



# Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israeli-Syrian committees meet

Israeli and Syrian negotiators met to discuss security arrangements and normalization, the issues Israel wanted to focus on first.

Four committees were created to deal with key issues in the talks being held in Shepherdstown, W.Va. In addition to the Security Arrangements and Normal Peaceful Relations committees, other committees on borders and water were also formed.

U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said Wednesday the issues of water and borders have also been discussed but not in formal committee meetings.

### New West Bank pullback begins

Israel began withdrawing from an additional 5 percent of the West Bank. Wednesday's redeployment, initially slated to take place Nov. 15, is expected to be completed by Thursday.

As a result of the withdrawal, the Palestinian Authority will have sole control over an additional 2 percent of the region and gain joint control over an additional 3 percent. [Page 3]

### Israel releases jailed Palestinians

Israel released 22 Palestinians jailed for common crimes in a goodwill gesture to mark the end this week of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Wednesday's move was not called for under any of the interim agreements reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

### Rabbis oppose Golan withdrawal

A group of Israeli rabbis led by former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira issued a rabbinical ruling declaring the Golan Heights an integral part of Israel. The ruling, issued this week by the Union of Rabbis for the Land of Israel, claims that the Golan was in Jewish hands in ancient times.

### Money given for Soviet emigres

An interfaith group donated \$2 million to help the resettlement in Israel of Jews from the former Soviet Union.

The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews has now given the United Jewish Communities a total of \$20 million for the resettlement of Jews from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### Despite shrinking numbers, Moldova's Jews enjoy revival

By Michael J. Jordan

CHISINAU, Moldova (JTA) — As a new century dawns, the Jews of Moldova — unlike their impoverished compatriots — actually have something to celebrate.

After four decades of communism during which there was barely a pulse of Jewish life, Jews in this ex-Soviet republic are enjoying a remarkable renaissance.

It's about more than schools and meals-on-wheels.

There are Jewish historical and cultural societies, a folk dance group and even a Yiddish-language center for children.

"Fifteen years ago, if you'd transported me to today, I'd be shocked," says Semion Shoihet, 69, head of the Moldova Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities. "Now we argue about what time to hold this celebration or that celebration — but not whether to celebrate."

None of this would be possible, says Shoihet, if it weren't for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Still, the revival has not been enough to prevent a massive exodus of young Moldovan Jews to Israel, Germany, the United States and elsewhere. The community has shrunk from roughly 75,000 just 10 years ago to between 35,000 and 40,000 today.

Their reasons for leaving are clear.

Moldova, which boasted one of the highest standards of living in the former Soviet Union, has, since it became independent in 1991, become one of the poorest countries in Europe.

It is now also among its coldest and darkest. Russia, which provides 93 percent of Moldova's energy needs, cut off gas supplies in late December, citing Moldova's mounting debt.

That forced the closure of hundreds of primary schools.

Pensions, which arrive irregularly, average \$8 per month. A Big Mac at one of the two McDonald's in Chisinau, Moldova's capital, costs \$1.25.

In the countryside, they do without cash. Villagers can't tell you how much a box of detergent costs, only that it's worth one live chicken or 1 kilogram, or 2.2 pounds, of sour cream.

But the 4.4 million Moldovans live mostly off the land: They smoke meats, pickle peppers and preserve jams.

The JDC provides Moldova's Jews with more than organizational support; the elderly also depend on it for their physical survival.

The JDC, which first began its operations in Moldova in 1919, provides hot meals, medicine, blankets, heating fuel and home repairs. Last year, the JDC aided 2,200 Jews.

"Without our additional relief, they would die," says Yigal Kotler, director of the JDC branch in Moldova.

"They wouldn't escape this economic crisis."

Not surprisingly, the crisis has also galvanized the country's Jews.

There are organized Jewish communities in 10 cities, impressive for a country just larger than the state of Maryland. They are a diverse lot, mirroring the Balkans-like ethnic mix of the country.

Moldovan society is 65 percent ethnic Romanian, 14 percent Ukrainian, 13 percent Russian, plus Turkic-speaking Gagauz, Bulgarians and others. Jews are 1 percent of the population, and there are Jewish homes in which Romanian, Russian or Yiddish are the

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Syria told to disarm Hezbollah

Syria will have to ensure that Hezbollah gunmen in southern Lebanon are disarmed if it wants to make peace with Israel, according to Israel's deputy defense minister.

"We are coming to these negotiations with power and strength and we have the right to demand what our citizens deserve," Ephraim Sneh told Israel Radio on Wednesday.

He added that Syria will also have to end its alliance with Iran.

### Forbes: Syria should compromise

Republican presidential candidate Steve Forbes said he worries that President Clinton's desire to leave a lasting legacy of Middle East peace will harm Israel in the peace talks with Syria.

"We've got to pop this euphoric bubble of peace talks and realize that there's a lot of hard bargaining that has to be done, and the Syrians have to be made to realize they have to make real concessions," Forbes told reporters Tuesday.

### Weizman used funds as president

Israeli President Ezer Weizman used money after taking office that he had received from a French millionaire, his lawyer said.

But the "money transfers stopped" after Weizman became president, Jacob Weinroth told Israel's Army Radio on Wednesday. During the radio interview, Weinroth confirmed that Weizman had continued to dip into funds from Jewish benefactor Edouard Saroussi after his election in 1993.

### Soldier dies after years in coma

An Israeli soldier who spent 17 years in a coma after being wounded during Israel's invasion of Lebanon has died. Cpl. Aharon Ketsef, 36, died Monday, as peace talks between Israel and Syria resumed in the United States.



## Daily News Bulletin

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mother tongues. Shoihet, for example, speaks Russian and Yiddish. But the Jews are far more united than society at large.

"The Jewish community has become like a state within a state," says Kotler.

"When all the other state structures collapsed, Jews found they preferred to be within the community than outside of it."

However, almost every Jewish family has a member who has emigrated, and most young Jews say they think about following in their footsteps. But optimists here say the current situation is only the latest chapter in a history full of challenges to Jews.

Moldova, known as Bessarabia in past centuries, anchored the southwest corner of the Pale of Settlement. From 1835 to 1917, Jews were legally confined to the Pale, a huge swath of land that encompasses today's eastern Poland, western Russia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus.

By 1897, there were more than 5 million Jews living in the Pale, according to Zvi Gitelman, a professor of political science at the University of Michigan.

Meanwhile, Bessarabia, long coveted for its fertile black soil, changed hands between Russia and Romania seven times since 1812.

In April 1903 the capital, then known as Kishinev, made news worldwide when a rabidly anti-Semitic newspaper editor incited a pogrom against the city's 50,000 Jews. In two days, 45 Jews were killed and hundreds injured, according to Gitelman's book, "A Century of Ambivalence."

Worse times lay ahead. During the Holocaust, 300,000 of Moldova's estimated 400,000 Jews perished.

Shoihet, born in 1931, says that anywhere from 10,000 to 18,000 Jews were killed in his hometown, Dubossary, including many of his relatives.

However, in 1941 the Soviets evacuated him, his mother and two younger brothers to the Central Asian republic of Kazakhstan. Shoihet's father, a soldier, died in Leningrad in 1942.

Semion Shoihet went on to study architecture. He later became one of the Soviet Union's best-known architects and led Moldova's most prestigious institute of architecture.

Meanwhile, the only sign of communal life in Moldova was a short-lived Jewish theater.

Kishinev, which boasted 77 synagogues and prayer halls before the war, had none functioning during Communist rule. One is open today, run by the Chabad Lubavitch community.

Despite the educational and career opportunities that the Communist Party offered Shoihet, his Jewishness sometimes became an issue.

In the early 1970s, he was blocked from attending an international conference in Colombia. Moscow replaced him with a woman, ostensibly to boost female representation in the Soviet delegation. The real reason, Shoihet says, was anti-Semitism.

At about the same time, Arab terrorists murdered 11 Israelis at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany. Shoihet says he and thousands of other Jews dared to openly gather at a local Jewish cemetery to read Kaddish.

Today, Shoihet and his co-religionists are less fearful to express their identity, despite the occasional manifestation of anti-Semitism — conspiracy theories in the media, outbursts on street corners and desecration of cemeteries.

In fact, Moldovan President Petru Lucinschi actively encourages Jews, especially Moldovan-Jewish emigres, to promote their culture and contributions to society.

"He hopes Jews can be a model for other communities," says Shoihet, "to show how they should invest in their spiritual and cultural preservation."

Indeed, Moldova's Jewish community remains a fairly tight-knit group and loyal to Moldova, says Shoihet.

Despite the steady flow of emigration, even within his own family, he does not fear for the community's long-term survival.

Shoihet's two brothers are in Germany, as is one of his sons. His other son works in Moscow.

"I know emigration is the Jewish fate," he says. "But the graves of our parents and grandparents have kept us connected here. I don't rule out the possibility that my family may return to Moldova." □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Latvia speaks out on Kalejs

Latvia's ambassador to Britain said his government would seek the extradition of war crimes suspect Konrad Kalejs from Australia if there was enough evidence for prosecution against him.

"If there's enough proof," Normans Penke told BBC Radio on Wednesday, "then of course, the extradition case will be in place, and he will stand in front of court." Kalejs, suspected of aiding the slaughter of thousands of Jews in Nazi-occupied Latvia during World War II, has been living in Britain, which on Monday ordered him to be deported to Australia. He holds Australian citizenship.

Meanwhile, Australia's former war crimes prosecutor said his disbanded unit should be reformed to investigate Australians suspected of crimes against humanity. Robert Greenwood also said his file on Kalejs, who may arrive soon in Australia from Britain, should be reopened immediately.

### Anti-Jewish cartoon raises ire

The president of the Arab American Institute in Washington said Tuesday he is "perfectly willing" to protest an anti-Jewish caricature that appeared alongside an essay he wrote in the official newspaper of the Palestinian Authority.

The caricature in the Dec. 28 issue of the daily Al-Hayat Al-Jadida showed an old man, labeled "20th Century," and a young man, labeled "21st Century." Between them stands a short man with a hooked nose, skullcap and Star of David, who is labeled "The Disease of the Century."

### WJC: Costa Rica harbors Nazi

The World Jewish Congress accused Costa Rica of breaking international war crimes laws by harboring an alleged Nazi war criminal. The New York-based group said it would make formal charges against Costa Rica at the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva in the coming weeks concerning Bohdan Koziy, who has lived in the Central American country for more than 15 years.

"We have information that he is still there in Costa Rica and the government is undertaking no efforts to deport him or extradite him to Ukraine where he could stand trial," WJC Executive Director Elan Steinberg said Wednesday.

### French leader to run unopposed

French Jewish leader Henri Hajdenberg will be the sole candidate to head the European Jewish Congress when the group votes for a new leader on Sunday, according to French Jewish sources.

Hajdenberg, 52, is president of CRIF, the umbrella body for France's 700,000-member Jewish community.

## Israeli-Palestinian track moving full steam ahead

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli-Palestinian peace track, overshadowed by the ongoing Israeli-Syrian negotiations in West Virginia, is emerging from its recent doldrums.

After nearly two months of disagreements, Israel on Wednesday began withdrawing from an additional 5 percent of the West Bank.

In addition, the two sides have been meeting daily in an attempt to nail down a framework for a final peace deal by a previously agreed mid-February target date.

The head of the Israeli team, Oded Eran, said this week some progress has been made in the final-status talks. He added that he was optimistic the framework could be reached, if not by the middle of February, then a few weeks later.

For his part, Palestinian spokesman Nabil Abu Irdeineh said Wednesday it is still "too early to judge" whether the framework accord will be reached by the target date.

Wednesday's redeployment was initially slated to take place Nov. 15, but was held up by Palestinian demands that they have a say over which portions of the West Bank be turned over to their control.

But the two sides reached a compromise Tuesday, when the Palestinian Authority agreed to use Israel's original redeployment maps. Israel in turn agreed to be open to Palestinian requests for the next withdrawal, slated for Jan. 20. A day later, Israel withdrew from army bases in the West Bank towns of Nablus and Jenin.

As a result of the latest withdrawal, which was expected to be completed by Thursday, the Palestinian Authority will have sole control over an additional 2 percent of the region and gain joint control over an additional 3 percent.

The withdrawal is the second of three called for in a land-for-security agreement the two sides reached last September in Egypt. By Jan. 20, when the third withdrawal is scheduled, the Palestinians are due to control nearly 40 percent of the territory.

On Wednesday, Palestinian officials denied that they had agreed to go ahead with the latest Israeli redeployment for fear that they would be left behind by the Israeli-Syrian track.

The Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are a "parallel track, not a competitive" one, said Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat. Along with its redeployment on Wednesday, Israel also released 22 Palestinians jailed for common crimes in a goodwill gesture to mark the end this week of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. □

## U.S. Jews show support for Costa Rica, El Salvador

By Brian Harris

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (JTA) — Costa Rica and El Salvador may not be feeling lonely these days thanks to heavy tourism, but visits like the one this week from the leadership of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations are still welcome.

Of course, unlike other visitors, the six-person delegation had an unusual purpose: to show appreciation for the countries' stalwart support of Israel and their climates of religious tolerance.

"Both Costa Rica and El Salvador have long been friends to Israel and the U.S.," Conference president Ronald Lauder said after a 75-minute meeting with Costa Rican President Miguel Angel Rodriguez late Tuesday. The Conference, he said, wants "to work with Costa Rica and El Salvador to help them."

The only two nations in the world with embassies to Israel in Jerusalem, the disputed capital claimed by Israel but unrecognized by most of the world, Costa Rica and El Salvador have long enjoyed respect among pro-Israel groups.

But that respect has rarely translated into meeting their needs for investment, trade and cultural exchange. □

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

**Multimedia revolution bypasses Jewish world of 'chalk and talk'***By Avi Machlis*

BE'ERSHEVA, Israel (JTA) — Click into the “shmooze corner” of JewishFamily.com, and you will find Web surfers of diverse opinions and backgrounds engaged in a debate over whether Jewish kids in the Diaspora should celebrate Christmas.

Maya, a 14-year-old Israeli, thinks it is good to share in the celebration of a culture you live alongside. Her comments sparked an angry response from Devorah, who wondered why Arabs do not celebrate Chanukah in Israel. Meanwhile, Aline, who was married for 20 years to a non-Jewish man, says she celebrated Christmas to share in her husband's holiday but believes it confused her children.

It may seem like just a discussion, but Yosef Abramowitz, publisher of the Boston-based Jewish Family & Life, which runs this and several other Jewish-oriented Web sites, says cyberplaces like these are the key to the future of Jewish education. Surveys, he says, show that his sites have profoundly impacted the lives of visitors, leading some to talk about God for the first time, read Judaic articles to their children and even convert to Judaism.

“New media is the key to mass Jewish renaissance because it encompasses the home and school and is able to engage and inspire a whole new generation,” Abramowitz says. “It can totally reconfigure Judaism to be relevant to people's lives. Most Jews wouldn't walk through the doors of a Jewish institution but every month we are invited into 150,000 homes, half of whom are unaffiliated.”

Yet with the information technology revolution in full swing, the Jewish world is still struggling to integrate new technologies with ancient teaching traditions. Distance-learning classes, Torah software and Jewish Web sites with informal education content are increasingly being used to bring Judaism to life. But as 80 professionals and experts from Israel and North America convened for a Jewish Educational Technology conference in the desert town of Be'ersheva recently, the prevailing feeling was that there are many hurdles to overcome before technology makes a big impact on Jewish education.

Although the Jewish Family group of Web sites has been lucky to win \$1 million in funding from various groups, convincing donors was not easy. The problem, Abramowitz says, is that many decision-makers in philanthropic organizations are older. Often, they do not understand technological proposals.

But Susan Bass, the Jerusalem-based project editor of the Pincus Fund, which supports educational projects outside the United States and Israel, says not all technology proposals are necessarily worth funding.

“We are looking for innovative Jewish education projects,” she said, noting that her fund has supported a technology-based distance learning program. “But we are also interested in quality. Every proposal needs to be evaluated on its merits.”

In some respects, JET producers face problems similar to mainstream Internet entrepreneurs who are struggling to discover the key to profitability. However, JET producers are in a particularly difficult financial position for several reasons.

Development is much more expensive than for typical Jewish

educational projects. Building a technological project requires technology experts who must be paid salaries on par with the private sector, which are usually much higher than wages paid to Jewish educators.

Yet Jewish technology firms cannot raise money from venture capital funds or private investors who are pumping massive amounts of money into mainstream high-tech start-up companies. Those investors expect high rates of return that no Jewish company can ever deliver because the market is very small.

Even if funding starts to flow, it is difficult to infuse new technologies into teaching institutions. Some educators may question the educational worth of new, unproven technologies, but technology experts say this is the only way to engage a generation of techie youth — especially on Judaism — into the next century.

“Talk and chalk is not necessarily the best way to put across something as rich as Jewish culture and heritage,” says Meir Fachler, conference organizer and director for JET and multimedia at Geshet, an Israeli organization that tries to bridge the religious-secular gulf. “Technology has the potential to make Jewish culture accessible and relevant. The problem is much more for educators than for kids,” he says. “We've got to catch up with the kids. It's a total role reversal.”

Fachler calls the Internet an “enormous Jewish library” that is being used as a resource center instead of as an interactive tool.

“There's a lot of 'shovelware.' I shovel it on the Web and hope it's of use for someone,” he says. “Has it been edited for the Web for screens? Download, print it and read it and that's a fantastic benefit but that doesn't utilize the technology of the Internet.”

Fachler says there is a new language being spoken by a new generation, a language that involves bombardment of the senses with all media. Jewish teachers, he said, need to be able to speak the language to make Judaism more relevant to this generation.

Chaim Feder, director of Education Matters, a Jerusalem-based private consulting firm on Jewish education, recalls a seminar he delivered at an Israeli school where two-thirds of the teachers did not know how to use a mouse. “The vast majority of teachers are people who grew up with the computer being at best, a second or third language,” Feder says. “Kids grow up today speaking computerese.”

The trick, Feder says, is to create educational technologies with Jewish content that is so compelling, teachers will want them. “In education, and certainly Jewish education, that does not exist yet,” Feder says.

Several conference participants agreed that so far, compelling content remains elusive. Fachler, the conference organizer, labels much of the existing Jewish software and Web material “cybershlock.”

Abramowitz, whose Web sites are delivering original content on a range of Jewish-related issues, thinks one problem is that Orthodox content dominates Jewish educational technology and may not be relevant enough to engage the spectrum of Diaspora Jews. Indeed, the Be'ersheva conference was dominated by Orthodox participants.

“In many respects, the Orthodox were the pioneers who believed in new media to service their members and do outreach,” says Abramowitz, himself a non-Orthodox Jew. “The non-Orthodox movements have not stepped up to the plate with gusto.” □