an Italian partisan attack that left 33 German soldiers dead.

The site of the March 24, 1944, massacre has become a national shrine, and the anniversary is commemorated every year by the state.

Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro and other government figures, Rome Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff, Roman Catholic leaders and representatives of families of the victims paid homage to the victims in Monday's ceremony.

The anniversary came just three days after former SS Capt. Erich Priebke, awaiting a retrial for involvement in the massacre, was placed under house arrest in a Catholic monastery near Rome after he had been in jail for 16 months.

A military court in Rome last week agreed to a defense request that Priebke, 83, be transferred from prison on grounds of deteriorating health.

"We have no intention of expressing ourselves on matters of human justice," according to a statement from the San Bonaventura Monastery in the town of Frascati.

"We have been asked to provide simple hospitality for a detainee.

"We wish to receive the man in the spirit of sacred hospitality which the Scriptures teach us."

In November 1995, Priebke was extradited to Italy from Argentina, where he had lived for nearly half a century, to stand trial for participation in the Ardeatine Caves massacre.

A military court last summer found him guilty of taking part in what is considered to be the worst Nazi atrocity carried out in Italy.

However, the court ordered him freed because of extenuating circumstances, including a statute of limitations.

The verdict caused an uproar, and Priebke was rearrested.

An appeals court in October annulled the verdict and ordered a new trial, which is expected to begin next month.

Former SS Maj. Karl Hass, who is also under house arrest, will be tried on the same charges. □

Satellite to get another chance*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Haifa's Technion-Israel Institute of Technology is planning a second launch of a satellite, after a first attempt failed two years ago.

In that launch, the rocket crashed 14 seconds after it was sent up.

The new satellite, TechSat 2, is set to be launched by a civilian Russian company.

The first satellite was sent up on a ballistic missile modified for civilian use. The Technion will pay \$400,000 for the launch. □