



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The collapse of a bridge during the opening ceremonies of the Maccabiah Games in Israel was not caused by sabotage, Israeli authorities said. One member of the Australian delegation was killed and dozen others injured in the accident. [Page 2]

■ Dore Gold was confirmed as Israel's new ambassador to the United Nations. Gold was scheduled to arrive in New York in time for Tuesday's emergency session of the U.N. General Assembly. The session is slated to debate an Arab-sponsored resolution seeking sanctions against Israeli settlements in response to its failure to halt construction at Har Homa.

■ Israel arrested three armed Palestinian police officers that it said were trying to attack a Jewish settlement near the West Bank city of Nablus. One of the three was lightly wounded when he turned to shoot at Israeli security officials. [Page 2]

■ U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made an emotional reference to her Jewish roots after spotting the names of her two paternal grandparents on the wall of the Pinkas Synagogue in Prague. Albright was in the Czech Republic as part of a diplomatic trip to Eastern and Central Europe. [Page 1]

■ U.S. religious leaders urged Congress not to pass a constitutional amendment as a way to counter the Supreme Court's ruling striking down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Testifying before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, the leaders and legal experts outlined several alternative courses of action, including new federal legislation, in order to restore the religious freedom protections voided by the court.

■ The Clinton administration endorsed a bill that would ensure that women could not be denied health insurance because of a genetic predisposition for diseases, including breast cancer. U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala first announced the endorsement during a speech at Hadassah's national convention in Chicago.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Albright: Names of grandparents 'forever seared into my heart'

By Randi Druzin

PRAGUE (JTA) — For U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, all doubt has disappeared.

Like the names of her grandparents who perished in the Holocaust, her Jewish roots are carved in stone.

And at least for the Czech Jews who accompanied her on her historic visit here this week, any doubts that she knew about her Jewish background prior to their revelations in the media earlier this year have been erased.

Tomas Kraus, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, said Albright's emotion was genuine during their tour of the historic Jewish Quarter on Sunday night.

She seemed on the verge of tears many times as she toured the Old Jewish Cemetery and the adjacent Pinkas Synagogue — which has inscribed on its walls the names of more than 77,000 Czech and Slovak Holocaust victims, Kraus said in an interview.

It was among those thousands of victims that Albright found the names of her paternal grandparents, Olga and Arnost Korbel.

Her encounter with her Jewish past was first on the secretary's agenda as she arrived in Prague as part of a tour devoted to NATO and its expansion to Eastern and Central Europe.

Kraus said that during Albright's Jewish tour, which was closed to reporters, it was apparent that she had developed "very strong feelings about her Jewish roots" since learning about them earlier this year.

Standing in front of the 16th-century Jewish Town Hall at the end of her tour, Albright said that when she visited the synagogue last year with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, she didn't look for the names of her grandparents or other family members.

'Something stronger, sadder and richer'

"I did not know my own family story then," she explained, her voice cracking.

"Tonight, I knew to look for those names. And their image will forever be seared into my heart.

"To the many values and many facets that make up who I am, I now add the knowledge that my grandparents and members of my family perished in the worst catastrophe in human history.

"So I leave here tonight with the certainty that this new part of my identity adds something stronger, sadder and richer to my life," Albright said.

Leo Pavlat, the director of Prague's Jewish Museum who also accompanied the secretary of state, said he understood Albright's reaction.

"She is not here for the first time, but it is the first time she came with the aim to look at the names," he said.

In addition to locating the names of her two paternal grandparents on the synagogue walls, Albright was also shown file cards describing their tragic fate: her grandfather died in Theresienstadt in 1942, her grandmother at Auschwitz in 1944.

Her maternal grandfather died before the war. The fate of her maternal grandmother is unknown.

What Kraus saw with Albright, he has seen before: "It is common for Jews from this part of the world to be ignorant of their Jewish roots. A substantial number of Czech Jews have only recently discovered their ancestry."

Both during and after World War II, many European Jews shed their religion and their Jewish identity to break with their painful past and to ensure better lives for their children.

Albright was born here and fled twice as a child.

Her father, who was a diplomat, took his family with him when he left Czechoslovakia in March 1939, days after Nazi forces occupied the country.

Albright said she reflected on her parents' choices as she looked at her grandparents' names on the synagogue wall.

"I felt not only grief for those members of my family that were

inscribed there, but I also thought about my parents. I thought about the choice they made."

"They clearly confronted the most excruciating decision a human being can face when they left members of their family behind even as they saved me from certain death.

"I will always love and honor my parents and will always respect their decision, for that most painful of choices gave me life a second time."

The family returned, but left again after the Communists seized power in 1948 and settled in the United States.

Raised as a Roman Catholic — she is now an Episcopalian — Albright expressed surprise when it was revealed in a February story in The Washington Post that at least three of her grandparents were Jewish and that they, along with more than a dozen other relatives, died in the Holocaust.

"The only thing I have to go by is what my mother and father told me, how I was brought up," she said at the time.

But the question of whether she had known about her past surfaced after reports suggesting that the mayor of the Czech town of Letohrad, where her paternal grandfather once lived, sent her a letter three years ago about her Jewish roots.

Albright's tour of the Jewish Quarter came on the eve of her one-day state visit to Prague.

She met Monday with Czech Foreign Minister Josef Zieleniec to discuss NATO's recent invitation to the Czech Republic to join the alliance.

She also had dinner with Czech President Vaclav Havel.

In a speech before throngs of cheering Czechs on Monday, she spoke of her ties to the Czech Republic and her childhood in Prague.

But Albright made no reference to her Jewish roots.

Kraus said he and Albright spoke in Czech, and that they did not have in-depth discussions about the restitution of property looted by the Nazis or any of the other issues facing the Czech Jewish community.

"It wasn't a political visit," he said. "It was personal." □

Israeli authorities rule out sabotage in Maccabiah accident

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli security forces are dismissing sabotage as the cause of this week's tragic collapse of a pedestrian bridge during opening ceremonies of the "Jewish Olympics."

Police officials said the bridge had been built by a contracting company and that all necessary permits had been obtained.

"It didn't stand up to the weight," Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani said.

Organizers of the 15th Maccabiah Games decided to suspend the competition for 24 hours after at least one person was killed and dozens injured Monday when the bridge leading into a sports stadium collapsed minutes before the competition's opening parade.

Israeli media reported that the games — which brought together some 5,500 Jewish athletes from 50 countries for the quadrennial event — were expected to resume on Wednesday.

Most of the injured athletes were members of the Australian delegation.

Dozens of members of the 370-member team were standing on a temporary bridge spanning the Yarkon River,

waiting to march into the Ramat Gan stadium near Tel Aviv. Tens of thousands of spectators had gathered for the opening ceremonies.

Police said at least one person was killed and 66 were injured, one critically and three others seriously, when the wooden bridge, which was supported by aluminum metal beams, collapsed in the middle.

"I thought I would die," Daniel Cohen, a 16-year-old Australian team member who was injured in the fall, told Israel Radio.

Israeli television channels broadcast images of rescue workers pulling injured athletes from the waters and placing them into waiting ambulances.

"We were walking on the bridge when all of a sudden we heard a crack, and then a second crack, and all of a sudden in slow motion, the bridge just collapsed in the middle," said Harry Purcell, the Australian team manager.

"We started to slide, people falling on top of each other into the water."

"I slid into the water, though my head remained above it. Other people behind me were totally submerged," said team member Evelyn Cohen.

As other athletes and rescue teams struggled to pull people out of the muddy water, the opening ceremonies for the quadrennial Maccabiah games got under way.

The march of the athletes was canceled, but organizers decided to proceed with the scheduled entertainment.

Organizers said the decision to continue the ceremony was made before the full extent of the incident was known.

President Ezer Weizman, who attended the ceremonies, apologized for the initial decision to continue.

"It was unfortunate for this to happen, but at the time it was uncertain whether there were any deaths, and there was a decision to go on with the ceremony," Weizman told the audience before leaving for the hospital to visit the injured.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was also at the event, visited the injured as well, as did Health Minister Yehoshua Matza.

The Israel Defense Force spokesman's office issued a statement that it had offered the services of the army engineering corps to build the bridge, but Maccabiah organizers had elected not to take up the offer because it would be too expensive. □

Palestinian officers arrested

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli security officials have arrested three Palestinian police officers suspected of planning a terrorist attack near a Jewish settlement in the Nablus area.

Acting on intelligence information, Israeli forces Monday arrested the three armed men.

One of the Palestinian officers was lightly wounded by Israeli fire when he turned to shoot at the security officials.

Investigators were verifying whether the police had any previous involvement in other terrorist activities.

Israel Radio reported that two Palestinian policemen were suspected of involvement in last week's roadside attack on the outskirts of Nablus.

Two border policemen were wounded in the explosion.

In Bethlehem, meanwhile, a Palestinian youth was reported killed Monday when a bomb he was apparently preparing went off prematurely.

Palestinian sources said the youth was a Hamas activist. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

European Jews battle prediction that 'Vanishing Diaspora' means them

By Ruth E. Gruber

STRASBOURG, France (JTA) — "Vanishing Diaspora" was the title of a controversial book published last year by Harvard University Press.

In it, British Jewish scholar Bernard Wasserstein theorized that on the basis of demographic trends, Jews in Europe "face slow diminution, at worst virtual extinction."

"Here and there," wrote the director of the Oxford Center for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, "pockets of ultra-Orthodox Jews, clinging to the tenets of the faith, will no doubt survive — a picturesque remnant like the Amish of Pennsylvania." But within a few generations, he predicted, Jews "will disappear as a significant element in the life of the continent."

More than 200 scholars, community leaders and other Jewish representatives from 31 European countries, Israel, the United States and Morocco gathered in Strasbourg recently to discuss ways to prevent this fate.

Entitled "Strengthening Jewish Life in Europe," the June 29-July 1 meeting was the second international conference on planning for the future of Jewish life in Europe and a follow-up to a landmark gathering in Prague two years ago.

The conference was not prompted by Wasserstein's book, but rather by the consciousness that the end of the Cold War and the passage of half a century since the Holocaust have created new conditions — and new potential — for European Jewry.

Nonetheless, awareness of Wasserstein's worst-case scenario provided a disconcerting subtext to the proceedings. Participants demonstrated a will for Jewish survival — and a rejection of Wasserstein's vision of an inevitable "Vanishing Diaspora."

'We are questioning our inherited values'

But they left open important questions as to how to ensure it. "We are healthy, producing good, organic responses to change," said British scholar Jonathan Webber, also of the Oxford Center. "We are questioning our inherited values; enormous progress is being made."

Still, he cautioned, "there is no such thing as predicting the future on the basis of the present."

Jews in Europe are grappling with many of the same challenges facing Jews in America, but under different historical and physical conditions.

Two-thirds of Europe's Jews were killed in the Holocaust, destroying centuries-old communities and traumatizing those Jews who chose to remain — and their children.

"For me, the Holocaust is a burden, I feel it every day," said Esther, a 26-year-old Jew from Vienna.

The Cold War effectively cut off the Jews of Eastern and Central Europe from the rest of the Jewish world. Communist oppression made many Jews afraid to express their Jewish identity and prevented most of them from knowing anything about Jewish practice or tradition.

Immigration from North Africa and elsewhere, meanwhile, changed the face of West European Jewry.

And in many countries — east and west — Jewish communities were so small that only one form of practice, generally Orthodoxy, existed.

The collapse of communism created new conditions for Jews in a newly united Europe.

As in the United States, European Jews are now much freer to choose what historian Diana Pinto describes as a "voluntary" Jewish identity, and to select what type of identity this might be.

"The development of pluralistic Jewish life has increased exponentially," Pinto told the Strasbourg conference.

"Jews across Europe are traveling and meeting each other as if it's the most natural thing on earth.

"Europe is not merely a backdrop but a crucial concept of Jewish life as we head into the 21st century."

The conference was organized by the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research and was sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the European Council of Jewish Communities and France's Unified Jewish Social Fund.

More than two days of debate produced a picture of Jewish life in Europe that showed vigorous development under today's new conditions.

But it also revealed deep, unresolved challenges ranging from increased polarization between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews to newly voiced claims by emerging Jewish communities in Eastern Europe.

"There is concern that the Jews are the cause of their own dissension; the pressure is from within rather than from without," said David Lewis, president of the European Council. "We must come to terms with pluralism or we will self-destruct."

The changing relationship between Diaspora Jews and Israel was noted — including the question of whether the term "Diaspora" was still relevant at a time when Jews were free to choose where and how they wanted to live.

'Suffering from a competition of arrogance'

Likewise, speaker after speaker stressed the need to find ways to make Judaism and Jewish identity an attractive and relevant choice at a time when Jews are — perhaps for the first time in Europe — free to choose whether or not they want to remain Jewish.

"One must be able to cope with freedom," said Nelly Hansson, director of the Foundation of French Judaism.

The beginning of division between European Jews and their American and Israeli counterparts also came to the fore, as European Jews made clear that they sometimes felt snubbed by the two larger Jewish poles.

"As Europeans," said Dominique Moisi, director of the French Institute of International Relations, "we feel we are suffering from a competition of arrogance of Americans and Israelis."

Representatives came from more than 15 former Communist countries. A score came from Russia and Ukraine alone, despite bureaucratic problems that prevented one featured speaker from Russia from obtaining a French visa.

In their statements, East European Jewish representatives stressed the idea that they were no longer "captive Jews" isolated behind an oppressive Iron Curtain, but full-fledged members of the global Jewish community.

They were especially outspoken on the subject of property restitution and compensation for Holocaust victims, demanding loudly and openly that they have a direct say in negotiations.

"We need our voice to be heard and to speak ourselves," Grigory Krupnikov, co-chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, said.

No solutions emerged from the gathering, but organizers and other participants said that this was not an immediate objective.

"The conference as a whole demonstrated the continued hunger for European Jews to come together. It is a process that is still in early stages, but which much continue," said Antony Lerman, executive director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Israel's red heifer still piques curiosity — and political concern***By Michele Chabin*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — To most Israelis, she is just one of tens of thousands of cows born in Israel every year.

But to some Orthodox Jews, Melody, a young heifer with sleepy brown eyes and auburn-colored hide, is the heavenly sign of redemption they've been waiting for.

Described as the first red heifer to be born in the Land of Israel in 2,000 years, Melody has been the subject of both curiosity and concern since the spring, when word of her existence was leaked to the media.

Curiosity peaked again last week, when the biblical reference to the red heifer was read in the weekly Torah portion — Chukat, Numbers: 19-22.

Though not quite as famous as Dolly, the cloned sheep, Melody has become a celebrity in her own right — much to the consternation of the residents of Kfar Hassidim, a moshav in northern Israel.

"We really have nothing to do with the red heifer," says a woman in the moshav office, her voice betraying just a tinge of exasperation. "Why not try the youth village? That's where the heifer lives."

Born 14 months ago, Melody led a quiet life until the media got wind of her. Since then, thousands of people have flocked to the moshav. While most Israelis regard Melody as no more than a curiosity, some in the Orthodox community believe that the birth of a red heifer — after two millennia — signals the coming of messianic times.

The biblical red heifer was used in purification rites through the Second Temple period.

To enable Jews to approach the holy site, the high priest slaughtered a 3-year-old red heifer, burned it and then mixed its ashes with water. The water was then sprinkled on those seeking ritual purity.

'Yet another sign' of redemption

Gershon Solomon, founder of the Temple Mount Faithful, a group dedicated to building a Third Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City by evicting Muslims from the site, calls Melody's appearance "another important stage in the building of the Third Temple in Israel."

"In a spiritual sense, we are in a special time in the history of the Jewish people, the time of the redemption," Solomon says.

"We've had so many signs: the ingathering of the Jewish people to the promised land when Israel became a state in 1948; the transformation of the Land of Israel, which had been a wilderness before 1948, to a land of milk and honey; the capture of the Temple Mount during the Six-Day War.

"The red heifer is yet another sign that Jews will achieve redemption."

Solomon rejects the assertion by some rabbis that Melody does not qualify as a "holy cow" because she sports a few white hairs. According to Jewish law, a red heifer must be completely red.

When the Messiah comes, Solomon quipped, the skeptics "will be checking if his hair is red or white. They'll be checking whether he is the Moshiah of the Likud or Labor, Shas or Agudat Yisrael."

Some self-proclaimed skeptics fear that Solomon and his followers will use the heifer as a rallying cry to seize the Temple Mount from Muslim hands and thus inflame already strong tensions between Jews and Arabs.

Some, like political analyst David Landau, have even called for the heifer's slaughter long before she

reaches her third birthday, when she could be sacrificed as part of the ancient purification ritual.

Landau wrote in the Hebrew daily Ha'aretz, for whom he is an editor: "The potential harm from this heifer is far greater than the destructive properties of a regular terrorist bomb."

Landau also serves as Israel bureau chief for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Others, like Rabbi Mordechai Gafni, take a middle ground.

Gafni, a modern Orthodox rabbi, says, "Signs of redemption are exciting, but we don't live our lives according to them, and we don't interpret history based on them. What will ultimately bring the Messiah is ethical action and living."

Until Israelis decide what to do with the red heifer, Mordechai Rafeld, head of the Kfar Hassidim youth village, says that no one should worry about Melody. "Melody will always have a home with us," he says. □

Wave of anti-Semitic incidents

strikes fear among Swiss Jews

By Fredy Rom

ZURICH (JTA) — Months of mounting accusations against Switzerland for its wartime dealings with the Nazis have resulted in an anti-Semitic backlash against members of the Jewish community here.

"It is no secret that we live in an anti-Semitic society," Hugo Benjamin, president of the small Orthodox community in Lucerne, said Monday.

Most members of Lucerne's Orthodox community have had direct experience of anti-Semitic incidents, Benjamin added. "Members of our community are often suffering from verbal attacks in the streets," he said. "These days, I do not go to those streets and places where I risk being attacked."

In Zurich last week, there were two separate incidents on the city's trams.

"I was shocked when an educated-looking man attacked a Jew, and that none of the passengers was ready to help a man with a kippah," or skullcap, Frank Mayer, a well-known writer and publisher who witnessed one of the incidents, said Monday.

Mayer said that the man was assaulted with the cry, "The Jews are stealing the money of Switzerland. Get off the tram, stinking Jew!"

The assault was apparently prompted by attempts by Jewish groups to have Swiss banks return the assets of accounts that were opened by Jews during World War II.

Contributions made earlier this year by Swiss banks and industrial firms to a fund intended to benefit Holocaust survivors may also have contributed to the attacker's ire.

"I tried to stop the man, but he reacted with threats to my person," Mayer said of the incident, adding, "None of the other passengers was ready to help."

One member of the Swiss Orthodox community said that victims of such assaults are often "advised by the rabbis not to go to media or police" in order not to stir passions.

Thomas Lyssy, vice president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Switzerland, said that he, too, has observed such incidents. "I have witnessed similar cases in the last few days," he said. "It's obvious that these incidents have a direct connection with the present discussions about Switzerland's past" dealings with the Nazis.

One Jewish leader who asked to remain anonymous said the recent aggressive responses from some members of the Swiss government to the charges about the country's wartime actions are "one of the reasons" for the recent increase of anti-Semitic incidents in Switzerland. □