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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Ross visit prompts optimism

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross is slated to return to the region Wednesday to advance the stalemated Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Political observers believe his trip signals that the talks are in the final stretch.

They added that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat may meet soon with President Clinton in Washington.

Mayor defends police decision

New York City's mayor defended a police decision to disperse the Million Youth March in Harlem within minutes after it was supposed to end under a court-ordered deadline.

Describing the march as promising "to be a really violent event," Rudolph Giuliani said participants listened to speakers "who got up and talked about killing Jews and taking off their scalps and cutting off their heads."

Meanwhile, police officials are mulling whether to bring charges against the march's anti-Semitic organizer, Khalid Muhammad, for what they say were his attempts to incite the crowd to kill police.

Judge rules in Sheinbein case

An Israeli judge ruled that a teen-ager suspected in a Maryland killing should be extradited to the United States.

The judge ruled that although he accepted Samuel Sheinbein's contention that he is an Israeli citizen, he had no right to stay in the country because he had not maintained ties with the Jewish state.

Lawyers are expected to file an appeal on behalf of Sheinbein, who fled to Israel one year ago following the murder of 19-year-old Alfredo Tello. A Maryland court last month filed a warrant for the arrest of Sheinbein's father for aiding his son's escape.

Clashes near Jerusalem

Five Israeli police and five Palestinians were wounded in a dash at a refugee camp near Jerusalem. Residents of the camp, who threw stones at Israeli security forces, were angered by the death of a heart-attack victim who they maintained could have been saved if an Israeli ambulance had not been delayed because of security procedures.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Russian Jews weigh emigration amid deepening economic crisis

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Irina Meerzon knows that she is in financial trouble.

The retired accountant's pension, which had been the equivalent of \$60 per month as recently as mid-August, is now worth roughly \$20 as a result of the ruble's free fall. In the same time period, the prices of staple goods have risen 50 to 60 percent.

"I always had to count every penny," the 74-year-old woman says, "but now I'm on the verge of poverty."

Roman Libin, 34, who published a small advertising magazine for furniture wholesalers, says he had to go out of business last week because "no one needs now what I've been doing for the last four years."

Like other Russians, Jews here are watching with dismay as the country endures yet another period of chaos — perhaps the most serious crisis since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. But mindful of what has historically happened here when Russia has faced economic and political uncertainty, Russian Jews are watching the unfolding events with more uncertainty and fear than their neighbors.

With an increasing number of Jews concerned about an outbreak of anti-Semitism, another exodus of Russian Jews appears to be possible, and the crisis is already threatening the Russian Jewish communal structure that has been set up since the fall of communism.

In mid-August, the Russian government stopped trying to prop up the ruble. In less than two months, the currency, which was relatively stable during the past two years, plunged by about 300 percent. And as is usually the case when inflation skyrockets, consumers have been especially hard-hit.

In the fallout that ensued, the young, reformist Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko was ousted, and the country's Parliament has moved slowly to agree on a new candidate for the premiership. Meanwhile, rumors continue to swirl about the ongoing deterioration of the health and mental competence of President Boris Yeltsin.

All of which has Russian Jews, in particular, feeling anxious.

"There are two dangers that we Jews feel today," said Tankred Golenpolsky, a prominent Jewish leader and publisher of the Moscow-based *Evreyskaya Gazeta*, a weekly Jewish newspaper. The first, Golenpolsky said, is the impoverishment that Russian Jews are experiencing along with other Russians. But there's another worry that is specific to Russia's Jewish community.

"The second danger is typical for every crisis in Russia," said Golenpolsky. "When they are looking for someone to blame for the situation, they will turn to the Jews."

Some Jews appear to be taking no chances. Sources at the Israeli Embassy in Moscow said there has been a flurry of inquiries in recent days about immigration visas.

Yuri Teitelbaum, a Jewish activist in Krasnodar, said most of those who have been emigrating from the southern Russian region were either pensioners or younger Jews. Now, he said, Jews worried about providing for and protecting their families are likely to consider leaving Russia.

Libin, the former magazine publisher, fits this profile. He said he did not think about leaving the country until several weeks ago. "Now I seriously ponder this opportunity because in the current situation I will soon have no money to support my wife and kid," he said.

Though there has not been an increase in the number of actual emigrants, some are

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israeli workers end strike

Some 300,000 Israeli workers ended their five-day strike after getting a 1.5 percent wage increase.

The deal between the Histadrut labor federation and Finance Ministry averted a threatened shutdown of Ben-Gurion Airport. The agreement does not affect Israeli schoolteachers, who have been striking for more than a week.

Turkish premier visits Israel

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai denied that Turkey's visiting prime minister was seeking Israeli support should fighting break out with Greece over Cyprus. Mesut Yilmaz's visit reflects the two countries' growing military ties, which have been criticized by much of the Arab world as well as by Greece. "Turkish-Israeli cooperation is not against any other country," Yilmaz said during a welcoming ceremony with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israel plans for Russian influx

Israel created a government committee to plan for a possible sharp increase in immigrants from Russia. In light of the economic crisis ravaging Russia, Yuli Edelstein, Israel's minister of absorption, presented tentative plans that take into account a potential immigrant increase of at least 10 to 20 percent.

Before the current crisis, Israel expected between 50,000 and 60,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union this year.

Israel criticizes Mandela

Israel criticized South African President Nelson Mandela for condemning Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's administration as "narrow and chauvinistic." The Israeli Foreign Ministry called on South Africa and other nations "to refrain from unilateral, incorrect attacks against the Israeli government." Mandela's criticism came at a summit meeting of the 113-nation Non-Aligned Movement.



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predicting that emigration — to Israel and to Germany — could skyrocket if the economic and political situations continue to deteriorate.

Israel has begun preparations for a possible wave of Russian immigrants.

"In October, we will have long lines in our office," said a senior Jewish Agency for Israel official in Russia.

If the effects on aliyah are not yet clear, the financial crisis is already affecting Jewish domestic charities.

The Russian Jewish Congress, a group of local Jewish entrepreneurs and financiers that has spent millions of dollars in the past two years on various communal projects, is likely to cut its budget substantially.

Vladimir Goussinsky, the multimillionaire businessman who is president of the congress, told delegates at the group's biennial convention in Moscow last week that the coming months will be a "tough period" for the organization.

In addition to the country's chaos, all of the mechanisms that have triggered previous outbursts of Russian anti-Semitism are in place. During the past several years, many Jews, of whom Goussinsky is the most well-known, have become prominent members of Russia's market economy.

Several members of recent Russian Cabinets have had Jewish ancestry. In the last Cabinet, for instance, Kiriyenko and his first deputy Boris Nemtsov were half-Jewish and Economics Minister Yakov Urinson and the chief presidential adviser on economic affairs, Alexander Livshitz, were Jewish.

Jewish leaders fear that if the situation does not improve quickly, some Russians will hold Jews responsible. So far, this has not occurred.

"Thank God, no one now is blaming Jews for what is going on," said Alexander Osovsov, executive vice president of the Russian Jewish Congress.

Though the Kremlin has repeatedly promised to stick to reforms, many Jews fear that early elections could spell trouble.

"Every scenario now seems possible," one Jewish activist said.

"Jews fear that using this turmoil, the Communists may come to power and the country will change its course," said Evgeniya Lvova, a Jewish leader in St. Petersburg.

Parliamentary elections are scheduled for December 1999 and presidential elections for 2000.

"If the situation does not stabilize in two weeks, people will begin leaving the country in bigger numbers than usual," said Lvova. "The longer the situation remains uncertain, the more likely there will be an outburst of social discontent." □

Jewish leaders show concern

MOSCOW (JTA) — A group of American Jewish leaders who came to Russia last week said they are monitoring the deteriorating situation here carefully.

"When a country is in trouble, Jews are often blamed, especially in this country," World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman, who led the group, told JTA.

Bronfman said he and his colleagues "wanted to make sure that everybody here understands that we're watching very carefully how Russians treat" the Jewish community.

At a meeting with the group in Moscow, President Clinton echoed the delegation's concern about the possible ramifications the current instability in Russia may have for the country's Jewish community.

In addition to receiving a first-hand look at the chaos that is today's Russia, the leaders also used the time to delve into other issues.

The World Jewish Congress held an extended meeting on restitution issues in the Russian capital.

The meeting, which was also attended by representatives of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, dealt mainly with resolving property dating from the Holocaust era.

American Jewish leaders also held a series of meetings with Russian officials on the Middle East peace process and the proliferation of missile technology and weapons of mass destruction in Iran and Iraq. □

JEWISH WORLD

Candidate addresses slave labor

The opposition candidate in Germany's race for chancellor said he believed German companies that used slave workers under the Nazis had a moral obligation to compensate them.

Gerhard Schroeder said the firms should follow the example of Volkswagen, which is creating a fund to compensate former slave laborers.

Holocaust survivors filed two class-actions lawsuits last week in the United States against several German firms accused of profiting from such labor.

Meanwhile, the German truck and bus manufacturer MAN denied that it employed slave laborers during World War II.

The company said it was falsely accused of engaging in such practices when the lawsuit was filed last week.

The firm maintained in a statement that it "staunchly" resisted requests by Nazi officials during the war to employ concentration camp prisoners at its plants.

Neo-Nazi group to exploit crisis

A neo-Nazi paramilitary group in Russia said it plans to exploit the country's current economic crisis to play a more active political role.

Russia's acting prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, said in a television interview that groups like Russian National Unity have a chance of gaining increased power because of the country's current political and economic turmoil.

Emigre life celebrated

A three-day celebration of Jewish emigre life in America began during Labor Day Weekend in New York's Battery Park.

No Zdroye-L'Chaim-To Life Festival '98 commemorates what its sponsor, the New York Association for New Americans, is calling the 25th anniversary of the first immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union.

Since the 1970s, roughly 400,000 Russian-speaking emigres have come to the United States, over half of whom settled in New York City.

Hockey star plans meeting

A hockey Hall of Famer who was quoted in a Moscow newspaper as making anti-Semitic and anti-black comments will meet with representatives of these groups in the Toronto offices of the Canadian Jewish Congress on Sept. 17.

Bobby Hull daims he was misquoted in the English-language Moscow Times.

In an article last month, the paper quoted him, among other things, as saying that Hitler had some good ideas, but had gone too far.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

British scholar wants to dig for lost ark in Palestinian area

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A latter-day Indiana Jones believes he has found the burial site of the Ark of the Covenant — in a part of the West Bank that Israel has already handed over to the Palestinian Authority.

Michael Sanders, 58, bases his theory on satellite images, coupled with a study of ancient Egyptian papyrus documents from the British Museum in London and other accounts.

The British-born Sanders is a publisher of classical university texts who now lives in Irvine, Calif.

He has spent more than 25 years researching biblical history.

Now he is planning to excavate the site, where he has detected the contours of an Egyptian temple that he believes may have been built over the burial site of the biblical Ark of the Covenant.

"There will be archeologists with us," he told the London Sunday Times this week, "but the search for the ark is bound to be more of a treasure hunt than a classical archeological dig."

The Ark of the Covenant — and the Ten Commandments that were inscribed at Mount Sinai around 1250 BCE — disappeared from Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem after a raid by an Egyptian king.

The raid occurred in the 10th century BCE.

The ark was never recovered, and its location is one of the most enduring and fascinating biblical mysteries.

Sanders believes the ark was seized by Egyptian King Shishak when Solomon's Temple was plundered in 925 BCE, the first in a series of Egyptian raids on the city of Jerusalem.

He says papyrus documents in the British Museum have identified an Egyptian temple at the southern end of the West Bank, beneath which the ark may have been buried.

"This temple is referred to in the papyrus as a 'mysterious house in the land of Zahi,' " which Sanders said is a reference to the god Amuna Ra.

In 1830, the American explorer Edward Robinson walked the route that had been taken by the invading Egyptians and found ancient ruins lying in the village of Dhahiriya.

Satellite images have also revealed ruins at the southern end of Dhahiriya, which Sanders believes are the remains of an ancient Egyptian temple.

"The village is still there and is the most likely resting place of the tablets of stone," said Sanders.

"If the Egyptians had just seized the most sacred religious codes from the people they had invaded, they would have laid them in the foundations of their new temple," he said.

Jonathan Tubb, an expert on Syrian and Palestinian archaeology at the British Museum, agrees that it is "very reasonable" to suggest the ark was looted by Shishak because that would have been the first opportunity to remove it from Solomon's Temple.

"If an Egyptian temple can be identified, it would be a great place to dig," he said. "It could solve all sorts of mysteries."

However, Sanders must overcome two hurdles before he can put together a team to search for the lost ark.

First, he faces the bureaucratic problem of where to go for permission to dig — to the Israeli or Palestinian authorities.

Second, there is a security problem: The location of the site is also a training ground for Hamas terrorists, he said.

"It is in very dangerous territory," said Sanders.

"But it must be worth the risk." □

Polish extremists seize control of debate over Auschwitz crosses

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — The crisis over the forest of crosses at the site of Auschwitz has demonstrated that the fight for the memory of the former death camp is far from over.

But the struggle has also taken on deep political, religious and national overtones that have exposed several fault lines in modern Poland.

Extremists have seized control of the debate, hobbling efforts by both the Roman Catholic Church and the government to defuse the situation and damaging Poland's image abroad.

Since the end of July, Roman Catholic fundamentalists have erected more than 200 crosses to commemorate the 152 Polish Catholics who were killed at Auschwitz — and to “defend” a much larger cross that was used by Polish-born Pope John Paul II during a mass at Birkenau in 1979, and erected outside Auschwitz 10 years ago.

The cross affair has given a prominent public platform to virulent anti-Semites who normally exist on the fringe of political life.

The two leaders of the campaign to put up the crosses, Kazimierz Switon and Mieczyslaw Janosz, “use the affair for self-promotion and to spread ethnic hatred,” Stanislaw Krajewski, a board member of the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland, told JTA in a telephone interview from Warsaw.

News reports, he said, quoted Janosz as saying that Jews controlled Poland, the government, the media, and the courts, and that the Mossad had infiltrated the country. He was even quoted as calling the Polish church hierarchy who have condemned the crosses “Jewish bishops.”

Some 3.5 million Jews lived in Poland before World War II.

More than 3 million Polish Jews were murdered during the Holocaust.

Only about 10,000 to 15,000 Jews live in Poland today.

The standoff has also pitted Catholic radicals against the mainstream Catholic church in what Krajewski described as a “religious war.”

This was exemplified by the fact that a German priest from the Society of St. Pius X — right-wing followers of French-born Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who was excommunicated in 1988 for refusing to accept the reforms of the Second Vatican Council — blessed the crosses and attacked Polish bishops.

Krajewski says it might take direct intervention by the pope himself to move a roughly 25-foot-high cross — the so-called papal cross — that is at the center of mounting Catholic-Jewish tensions.

Jewish and Israeli organizations, as well as some Polish figures, have called for the removal of all crosses and religious symbols at Auschwitz, including the papal cross.

Poland's Roman Catholic hierarchy and the Polish government have condemned the erection of the smaller crosses and called for their removal, but both have stated that they believe that the papal cross should remain in place.

“Short of the pope's direct intervention, I can't foresee the cross being relocated,” said Krajewski.

“His intervention would be perhaps a last resort and would be

very, very welcome,” said Krajewski, who is also the American Jewish Committee consultant in Warsaw.

So far, the pope has remained silent on the issue.

“Those who should be the first to defend the cross are on the opposite side of the barricade,” he said.

“The war inside the church is escalating,” Krajewski said. “Christians are fighting Christians.”

“But the general feeling is that it is all the fault of the Jews. The atmosphere is very bad.”

Krajewski, noted, however, that divisions on how to approach the cross issue have also emerged within Poland's Jewish community.

Members of the board of the Union of Jewish Community distanced themselves from a hard-line pronouncement by Chief Rabbi Menachem Joskowicz last month.

Joskowicz, himself an Auschwitz survivor, declared that the presence of any cross prohibits Jews from praying at the former death camp site.

One cross, he said, was as bad as 1,000 crosses.

“Joskowicz's statements were perceived as a war against Christianity,” Krajewski said.

Krajewski faulted some Jews for failing to recognize that even though 90 percent of the 1.5 million people killed at Auschwitz were Jews, Polish Catholics, too, have a right to consider Auschwitz a symbol of Nazi persecution and to mourn the thousands of Poles who were murdered there.

Poles, he said, have the impression that Jews ignore the fact that Poles also were killed at Auschwitz. “Defending the cross” has been made into a symbol of Poles' right to commemorate these victims.

“Poles do have real, justified rights,” he said. “If Jewish leaders publicly expressed this, it could help improve the situation.” □

Police detain man for attempt to blackmail prime minister's wife

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli man faces charges of attempting to blackmail the wife of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Shmuel Elimelech, 37, was detained last week after having telephoned the premier's office and demanding payment to prevent the publication of “embarrassing information” about Sara Netanyahu.

Only after he was arrested did police discover that what Elimelech possessed was a collection of Sara Netanyahu's third-grade notebooks.

The notebooks were found among articles that had been left in her old house in the town of Tivon and discarded by the new owners.

Elimelech, who lives in Tivon, originally demanded about \$3,000, but then settled for less than \$1,000.

An officer met with him, handed him the money — and then arrested him.

Elimelech, who was released on bail, told reporters that during the negotiations he had even invited the Netanyahus for a Moroccan dinner at his home. □