



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **U.S. envoy Dennis Ross met separately with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in an effort to revive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Ross told reporters he wanted to emphasize the need for resumed security cooperation. [Page 3]**

■ **An Israeli soldier was killed and one wounded in fighting with Hezbollah gunmen in the southern Lebanon security zone. Hezbollah, meanwhile, accused groups backing Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat for a Katyusha rocket attack last Friday on northern Israel. One Israeli woman was wounded in that attack. [Page 3]**

■ **A fourth Australian died as a result of the bridge collapse at the recent Maccabiah games. Warren Zeins, 56, died in Israel of complications from an infection caused by ingesting polluted water in the Yarkon River.**

■ **Israel's state attorney asked the High Court of Justice to delay by two weeks the formal appointment of a Reform representative to the Netanya religious council. The state attorney argued that the deputy religious affairs minister needed more time to study the court ruling issued last week ordering the immediate appointment of Joyce Brenner to the council.**

■ **Lithuania's president ordered police and security forces to investigate the desecration of a Jewish monument in the Baltic nation's capital of Vilnius. Vandals scrawled swastikas and spray-painted graffiti on a monument marking the site of Vilnius' oldest Jewish cemetery. The desecrated monument bears an inscription indicating that the 18th-century spiritual leader of Lithuanian Jewry, Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Shlomo Zalman, also known as the Vilna Gaon, was buried in the cemetery.**

■ **Several hundred Germans staged anti neo-Nazi demonstrations over the weekend. The protests were a pre-emptive strike against right-wing extremists who are expected to hold rallies next week to mark the 10th anniversary of the death of Hitler deputy Rudolf Hess.**

Hungarian compensation plan meets with survivor's skepticism

By Michael J. Jordan

BUDAPEST (JTA) — In his 93 years, Marton Hellmann has had plenty of opportunities to hone the art of survival.

The misery of Austria's Mauthausen concentration camp; the loss of his parents and four of five siblings to the gas chambers; the oppression of four decades of communism.

And today, the indignity of a meager \$115-a-month pension that barely covers his electricity, heating and telephone bills.

So not much fazes the artist, even the news that his pension will soon more than double under a Hungarian government plan to provide compensation to its approximately 20,000 Holocaust survivors.

Instead, Hellmann, sitting in a brightly lit cafeteria after he and other elderly Jews had taken their daily free lunch, would rather talk about other things.

Like the watercolor portraits he painted two years ago that now adorn the cafeteria walls. He hopes to exhibit his work at some point.

"I've been through so many negative things in my life," says Hellmann, his yarmulke tilted to the right atop his thin, white hair. "I don't want to trust or distrust what the government says it will do.

"We'll see what happens, but it's better late than never."

Hellmann and others here cannot help but be skeptical.

It took half a century for the Hungarian government to formally apologize for the tidal wave of evil — perpetrated by the Nazis and home-grown fascists — that wiped out roughly three-quarters of the country's 800,000 Jews during World War II. And now, pressed forward by American Jewish groups and the Clinton administration, Hungary's primary motivation to provide restitution seems to be the removal of one more obstacle from the road to full Western integration.

Hungary, along with Poland and the Czech Republic, was recently allowed to begin the process of joining NATO. The European Union last month said it would recommend that Hungary and five other nations begin E.U. membership talks next year.

Western countries are closely watching Hungary's commitment to human rights, and its treatment of Holocaust survivors will prove an important component of that commitment.

Today, the Hungarian Jewish community, the largest in Central Europe, numbers between 80,000 and 130,000.

To its credit, Hungary is the first formerly Communist country to compensate its Jews for the communal property — such as synagogues, schools and hospitals — that was either confiscated by Nazis or nationalized by Communists after the war.

The government's restitution law, enacted in June, established a Jewish Heritage Foundation with an endowment fund of about \$21 million — a little more than \$1,000 per survivor.

Time winding down for elderly Jews

Compensation eligibility begins at age 60 for everyone born before 1945. Payments may begin as early as the end of this month, with men to receive \$15 per month and women \$12.

The pension for women will be smaller because they generally live longer.

Eighty year olds will be given about \$49 and \$43, for men and women respectively; Hellmann, 93, can expect \$159 per month.

With time winding down for elderly Jews in desperate straits, Jewish community leaders hammered out the deal with the government earlier this year with a certain sense of urgency.

At the same time, they could not ignore the country's overall economic and political climate. Throughout the region, Jews are torn between asking for what they deserve and appearing to ask for too much.

"We cannot demand more at this moment because there are also many poor Christians," says Imre Hutás, co-chairman of the new foundation and also president of the Hungarian Jewish Social Support Foundation.

"For the right-wing extremists, perhaps they can tolerate giving" a

modest amount, he adds. "But if it were any more, they could use it as a political weapon."

Hutas and others did, however, emphasize that this is only the first of several steps.

Another likely source of support for Hungarian Holocaust victims is the \$116 million Holocaust Memorial Fund that was created by Switzerland earlier this year, which is expected to begin making payments next month to Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe.

Yet there are many in the Hungarian community who believe this first step taken by the government should have been bigger.

While the restitution law also provided for the return of seven buildings and 10 paintings, observers say it is a tiny fraction of all the property lost.

One estimate making the rounds is that the restituted property represents just one-thousandth of what was taken.

Some speculate that local leaders settled now for the endowment of \$21 million from the government primarily because next year's elections may bring to power a right-wing government unsympathetic toward Hungary's Jews.

Paradoxically, the opposite may occur, says Gabor Szanto, editor of the Jewish magazine *Saturday*.

The current Socialist-liberal coalition, sprinkled with Jews, was unafraid to be a tough negotiator, Szanto says.

But whatever government comes next, he adds, it will be obligated to stick to the course of westernization and the concomitant commitment to human rights — and it will therefore seek to appease the Jewish community.

"They will be afraid of the charge of anti-Semitism," Szanto says.

"So Jews must be harder and louder, shouting in *The New York Times* and *International Herald Tribune*. They have been polite, silent, thinking the Hungarian government would feel obliged to compensate."

Hungarian Jews fear being identified as Jews

Some Hungarian Jews are even more quiet.

Community leaders, who say it is impossible to gauge exactly how many survivors are still alive, estimate that only a couple of thousand have applied for compensation.

They point to several reasons why some survivors are not applying: A few simply do not need the money; some find the notion of cash as "compensation" for the murder of a relative morally distasteful; others continue to harbor resentment toward a Hungarian state that did little to prevent genocide.

But the most troubling reason also indicates the depth of trauma inflicted by the Holocaust: They fear being identified as Jewish.

Shortly after the Nazis invaded Hungary on March 19, 1944, they and the local fascists of the Arrow Cross Party dutifully collected the birth records of every Jewish community in the country.

When the roundups began, they knew exactly where to go and whom to arrest.

Today, some Hungarians vow never again to identify themselves in an official document — or even publicly, for that matter — as a Jew.

Survivors who have not applied for compensation have the option of coming forward later. There is no deadline.

The foundation's officials are encouraging survivors to take the pension.

Even if they do not want it for personal use, the officials say, it could benefit the country's various Jewish schools and organizations.

"The money is ours, for the Jews. Don't leave it for the government," says Gyorgyi Bollmann, a foundation volunteer and herself a survivor.

"The money is symbolic, it cannot wash away history. But please take it and donate it back to the Jewish community." □

Commission created to rework bill on Russian religious freedom

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin has established a commission to rework a controversial bill on freedom of religion.

But with the commission predominantly comprised of those who supported an earlier version of the bill, doubts have emerged over whether the proposed legislation will undergo serious changes.

The commission is made up of representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, parliamentarians and members of the Yeltsin administration.

The original bill was overwhelmingly approved by Parliament earlier this summer and had received support from the Orthodox Church.

The proposed legislation allotted to four established faiths — the Russian Orthodox Church, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism — the status of "traditional" Russian religions.

All other religions would have been required to prove that they officially existed in Russia for at least 15 years even though under the Communist regime religious freedom was harshly restricted and many religions had to operate clandestinely.

Religions, or denominations of religions including the Lubavitch movement and Reform Judaism, that could not meet the 15-year requirement could face limitations on their ability to obtain a legal identity, own property or publish literature.

Supporters of the original bill said it protected the country from the spread of dangerous sects, including the Japanese group Aum Shinri Kyo, which in March 1995 launched a deadly Sarin nerve gas attack on a crowded Tokyo subway, killing 11 people and injuring more than 5,000.

Critics of the proposed law said it would have imposed serious restrictions on freedom of religion in Russia.

Human rights groups, as well as the pope and the U.S. Senate, charged it would be discriminatory and undemocratic.

Yeltsin refused to sign the bill last month, saying it contradicted a number of clauses in the Russian Constitution.

The Orthodox Church was openly disappointed by Yeltsin's veto.

After attending a Russian Orthodox ceremony in Moscow last week, Yeltsin stressed that cooperation with the church will develop "despite obstacles that have arisen lately."

Yeltsin said recently that he would most likely sign the bill after it was amended.

After meeting with Yeltsin, the patriarch of the Orthodox Church, Alexy II, reiterated his support for the legislation.

"The authorities must understand that the religious spirit of the people must be protected from sects and pseudo-missionaries," the patriarch said.

Alexy II last week dismissed fears that he had formed an alliance with the Communist and ultranationalist parliamentarians who voted their overwhelming support for the bill. □

Ross focuses on security issues in talks with Netanyahu, Arafat

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Clinton administration gave U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross specific marching orders for his meetings this week with Israeli and Palestinian officials.

President Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright "want me to focus on the security questions, and I will be doing that," Ross said Sunday at a news conference here.

"They recognize that there is a political dimension that has to be addressed, but they also understand that there is an essential security underpinning to the process."

Ross held separate meetings Sunday with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in an effort to ease tensions, which were heightened by a recent double suicide bombing at a Jerusalem market that killed 13 Israelis.

Netanyahu welcomed the American focus on security, telling his Cabinet on Sunday that he had made clear to Ross that there could be no progress in the peace process until the Palestinian Authority cracked down on Islamic militants.

But the Palestinian Authority called on Ross to widen the scope of his visit.

"We cannot confine the talks to security issues. This means we will have no talks at all, because security is part of the overall peace process," Palestinian Authority official Yasser Abed Rabbo was quoted as saying before Arafat and Ross met in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

During that meeting, Arafat focused on the hardships caused by the sanctions Israel imposed after the July 30 suicide attack, aides to Arafat said.

Arafat has repeatedly called on Israel to remove the sanctions, including a closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the withholding of tax and customs revenues that Israel regularly transfers to the self-rule authority.

Israel loosened restrictions on travel within the West Bank and Gaza Strip late last week, but has refused to ease the closure between the territories and Israel.

Ross, who was slated to hold more meetings with Netanyahu and Arafat, also met Sunday with President Ezer Weizman.

Palestinian sources said that American, Israeli and Palestinian officials would soon meet to discuss security cooperation.

The Palestinian Authority suspended negotiations and cut off security coordination with Israel in mid-March after Israel began construction of a Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem.

There has been some limited cooperation since then on specific security issues, including the July 30 attack.

But the Palestinians have yet to restore full security coordination with Israel on an ongoing basis. □

Hezbollah kills Israeli soldier as fighting escalates in Lebanon

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Fighting in southern Lebanon is reaching its highest levels since an American-brokered cease-fire in April 1996 brought a temporary lull to tensions in the area.

An Israeli soldier was killed and another wounded Sunday after Hezbollah gunmen fired rockets and mortars on an Israeli patrol in the southern Lebanon security zone.

After the attack, Israel fired artillery at suspected Hezbollah positions in the area.

Earlier, a Lebanese woman and several children

were reportedly wounded by Katyusha rockets and shells that hit two villages.

Lebanese authorities said that one of the villages, where an orphanage was hit, was near a position of the Israel-allied South Lebanon Army.

Hezbollah, which regularly uses Katyushas, denied any involvement in the rocket attacks on the two villages.

It also accused groups supportive of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat of launching a Katyusha rocket attack last Friday on northern Israel.

In that attack, rockets damaged a synagogue in the town of Kiryat Shmona shortly after Shabbat services ended. One Israeli woman was wounded.

Hezbollah has been engaged in a war of words with the Palestinian Authority, which recently accused the Shi'ite movement of being behind a July 30 double suicide bombing in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market.

Hezbollah denied it was behind the attack, which killed 13 Israelis.

In another weekend incident in southern Lebanon, two Israeli soldiers were injured by fire from their own unit Friday night.

The two were leading their unit on a mission to set an ambush for Hezbollah fighters. They were caught in friendly fire after fellow soldiers spotted Hezbollah gunmen.

In other fighting over the weekend, Israeli fighter planes rocketed suspected positions of Hezbollah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the Bekaa Valley, an area under Syrian control.

One Hezbollah fighter was killed and three wounded in the raids, which also wounded one member of the Popular Front, according to sources in the Bekaa.

Tensions in southern Lebanon escalated after Israeli commandos, in an Aug. 4 raid north of the security zone, killed five Hezbollah fighters, including two area commanders. □

Soldiers release three guards, end revolt at Israeli army prison

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A violent protest at an Israel Defense Force prison near Haifa ended peacefully this week after IDF soldiers released three guards they had taken hostage.

The protest began Saturday, when a group of soldiers in the jail took nine unarmed guards hostage at knifepoint.

The prisoners, who reportedly stole the knives from a prison workshop, said they were protesting what they said was harsh treatment in the jail, including beatings and humiliation by prison guards.

Senior army officials said the soldiers had two principal demands: that organizers of the protest not be punished and that long-term prisoners not be transferred to civilian prisons, as is the practice for soldiers serving time for non-military offenses.

Six of the guards were released during negotiations.

Army officials said the leaders of the protest were serving long-term sentences for crimes such as homicide, rape and drug dealing.

The head of the IDF's personnel division, Brig. Gen. Gideon Sheffer, said a committee of inquiry would be set up to examine the events leading up to the protest and to find ways to prevent a recurrence of this type of incident.

The protest also prompted a Knesset committee to call for a special discussion about conditions at military prisons. □

Ancona Jews confront fear their community may disappear

By Ruth E. Gruber

ANCONA, Italy (JTA) — On a recent Saturday morning, the Jews of Ancona celebrated a special event.

A Bar Mitzvah.

Not the Bar Mitzvah of a 13-year-old boy taking his place within the Jewish community, but the Bar Mitzvah of a man in his mid-20s.

"I'm very excited, but I feel great," said a beaming Lanfranco Lanternari after the ceremony in Ancona's stunning Baroque synagogue.

Lanternari, the son of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, was raised Jewish.

But he was not circumcised or formally converted as an infant because of health problems.

He chose to undergo the full conversion process earlier this year.

Lanternari's Bar Mitzvah — the latest of several adult men of mixed parentage choosing Judaism during the past two years — has provided a ray of hope for the dwindling Jewish community of Ancona, a major port on the Adriatic Sea.

Ancona has only about 120 Jews. In all of Italy, only about 26,000 people are registered as members of Jewish communities.

For all the optimism raised by Lanternari's Bar Mitzvah, however, the ray of hope is dim.

At the ceremony, local members of the community were outnumbered by members of a Jewish choir from Rome that had come to Ancona as part of a klezmer music festival.

"We would not have had a minyan had it not been for members of the choir," said one Ancona Jew.

'We don't have young people'

In the Middle Ages, Ancona was second only to Rome in the size of its Jewish population.

It was a magnet for Jewish merchants, particularly from the Middle East, and for refugees from the Spanish and Portuguese expulsions.

"The Jewish presence here was so strong that the local dialect still reflects Jewish influence," said Silvo Sacerdoti, 36, one of a handful of younger people active in the community.

"Many Anconans refer to a holiday as 'Shabba' — from the word Shabbat," he said.

But after more than 1,000 years of history in Ancona, local Jews fear that their community may soon disappear unless something drastic happens.

"We don't have young people to pull us forward," explained Franca Ascoli Foa, the president of the community.

"If there were a change of generations coming, that would be one thing, but there are no children, except for a couple of little girls."

She and other community members described a sense of isolation.

"It's more important in small communities to have contact" with other Jewish communities, she said.

"It's easier to maintain Jewish life where there is a bigger community.

"It's harder here if there is no exchange," Foa added.

Indeed, like most other Jews here, Sacerdoti is married to a non-Jew.

The pool of young Jewish people is simply too small to find partners.

"We want contacts with other Jews," Sacerdoti said.

"What I personally would like to see is Jewish immigrants coming here from Eastern Europe, to rebuild our numbers.

"We need people.

"What we also need is a full-time rabbi," he added.

Ancona's previous full-time rabbi died last year. A rabbi now comes more than 200 miles from Rome twice a month, but he often cannot gather a minyan.

Ancona's synagogue is on Via Astagno, a narrow, steeply rising street that was the principal artery of the Jewish ghetto.

There are two sanctuaries in one building, each with a magnificently carved Baroque ark and fine ritual objects.

Only one of the sanctuaries, located on the upper floor, is in use.

The lower sanctuary is being renovated with funds from local authorities.

And only two or three community members still know how to sing the traditional prayer melodies that were specific to Ancona.

Abandoned and overgrown, the old Jewish cemetery, which dates back to 1428, spreads out on a cliff overlooking the port.

A large number of the massive tombs have fallen into the sea as a result of erosion.

Many of the tombs are Eastern style, with massive pillars topped with turban-like carvings.

City authorities, in agreement with the Jewish community, plan to fence in the cemetery, remove weeds and undergrowth and maintain it as a park.

"I want to see Jewish tourism come here — I would like Jews from other places to come and visit us and our treasures," said Sacerdoti.

Foa said non-Jews in Ancona often seem to have a greater interest in the city's Jewish culture and history than do local Jews.

Authorities in Italy's Marche region, of which Ancona is the capital, even bought 2,000 copies of a Jewish guidebook to the region for use in schools, Foa said.

"The interest is very high," she said. "We keep taking groups on tours of the synagogue.

"They want to visit it and to learn about the history and the Jewish religion. But all these activities seem to be more for those outside the community than inside."

Reflecting her viewpoint, Ancona's four-day klezmer music festival in July was organized by a non-Jewish city cultural association.

It was aimed primarily at the city's non-Jewish population.

'It's wonderful at Yom Kippur'

But the Jewish community did collaborate in the project.

It sponsored a concert of liturgical music by the Rome Jewish choir that was held in the synagogue as part of the festival.

"I didn't see too many people from the community at any of the concerts," said one local Jew.

Foa said the community was attempting to organize dinners or parties in the communal offices to mark the major holidays.

She was especially pleased with the turnout during holidays.

"It's wonderful at Yom Kippur," she said. "Then the synagogue is full — the Jews all come, together with their non-Jewish spouses and children and grandchildren, everyone together." □