



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Financial officers from across the United States who gathered in New York City were expected to adopt a moratorium on imposing sanctions against Swiss banks. The World Jewish Congress urged the officers to wait until March 31 to see whether the Swiss take additional steps to compensate Holocaust victims and their heirs.

■ World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman said Switzerland "may be getting serious" about a global settlement to all claims arising from the Nazi gold dispute. Bronfman also said the group's secretary-general, Israel Singer, went to Switzerland after last week's London gold conference to discuss the idea with the Swiss.

■ A German insurance company will pay undisclosed amounts to settle insurance claims stemming from the Holocaust era, according to a news report. Allianz AG Holding is one of several insurance companies named in class action lawsuits filed in the United States.

■ Israeli Communications Minister Limor Livnat is scheduled to become the second Israeli Cabinet member to visit Jonathan Pollard. Absorption Minister Yuli Edelstein met last month with the former U.S. Navy intelligence analyst, who is serving a life sentence for spying for Israel.

■ About 2,000 Palestinians marched in the West Bank town of Hebron to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the start of the Intifada, the 1987-1993 Palestinian uprising. Some of the demonstrators waved a banner that read, "No peace without a settlement freeze."

■ Germany's defense minister disciplined two senior officers for allowing a neo-Nazi leader to address army officers two years ago. [Page 2]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said no one would pressure Israel into taking any actions that would endanger its security. Netanyahu spoke via satellite at a suburban Washington fund-raising dinner for a West Bank think tank.

Jewish groups not opposing Farrakhan plan to visit Israel

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When Louis Farrakhan asked Israel to receive him on an official visit, Israeli officials turned to American Jewish groups — hoping that they would spearhead opposition to any visit by the Nation of Islam leader.

But after no group offered to support a total travel ban, Israel agreed to allow Farrakhan make a private visit.

And with that, Farrakhan opened a new front in his quest for Jewish acceptance.

Now attention is focused on preventing the black Muslim leader from obtaining long-sought Jewish recognition if he follows through with his plans to visit Israel and Palestinian-controlled territories for three days beginning Jan. 7.

Farrakhan announced last week that he wants to visit Israel to advance the Middle East peace process, and some Israelis have already hinted that they will meet him to discuss black-Jewish relations in the United States.

Others, such as the group Jerusalem Is Ours, have vowed to block Farrakhan's entry to Israel.

One of the group's leaders, Ross Torossian, is suing police in Washington, D.C., for allegedly evicting him from the area of Farrakhan's Million Man March in October 1995.

For Jewish groups like the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Congress, who have refused to meet with the Nation of Islam leader but are not opposing a private Farrakhan visit to Israel, the issue is one of democracy and free speech.

Farrakhan "has the right to visit the democratic state of Israel as a private individual," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL.

Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, said, "It would appear they fear him if they don't let him in."

Initially, the Israeli Foreign Ministry would not commit to allowing Farrakhan into Israel.

"We cannot forget his unpleasant remarks about the Jewish people," Foreign Ministry spokesman Effi Ben-Matityahu was quoted as saying.

But after the ADL and the AJCongress supported a private Farrakhan visit, Israel decided to let him in, according to sources in Washington.

Israel generally allows visitors with U.S. passports to visit, but Israel can "technically and legally" deny anyone the right to enter its borders, according to an Israeli official.

Security arrangement disputes could stop visit

But disputes over security arrangements could stop the visit before Farrakhan ever sets foot in the Jewish state. Israeli officials said it would be highly irregular if Farrakhan was allowed to travel with his own armed security force.

Aside from a few meetings with Chicago-area rabbis and a collapsed attempt at dialogue with World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman, the organized American Jewish community has succeeded in ostracizing Farrakhan.

Now Jewish groups are calling on Israelis to follow their lead.

"There is no reason why this longtime, unrepentant racist and anti-Semite should be granted the respectability and status of any official recognition or reception," said Foxman.

The Foreign Ministry decided that no state official will meet Farrakhan unless he apologizes for his anti-Semitic remarks.

But already there are signals that Farrakhan may meet with Israeli officials.

Knesset member Dedi Zucker, of the left-wing Meretz Party, has asked Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy to invite Farrakhan for an official visit.

"Such a visit could open a new chapter with a man who has a very problematic record and has done a lot to increase tensions between blacks and Jews in the United States," Zucker was quoted as saying.

The ADL sent a letter to Zucker urging him not to meet with the

Nation of Islam leader. While Farrakhan has not announced an itinerary for his planned Israel visit, the Foreign Ministry said he has asked to deliver a sermon at Jerusalem's Al-Aksa Mosque.

Denying Farrakhan permission to visit Islam's third holiest shrine could have raised the ire of Muslims who oppose Israeli control over Jerusalem.

Israel would only be one leg of a planned world tour that will bring Farrakhan and his entourage to Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria and Cuba. □

Poland removes controversial crosses displayed at Auschwitz

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish groups are claiming victory in the latest battle at Auschwitz.

Under orders from the Polish government, eight crosses and 11 Stars of David were removed last week from the grounds of the Nazi death camp.

"This is a great achievement," Kalman Sultanik, the vice president of the Auschwitz Museum Council, which is working to preserve the camp, said in an interview.

"I think this will be a step in the improvement of Polish-Jewish relations."

The religious symbols were placed at the former Nazi death camp in 1983 by a Polish scouting group.

Jewish groups protested against the crosses, which had been placed on the "Field of Ashes," where Nazis buried the cremated remains of their victims.

"Auschwitz should remain a place where everyone should be able to go and identify with the place and have their own prayer," said Sultanik, who also is a vice president of the World Jewish Congress.

"If you start with religious symbols, there is no end."

The campaign to rid Auschwitz of the symbols gained steam last year, when the issue was raised by Elie Wiesel at a ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of a pogrom in the Polish town of Kielce.

According to Sultanik, the issue was formally raised at a meeting in January of the museum council. The council voted at its October meeting to urge the Polish minister of culture to remove the symbols.

Worried about an anti-Semitic backlash, the council worked discretely, making sure that the Polish Roman Catholic Church did not object to removing the crosses, and then waiting until after the recent Polish elections to raise the issue with the new government.

The politicking paid off.

"We have been successful because all involved were committed to reasoned, respectful discussion," said Miles Lerman, chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, an international coalition of organizations dedicated to preserving Holocaust sites.

The crosses have been given to a local church, and the Stars of David will be given to a Jewish archive in the nearby city of Krakow.

This is not the first time that there has been a dispute regarding the grounds of Auschwitz-Birkenau, where more than 1 million Jews are estimated to have perished.

In 1993, a Carmelite nun convent was removed from its location next to the camps after years of controversy.

Meanwhile, Poland's foreign minister said Monday that his country wants to hold a conference next year on compensation for Holocaust victims. "The basic question is what obligations the current generation has toward those who suffered 50 years ago," he said. □

Neo-Nazi leader addressed German army officers in 1995

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — The revelation that a leading neo-Nazi gave a training lecture to army officers has rocked the German army — and forced German officials to scramble to respond.

The German newsmagazine Der Spiegel reported in its most recent issue that neo-Nazi leader Manfred Roeder gave a lecture in 1995 at an army officers' academy in Hamburg.

The revelation was the latest in a spate of neo-Nazi scandals that have hit the Bundeswehr, the German army, in recent months.

Last week, the Defense Ministry confirmed reports that six army parachuters held a party in an office decorated with a Nazi flag and pictures of Hitler. Prosecutors are investigating the incident.

Meanwhile, prosecutors continue to investigate the production of an amateur film by army soldiers that glorifies neo-Nazi violence.

Roeder delivered his lecture on the "Relocation of Ethnic Germans in Russia in the area of Koenigsberg."

Together with other right-wing extremists, Roeder is striving to re-establish the German culture and language in the Russian region of Kaliningrad, which was once a part of Germany called Koenigsberg.

The organization claims to have resettled up to 20,000 ethnic Germans who were living in remote regions of the former Soviet Union to Kaliningrad in the past few years.

The Russian government has forbidden Roeder and three other German neo-Nazis from entering Kaliningrad because of a newspaper advertisement they published last year which claimed that "the idea of war guilt [of the Germans] is a demonic modern invention."

On Monday, the German defense minister announced disciplinary measures against a colonel who was responsible for the invitation. He also suspended a lieutenant-general who headed the academy at the time of the incident.

Opposition members in the German Parliament demanded a session to review the incident and called for Defense Minister Volker Ruehe's resignation. □

Barak distances himself from Peres

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Young Turk in Israel's Labor Party has distanced himself from a member of the Old Guard.

Labor Party leader Ehud Barak on Monday said remarks by former Prime Minister Shimon Peres calling for Israel to back the establishment of a Palestinian state did not constitute a shift in the party platform.

That platform does not rule out a Palestinian state, but it does not endorse the idea.

Peres, speaking before the Labor Party convention, said the party must take a clear stand on the need for an independent Palestinian state "because we cannot take responsibility for the fate of 3 million Palestinians."

Barak, who succeeded Peres as party head in June, has tried to shift the party toward the political center in a bid to win over more supporters.

Peres also called for Israel to return all of the Golan Heights to Syria.

Syrian President Hafez Assad "wants peace, but the price is the entire Golan Heights," Peres told the Labor convention. "We can do it now, or we can do it later. In any event, the only difference will not be the price, but the cost." □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Histadrut leader claims victory after carefully structured strike

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The banks were closed — but Israelis could still get cash.

The Histadrut labor federation, which engineered one of the longest general strikes in Israeli history, made sure that bank employees could continue replenishing automatic teller machines.

That approach — to limit the average Israeli's hardship — seemed to be at the core of the Histadrut's strategy to retain public support for its confrontation with the Netanyahu government.

During the walkout by some 700,000 public sector workers, bread was available, public transportation and most schools operated as usual, gas stations did not run out of fuel and no power failures occurred.

In the end, the biggest impact of the five-day strike was felt by those Israelis stranded abroad as well as foreign visitors trying to arrive or depart.

One such casualty was a Jewish Agency for Israel mission of some 100 top federation leaders across North America. The mission was slated to depart for Israel on Saturday night, but was postponed until early next year.

The strike, which ended Sunday night, had been called to protest the Netanyahu government's refusal to honor a pension agreement signed with the previous Labor government. Both sides agreed on a compromise offered by the president of the national labor court.

While the daily routine of most Israelis was barely interrupted, the strike, which grounded Israel's economy to a near halt, affected the nation's airports, banks, rail services, hospitals, government offices and state-owned industries.

An estimated 15,000 Israelis were stuck in airports overseas, unable to return home because Ben-Gurion Airport was shut down. Yael, a passenger at London's Gatwick Airport, told Israel Radio that among the 300 waiting passengers was a boy suffering from cancer who needed urgent treatment in Israel.

'This is absolutely crazy'

"This is absolutely crazy," complained Yael. "Our children are waiting in Israel thinking we will never come back. We haven't seen daylight for four days, people haven't taken a shower for days."

Others reported that they had run out of money and could not even buy food or drinks.

Some passengers made their way back home in roundabout ways, such as flying to Amman, Jordan, and then crossing the border to Israel at the Allenby bridge.

As flights renewed Sunday night, some 30,000 passengers crowded inside the terminal at Ben-Gurion.

"There has been irreversible damage to exports, tourism and Israel's image abroad," Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman told reporters Sunday.

But the damage to the economy, estimated by Israel's manufacturers association at some \$60 million, could not be immediately perceived by the average Israeli.

This may explain why Histadrut chairman Amir Peretz was able to declare "total victory."

The public did not like the strike, but was not angry enough to oppose it because Israelis generally did not suffer.

"Don't blame the workers, blame the government," Peretz declared.

But there was a calculated risk in allowing the strike to go on, and Sunday's agreement came just before the breaking point.

Had the strike continued, tempers could have flared. Indeed, on the last day of the strike, protesting workers and police clashed outside the National Labor Court in Jerusalem as the court's president tried to hammer out a compromise.

Bus drivers joined the strike, causing many delays in public transportation. There were not enough buses to serve thousands of soldiers on their way back to the army after a weekend at home.

And telephone services were shut down for hours on Sunday.

Meanwhile, garbage piles were growing, particularly in Tel Aviv, which already had endured a separate two-week-old sanitation workers' strike.

Questions lingered about the Histadrut's actions in the strike's aftermath, with some observers suggesting that Peretz orchestrated the confrontation with the government in order to advance his own political career.

Indeed, on the first day of the strike, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the action a "political strike," telling reporters that he had no idea why the Histadrut called it.

The strike was triggered in part by remarks made by Ne'eman, who, referring to union activists, said, "We don't need enemies from outside."

"We have among us bombs," the finance minister added, "homemade, exploding bombs."

Although Ne'eman later apologized, saying his remarks had been misunderstood, the apology was rejected by Peretz, and the Histadrut printed stickers reading, "I'm a bomb made by Ne'eman."

The strike came as the government nears completion of its 1998 budget. A year ago, the Histadrut called similar strikes, but those walkouts only lasted hours.

Now, Peretz appeared to be flexing his political muscle to increase his chances for re-election next year by demonstrating that the Histadrut, once a bastion of the Labor Party, could still wield considerable influence.

But to many supporters of Netanyahu's Likud Party, the Histadrut is still seen as an arm of the Labor Party.

"This is not only a confrontation between the Histadrut and the government," said Ya'acov Bruchin of Bnei Brak. "It is also Labor's pathetic attempt to return to power." □

Survey: Young, urban Russians principal advocates of neo-Nazis

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Almost half of all fascist sympathizers in Russia are 35 years old or younger and live in large cities.

These were among the findings of the first-ever poll tracking attitudes toward neo-Nazis in Russia, which was conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation, a leading Moscow-based polling firm.

Some 58 percent of Russians have a negative attitude toward neo-Nazi groups, while 6 percent of respondents have a positive attitude toward such groups, according to the poll. Thirty-six percent of respondents said they had no definite attitude toward neo-Nazi organizations. It was this last number that concerned a leading anti-fascist activist.

"Should the situation in the country change, these people's attitude toward fascists might change from indifference to sympathy," said Alla Gerber, a former member of the Russian Parliament.

The foundation interviewed 1,500 Russian adults at the end of October. The margin of error in the survey was plus or minus five percentage points. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Expatriate group fulfills needs of foreign Jews living in Moscow

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Just before Chanukah last year, Faye Siegel was desperate.

She wanted to set up a holiday party for other American Jews living in Moscow but she didn't know many — so she called the U.S. Embassy.

"Tell me, please, do you have any Jews out there in the embassy who might be interested to celebrate Chanukah?" she asked a marine guard at the embassy switchboard. "I'm Jewish, madam, and I'm interested," he answered.

In the end, some 40 Jewish expatriates gathered in a private home to celebrate Chanukah. That event marked the founding of JIM, or Jewish in Moscow, a group that aims to provide a community — especially during holidays — for Jewish expatriates.

What started as a small group of enthusiasts has turned into a vibrant Jewish group with participants who come to celebrate holidays — 140 people attended a Passover seder at the U.S. Embassy — and a steering committee to plan future activities.

"My entire life has been part of the Jewish community," said Siegel, who heads JIM. For a number of years, she was in charge of the women's division at the Atlanta Jewish federation.

Last year, she came to Moscow after her husband was transferred by the accounting firm Deloitte and Touche. Today, JIM involves 160 people, most of them Americans who are working in a wide range of businesses, including fast food restaurants, travel agencies, banks and law firms.

Eugene Weiner, who has been behind many of the expatriate Jewish activities in Moscow and hosted last year's Chanukah party, estimates that some 300 to 400 American Jews are working in the Russian capital.

"Most of them are in their late 20s or early 30s," said Weiner, who immigrated to Israel from New York 25 years ago. "They tend to be single and very entrepreneurial."

Lingering in Russia

Usually, Americans come to work here for two or three years, but many stay longer.

"They are very inclined to be interested in joining the Jewish community," said Weiner, who came to Russia last year as head of special projects for the Moscow office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Just a few years ago, Avi Aliman had what was then a typical Jewish expatriate experience in Moscow.

Aliman, the general director of the Moscow-based company Travel House, recalled how he invited his friends to a Passover seder at what was then the city's only restaurant that advertised itself as Jewish.

"We came and what we first found on our table was vodka and bread," said Aliman, 25, a member of the JIM steering committee who came here from Los Angeles five years ago.

Now that the holiday events have already become a tradition, the group wants to expand its activities by having regular Shabbat dinners at members homes, starting a newsletter, organizing classes to study classical Jewish texts and even by establishing a Jewish school for their children. But Aliman, like other JIM leaders, believes that the group's activities should not be restricted to expatriates.

"We are interested in connecting up with Moscow Jews, in participating in the community here," said Aliman.

Siegel said her dream is to establish a place in Moscow that "we can call our community center, where the expatriates and Russian Jews can come to study, to learn, to celebrate together."

Moscow's chief rabbi, Pinchas Goldschmidt, said expatriate Jews can contribute significantly to the city's native community.

"They think they don't know much, but they know much more than most Jews here," said Goldschmidt, who is probably the longest-term Jewish expatriate in Moscow.

Born in Switzerland, Goldschmidt lived and studied in Israel and the United States before coming here in 1989 and taking his rabbinical post the following year.

As the first experience of cooperation with the local community, JIM leaders cite the High Holidays celebration that the group organized at a Moscow Jewish day school.

"We had about 100 expatriates and 550 Russian Jewish students whom we invited through the Moscow Hillel group," said Inna Prilutzky, who emigrated from Russia to Kansas City, Mo., with her husband and children 15 years ago.

Prilutzky, 50, cites JIM as one of the reasons she decided to return to Moscow a few months ago with her husband, who obtained a managerial position with an American-Russian joint venture.

"Judaism became a part of our life only after we emigrated," said Prilutzky, citing her children's Hebrew school experience and her younger daughter's bat mitzvah ceremony in Kansas City.

Because of her Soviet background, Prilutzky said she is the "least Jewishly educated member of the group."

In return for education about Judaism, Prilutzky said she can offer the group her knowledge of the Russian language and culture that is necessary to become more connected to the local community. □

French extremist reiterates claims minimizing Holocaust

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Human rights groups say they will file charges against an extremist French politician for his remarks that Nazi gas chambers are a "detail of history."

At a news conference in Munich last Friday, Jean-Marie Le Pen also insisted that what happened at Auschwitz is a minor historical event and that history books need only a few lines to deal with the Holocaust.

When asked about his comments, Le Pen, who is known for his anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant views, did not backtrack. "There is nothing extraordinary" in my comments, he said Saturday in a statement.

Le Pen has made similar remarks in the past. A French court fined the leader of the National Front Party for comments he made 10 years ago questioning the existence of gas chambers at Nazi death camps.

The news conference centered around a book written about Le Pen and his party. The book's author is Franz Schoenhuber, a former member of the SS and the founder of the Republicans, a far right-wing political party in Germany.

French observers say Le Pen's comments in Munich were part of an internal party struggle. Some of Le Pen's challengers, they say, are urging a more moderate course in order to allow for cooperation with establishment right-wing parties.

Le Pen, however, opposes such alliances until his party gains more power and can dictate the terms of cooperation. The National Front holds one seat in the 577-member French Parliament. □