



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ A group of leaders representing the three major Jewish denominations issued a joint statement supporting an Israeli committee's efforts to craft solutions to religious pluralism issues in Israel. "Our hope is that the efforts of the Commission will prevent an irrevocable split within the Jewish people," said the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform representatives, who urged American Jews to emulate their dialogue.

■ The Israeli Cabinet did not come up with a specific proposal for Israel's next redeployment from West Bank rural areas. The Cabinet is expected to meet again Tuesday in advance of Thursday's scheduled meeting between U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. [Page 3]

■ Israeli officials met to discuss how to approach an unexpected visit from Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. Farrakhan, who was not expected to come until next month, arrived in the West Bank and met later with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in the Gaza Strip.

■ Interest among Israeli government officials in Jonathan Pollard continues to increase. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is sending a message to the former U.S. Navy intelligence officer serving a life sentence for spying for Israel via Communications Minister Limor Livnat, who is expected to meet Tuesday with Pollard in a U.S. prison. [Page 3]

■ A group of German soldiers stationed in Croatia last fall broke into chants of "Heil Hitler" during a party, according to a German newsmagazine. The report of the incident comes as Germany is investigating neo-Nazism in its army.

■ Talks began concerning a settlement in a \$20 billion class-action lawsuit against Swiss banks. U.S. Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat, who mediated the talks, refused to disclose details of the discussions. The talks came after a Union Bank of Switzerland executive said the banks should only seek a global settlement that resolved all claims on their money.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Hungarian Jewry overcoming decades of spiritual Holocaust

By Michael J. Jordan

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Aser Rona is answering the spiritual needs of his community.

Hungary's approximately 80,000 Jews are slowly recovering from half a century in which first they endured a "physical" Holocaust, then what some describe as four decades of a Communist-induced "spiritual" Holocaust.

With a double-generation gap in religious observance, there are depressingly few people who know anything about Judaism's traditions.

Rona saw this as a challenge.

After flirting with the idea of making aliyah five years ago, he enrolled at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Budapest, the only rabbinical training facility in Eastern Europe.

Next year, he will be ordained as a rabbi.

"I feel even more deeply now that Hungarian Jewry needs us, all of us," said the lean and bearded 23-year-old.

"Except for a small minority, nobody knows anything about Judaism — how to pray, how to read Torah."

Rona is among the swelling ranks of young Hungarian Jews dedicating themselves to the community's renaissance.

Within a year, the community will have a new spiritual "incubator" — the Pedagogium of Budapest, which is slated to become what is a rarity in Eastern Europe: a Jewish university.

The announcement to open the school was made earlier this month by a visiting delegation of the Conservative movement's Seminary of Judaic Studies in Jerusalem, which plans to run the Pedagogium's educational programs.

The seminary, also known as the Bet Midrash, is a graduate school of Jewish studies affiliated with the Conservative, or Masorti, movement in Israel.

The Pedagogium will have three faculties, some of which are already in operation:

- The Jewish Teachers Institute;
- The School for Jewish Community Workers, which already confers B.A. and graduate degrees; and
- Budapest's Jewish Theological Seminary, which was incorporated into the Pedagogium in September.

A fourth faculty, for liturgy, is being planned.

The Pedagogium, said members of the Israeli delegation, will fortify the communal pillars — spiritual guidance, prayer, schools and social programs — to allow Hungarian Jewry to flourish once again.

"If there's a chance for Jewish life to re-emerge here, it's going to depend on one thing — Jewish education," said Rabbi David Clayman, director of the American Jewish Congress office in Israel.

"You can't live Jewishly and create Jewishly unless you know what Jewish is."

Token religious institution for Hungarian Jewry

Budapest's teacher-training college was founded in 1857, but shut down in 1948 when Communist rule was imposed.

When the Communist regime fell in 1989, reopening the facility was one of the first steps taken by the Jewish community.

The rabbinical seminary, on the other hand, opened its doors in 1880 and stayed open throughout the Communist era.

It was the token religious institution for Hungarian Jewry, producing rabbis, cantors and scribes.

The Communists left it unfettered in order to produce propaganda for Western consumption about how they were nursing a ravaged community back to health.

Still, the seminary was an oasis in the spiritual wasteland of communism, said the current director, Rabbi Alfred Schoner, a student here in the early 1970s. "It was the main point of continuity for the Jewish

community," said the Hungarian-born Schoner, who made aliyah in 1990.

In early 1996, Schoner was dispatched back to Budapest by Bet Midrash in order to oversee the seminary's revival.

The seminary has produced more than 300 rabbis during its existence.

Bet Midrash will raise the funds needed to bolster the Pedagogium's seminary and other faculties and help it attain state accreditation.

An estimated \$250,000 per year will be needed to supply it with ample full-time faculty and resources, said Rabbi Benjamin Segal, the Bet Midrash president.

Once it begins meeting the needs of Hungarian Jews, the Pedagogium may expand to serve Jews elsewhere in Eastern Europe. □

German insurance firm to pay a few claims filed by survivors

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — A German insurance company has announced that it will settle only a tiny fraction of the 1,800 claims filed by Holocaust victims and their families.

Allianz AG Holding said it will resolve seven insurance claims filed by the victims.

But an Allianz spokesman made it clear last week that the company does not expect to pay out many more such claims.

The spokesman said Dec. 8 that Allianz was offering about \$5,600 to settle each of the seven claims — five from Israel and two from the United States.

Allianz was one of seven European insurers targeted by a \$7 billion class-action lawsuit in April that was filed by Holocaust survivors and their families.

The claimants allege they never received payment for policies issued between 1920 and 1945.

The suit alleges that the insurers failed to honor the policies and that in some cases they turned over some of the money to the Nazis.

According to a recently found 1941 letter, the Austrian police ordered several insurance companies to pay to the Nazi government the proceeds of life insurance policies belonging to Holocaust victims.

California's Department of Insurance recently told the federal judge in the case that it wanted to join the plaintiffs on behalf of survivors who are living in that state.

Edward Fagan, one of the lawyers representing the plaintiffs, told reporters that he had heard that the states of New York and Florida might also want to join the suit against the insurers.

A New Jersey assemblyman last week called for similar action by his state.

The Allianz spokesman said last week that after an eight-month search, the Munich-based company has been unable to document hundreds of unpaid insurance claims by Holocaust survivors and their families.

Allianz, the largest insurance company in Europe, maintains that there is only evidence for the seven policies not being paid out.

Since the company set up an international hotline in April to deal with queries on unpaid policies issued before the end of World War II, more than 800 people have called requesting information concerning some 1,800 policies.

Allianz says it forwarded many of the search requests it received on its hotline to other insurance companies.

Of the 200 remaining claims, the company says 30

were paid out previously and another 59 were settled as part of the general restitution program by the West German government to compensate Nazi victims.

Allianz further claims that because the former communist governments in Eastern Europe nationalized the insurance companies after the war, they were responsible for prewar policies issued in those countries.

Allianz has hired the U.S.-based Arthur Andersen auditing company to search company records for further evidence of unpaid policies.

The company says some records were destroyed during the war but many have survived.

The results of the search are expected to be published in March 1998.

Allianz has hired a history professor, the University of California at Berkeley's Gerald Feldman, to conduct an independent investigation of the company's history during the Nazi era.

Feldman, who has access to internal company documents, has hired additional historians to research Nazi government documents in archives in Berlin, Moscow and Warsaw.

Research into other countries' archives is planned as well.

Feldman says he will publish a report on his findings by early 1999.

Holocaust survivors claim that is too long to wait, since many of the claimants are already aged. □

Former Dutch official confirms sale of Holocaust victims' assets

By Elise Friedmann

AMSTERDAM (JTA) — Dutch Finance Ministry employees purchased valuables looted from Holocaust victims at bargain prices during the 1960s.

The disclosure was confirmed by a former ministry official who said last week that in 1968 or 1969 "leftover" jewelry belonging to Jews who died in the Holocaust had been sold to his colleagues.

The goods had been held by the Nazi-owned Lippman-Rosenthal Bank and turned over to the ministry for restitution after World War II.

What happened to the proceeds of the sale remains unknown.

Dutch Jews returning from the camps or hiding places in 1945 spent years looking for lost family heirlooms and memorabilia.

The archives of the Lippman-Rosenthal Bank would have helped them discover the whereabouts of their belongings, according to representatives of the Dutch Jewish community.

Jewish community officials are now calling for a full-scale investigation into all of Holland's postwar restitution procedures.

The disclosure came after the bank's wartime archives were found by a group of students in an abandoned property in Amsterdam.

The archives detailed the names, addresses and lists of goods that were confiscated from Dutch Jews during the war.

The archives also provide the names of the wartime purchasers of some of the looted property.

They included individuals, Dutch state institutions and Degussa, the German company that bought and melted down gold looted from countries overrun by the Nazis and from victims of the Holocaust.

The archives were believed to be lost, but Finance Ministry officials said after the list's discovery that they had been "forgotten" when the ministry moved to another building years ago. □

**Israel shows a new interest
in jailed American Jewish spy***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Signaling a possible policy shift, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sent a message to jailed spy Jonathan Pollard expressing hope for his imminent release.

The message will be conveyed by Communications Minister Limor Livnat, who was scheduled to see Pollard on Tuesday during a three-day visit to the United States.

Her visit to the federal prison in Butner, N.C., where the former U.S. Navy civilian intelligence analyst is serving a life sentence for spying for Israel, comes several weeks after Absorption Minister Yuli Edelstein became the first Israeli minister to visit Pollard in jail.

Prior to her departure, Livnat said it was time the Israeli government took a more active stand in pressing for Pollard's release.

Last week, the Knesset passed a motion calling for his release.

Netanyahu's letter conveyed similar sentiments.

"All Israelis are concerned about your continued suffering, particularly after you expressed profound remorse for your actions.

"I sincerely hope that our continued efforts on your behalf will bear fruit, and that you will be a free man in the near future," Israel Radio quoted Netanyahu's letter as saying.

Livnat, who will reportedly be accompanied by members of the Israeli media during her visit, was also said to be carrying messages from Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman and Labor and Social Affairs Minister Eliyahu Yishai.

Pollard was arrested in 1985 outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

He pleaded guilty in 1986 to stealing secrets for the Israeli government and in 1987 was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Netanyahu recently denied that he had abandoned Pollard's cause, adding that he had raised the matter three times in discussions with President Clinton.

Clinton rejected a clemency plea from Pollard in July 1996, citing the gravity of his crime, his lack of remorse and the damage his actions caused to American security.

Pollard was granted Israeli citizenship in 1996, a move he had hoped would bolster his chances for release.

In the past, Israeli leaders have disassociated themselves from Pollard, maintaining that he passed on information during the 1980s without official Israeli sanction.

Pollard has petitioned Israel's High Court of Justice to compel the government to recognize him as an agent who acted for the state.

CIA official linked to spying

In a related development, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that around the time of Pollard's arrest, a major in the Israeli army reserves was arrested on suspicion of working as a spy on behalf of the CIA office operating out of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv.

The man, identified as Yosef Amit, was detained by the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security service, in March 1986.

He was convicted of spying in 1987 and sentenced to 12 years in prison, of which he served seven.

Though one of Amit's operators, the CIA official responsible for counter-terrorism, was also exposed, Ha'aretz reported that the national unity government of the time, headed by Yitzhak Shamir and Shimon Peres, opted

not to focus on the exposed CIA operative in order to negotiate a deal for Pollard's release.

The reasoning for the decision was attributed to concern that the threat of exposure might be counter-productive and further strain ties between Israel and the United States. □

**Israeli Cabinet eludes decision
on scope of West Bank pullback***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli Cabinet has still made no decision about how much West Bank land to relinquish.

Faced with American pressure for a "credible" redeployment in the West Bank, the Cabinet discussed various proposals Sunday as the clock ticked down toward a meeting later in the week between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

U.S. officials have reportedly told their Israeli counterparts to transfer now at least 12 percent of the West Bank.

Netanyahu has suggested a transfer of 6 percent to 8 percent, but last week Israeli media reported that the three ministers closely conferring with Netanyahu on the issue — Foreign Minister David Levy, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon — have agreed to a map that would allow for a 12 percent redeployment.

Palestinian officials have been demanding at least 30 percent more of the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority already controls about 27 percent of the area.

The extent of the redeployment was expected to be raised in talks Sunday night between Netanyahu and Martin Indyk, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, who is currently on a tour of the region.

The meeting with Indyk precedes Thursday's talks scheduled to take place in Europe between Netanyahu and Albright.

Levy reiterated Sunday that he did not expect Netanyahu to go to that meeting with "empty hands."

The Cabinet was slated to reconvene Tuesday to continue its discussions prior to the Netanyahu-Albright meeting.

At Sunday's session, Mordechai and Sharon presented competing proposals reflecting Israel's security interests.

Sharon has pressed for delineating Israel's security zones before the final-status negotiations with the Palestinians begin, while Mordechai has opted for setting more general guidelines.

Both ministers believe that the government should have a clear conception of Israel's final borders before making a commitment regarding a further redeployment in the West Bank.

Absorption Minister Yuli Edelstein said Sunday that the gaps between the two approaches appeared to be narrowing.

"My feeling is that the differences were not so significant. What I hope will happen in the next meeting is that the maps will be made on the same scale, so it will be easier to compare the two versions," he told Israel Radio.

The Cabinet meeting came a day after Netanyahu said that Israel would not "commit suicide" in order to please the Americans.

"Discussion on the permanent-status arrangement is fateful for the future of the country, and it is the people of Israel — not the Americans or the Europeans — who have to live with it," Netanyahu said in a statement released Saturday night. □

Crypto-Jewish group supports people newly discovering roots

By Norma Libman

The New Mexico Jewish Link

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (JTA) — Dennis Duran converted to Judaism in 1977.

Duran, president of Anusim Ysrael, a New Mexico-based support group for crypto-Jews, has since discovered that he descended from Jews on both sides of his Mormon-Catholic family.

His mother and father are fifth cousins, at least, he said, and he has gone back to 1557 in his genealogical research.

But it was not until 1988, when he talked with former New Mexico state historian Stan Hordes, that he discovered his family had many behaviors that fit the crypto-Jewish profile.

Crypto-Jews are descendants of the Jews forced to convert or leave Spain during the Inquisition.

They have been called Secret Jews, or the derogatory term Marranos.

Anusim, which means "the forced ones," is the current and preferred term.

"When I grew up, my grandfather was leading me to a path of Judaism without my even knowing it," said Duran, a former officer of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society.

"I went to Catholic school for 11 years and I would talk to him about what they were teaching me and he would say, 'No, no that's wrong. This is the way it ought to be.'

"I'd go back to class and start asking questions and I seemed to be getting in a lot of trouble with the nuns.

"They didn't like it and they showed it in the way they treated me, often singling me out and disciplining me for unknown reasons."

Duran said his grandfather made him four-sided tops for use in a game called "pon y saca," which means "put and take."

Each side of the top had an Arabic letter, and the game was played like the game of dreidel.

Duran always left the toy at his grandfather's house.

He said there were no crosses or pictures or statues of saints in his own home. His family ate no pork and his father grew up on a ranch where the animals were slaughtered in the kosher way.

Many other people, particularly in the American Southwest, are discovering that they are descendants of Jews forced out of Spain during the days of the Inquisition who often secretly maintained their Jewish beliefs and practices.

Long and difficult process

Coming to terms with this information is often a long and difficult process, and many people consult historian Hordes when they have questions.

"I leave people's spiritual choices to them," said Hordes. "I'm here to help with the history and heritage issues."

Both Gloria Trujillo and Isabelle Medina Sandoval have also learned they are descended from Jewish families and have recently gone through a conversion process called the rite of return.

Sandoval, who lives in Colorado Springs, Colo., recalled that her mother made kosher wine, but she does not believe her mother ever knew of her Jewish heritage.

"I always noticed that our family didn't seem to fit in anywhere," she said. "About five years ago, a friend

suggested that I might be a Sephardi Jew, and I started reading and things just fell into place. I'm very much at peace with who I am now."

Trujillo, who lives in California but also has roots in northern New Mexico, said she, too, always wondered about the ways in which her family was different. She began to study genealogy and spoke with Hordes about some of the rituals her family followed and soon realized they were of Jewish origin.

"It explained a lot of things for me," she said.

Out of these similar situations came the idea for Anusim Ysrael, a support group for crypto-Jews who are facing their heritage and who are interested in considering the possibility of identifying with Judaism.

The group is headquartered in Santa Fe, N.M., but draws its members from around the Southwest, as well as other parts of the country.

In 1994, Duran, along with Sandoval, Trujillo and other descendants of crypto-Jews who traveled to Jerusalem and Portugal for a meeting of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, decided to organize into a support group.

"Different people are in different stages of dealing with who and what they are — whether they grew up knowing it or it kind of hit them in the face just recently and there's some kind of trauma," said Duran.

Duran was elected president of the group, which now comprises about 50 members. Sandoval is vice president and Trujillo is the group's secretary. The group meets annually and has other events during the year.

The word "Anusim" was chosen to be in the group's name because it is an apt description of what happened to Jews in Spain who were forced to give up the public worship of their religion.

Sandoval said that, for her, Anusim Ysrael is "like having a brother or sister that I don't have to explain my background to. We understand each other and the implications of being ostracized by some family members who view you as being strange, almost like a violation of the family boundaries."

Group members have helped Trujillo find books and articles as she continues her study of Judaism, she said.

"You get anxious about things," Trujillo said. "Feelings of not knowing which way to turn.

"It's helpful to talk with people with the same feelings. We share what we know." □

Empire State gets Chanukah lights

By Faygie Levy

NEW YORK (JTA) — For Chanukah, a holiday of miracles, a young girl is getting her wish — and New Yorkers will be basking in its glow.

On the first night of Chanukah, Dec. 23, the lights on the Empire State Building will shine blue and white, thanks to 9-year-old Mallory Blair Greitzer.

Greitzer, a New York City resident, wrote a letter to the building's management company asking it to change the colors of the lights for Chanukah. The company refused. Greitzer says she was told that the landmark's lights are blue and white for Israeli Independence Day and that the lights can only honor each religion one day per year.

A letter written by Greitzer's father was also rejected. Unhappy with the outcome, he then wrote directly to real-estate magnate Leona Helmsley, who owns the company that manages the building.

Against the advice of her staff, Helmsley granted the Greitzers' request.

Mallory Greitzer will turn on the lights. The next night, Dec. 24, they will be red and green in honor of Christmas. □