



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 33

Tuesday, February 19, 2002

85th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Four Israelis killed in attacks

Three Israelis were killed and four were injured in a Gaza ambush.

In another attack on Monday, a Palestinian killed an Israeli policeman and himself when he detonated a car bomb at a roadblock near Jerusalem. [Page 4]

### Vatican to release documents

The Vatican will release documents that it said will shed a better light on the role of Pope Pius XII during World War II.

Pius has long been accused of failing to speak out against the Nazi genocide. [Page 3]

### Jewish Museum may face boycott

A Holocaust survivors' group is threatening to boycott the Jewish Museum. The American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors said it would boycott the New York-based museum for the duration of a controversial exhibit on Holocaust art, slated to open March 17.

### JCPA convenes in Washington

Hundreds of Jewish community leaders gathered in Washington to discuss Israel advocacy and social justice issues.

Among those who addressed the annual conference of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs this week were former Middle East envoy Dennis Ross and Rabbi Michael Melchior, Israel's deputy foreign minister.

Ross urged participants to go to Israel to show their support, and Melchior warned about a new anti-Semitism that "demonizes Israel." More than 400 students attended a second event, the Spitzer B'nai B'rith Hillel Forum on Public Policy, which was held in conjunction with the JCPA plenum.

### Israel building buffer zone?

Palestinian officials claimed that Israel has established a buffer zone in the Gaza Strip. Israel Radio quoted Palestinian sources Monday as saying that Israeli security forces had established a buffer zone ranging in width from a kilometer to three kilometers between Beit Hanoun and Bait Lahiya in northern Gaza and near the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza.

The report quoted Israeli sources as confirming that military positions had been established in Gaza to prevent mortar and rocket attacks into Israel.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### After lean years, Uganda's Jews finally have their day at the mikvah

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Capping a Jewish story of struggle and survival, Uganda's Jews just got dunked in the mikvah.

Four Conservative rabbis from the United States and one from Israel joined the community's spiritual leader, Gershom Sizomu, in supervising the conversion of 600 Ugandans whose Jewishness was previously in dispute. The several-day affair concluded last week.

Sizomu, who recently returned to Uganda from a semester of rabbinical studies at Hebrew Union College in New York, the Reform movement's theological seminary, is thrilled that the 83-year-old Jewish community has converted according to halachah, or Jewish law.

As such, it should now gain more legitimacy in the eyes of the Jewish world, he says.

Sizomu also is being pragmatic.

There are more men in the community than women, and most members of the community are related. Recognition by other Jews will expand members' opportunities to marry and sustain their community, known as Abayudaya, a local term that means "the people of Judah."

The community lives on the outskirts of Mbale, the third largest city in Uganda.

After several intense days, two-thirds of the Abayudaya — some 400 people in all — were converted. Most of those who chose not to undergo the conversion cited sickness or travel complications.

A few claimed their Jewishness didn't need an outside stamp of approval.

For most, though, the conversion went off without a hitch. Neither the neighboring Muslims nor the ABC television reporter who trailed behind the group made problems.

"We are at peace with everybody," said Sizomu, who described a newfound "connection between Uganda and the rest of the" Jewish world.

Sizomu and the rabbis divided into two religious courts, where they confirmed each community member's commitment to Judaism before sending each family off to the synagogue's mikvah or the local Namatala River.

The males of the community had been circumcised at birth, yet they agreed to undergo a hatafat dam brit, a symbolic procedure to extract a droplet of blood from the penis.

It was just "a small poke," one of the rabbis explained, but young boys who feared a second circumcision screamed anyway.

The Jews of Uganda trace their roots to Semei Kakungulu, the local agent of British imperialists at the turn of the 20th century.

In addition to carrying out political orders, Kakungulu was to be a missionary for the British, converting the people of Mbale to Christianity.

Unfortunately for England, Kakungulu favored the Hebrew Bible, and spread its teachings instead of the Christian one.

It therefore came as little surprise when the British fired Kakungulu in 1917. Around that time, he took on the task of circumcising himself — when he was almost 50 years old — along with his two grown sons and the 3,000 men of the community.

Two years later, the city began referring to the community — pejoratively — as Abayudaya when members began practicing the Orthodox Judaism they maintain to this day. After Kakungulu's death in 1928, many members left the Abayudaya for gifts that

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israeli commander killed

The commander of Israel's elite Duvdevan undercover unit was killed during an anti-terror operation in the West Bank. Lt.-Col. Eyal Weiss died last Friday when a wall collapsed on him as he was interrogating a senior leader of the Islamic Jihad terrorist group.

During the operation in Saida, near the West Bank city of Tulkarm, Israel troops killed one Islamic Jihad leader and arrested five suspected terrorists from Islamic Jihad and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement.

### Soldier killed at checkpoint

An Israeli soldier was killed in a Palestinian attack at an army roadblock in the West Bank.

The attack occurred last Friday night, when two Palestinian gunmen approached the Surda checkpoint undetected. One of the gunmen shot Staff Sgt. Lee Nahman Akonis, 20, at close range with a pistol. The second Palestinian attacked another soldier and took his weapon. A third soldier stationed at the checkpoint fired at the fleeing attackers but missed.

### Rockets fired at Israeli targets

Palestinians fired Kassam rockets at Israeli targets inside Israel and the Gaza Strip. A rocket fired at an Israeli army base in the northern Gaza Strip on Saturday night caused no injuries but damaged a building. Earlier in the day, a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed inside Israel.

### Rabin daughter denies reports

The daughter of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin denied reports that she asked to be appointed Israel's ambassador to Washington.

Reports had claimed that Dalia Rabin-Pelossof had asked Foreign Minister Shimon Peres for the appointment.

came with a price. The nearly naked Abayudaya could have education and clothing — if they accepted Christianity.

As their countrymen opted for modern conveniences, the dwindling Abayudaya could be recognized by their traditional Ugandan clothing, such as animal hides and "back cloth" made from the bark of a tree.

Sizomu's grandfather held together what was left of the community from 1936 to 1992.

During that period, the community experienced both a blessing and a curse: In 1962 Israel opened an embassy in Uganda, bringing clothing to the country's 1,000 remaining Jews and prayer books to their 36 village synagogues, but in 1971 Idi Amin came to power, banning Jewish practice and ordering Jews to convert to Christianity or Islam.

Amin took 32 synagogues for public use and shut the Israeli Embassy, which never reopened. The countries renewed diplomatic ties in 1994, but Uganda today is served by the Israeli ambassador in Kenya.

Although Sizomu was too young to suffer from Amin's repression, he remembers his father being tortured for building a sukkah, the fatal beatings of community members who collected remnants of a synagogue roof that had blown away in a storm and the caning of older brothers and sisters who refused to weed crops in the school gardens on Saturdays.

Amin was overthrown in 1979 — two days before Passover, Sizomu recalls.

"It was a real celebration of freedom. We had a practical Pesach," he said. "Whenever it's Pesach, we remember that wonderful time in 1979," when they felt like the Jews freed from Egyptian bondage.

Approximately 15 years later, an American organization called Kulanu — Hebrew for "all of us" — that aids lost and dispersed Jewish communities learned about Abayudaya, and has been working with the community since.

Kulanu established a scholarship fund to help the community's 150 children attend primary and secondary school, and coordinated the mass conversion.

At the community's request, Kulanu initially wanted Orthodox rabbis to perform the conversion.

They declined, saying Mbale didn't have enough of an Orthodox infrastructure — butchers, day schools and the like — to sustain an Orthodox lifestyle.

Now, after his experience at the Hebrew Union College, Sizomu plans to reshape his community's brand of Judaism.

The different kinds of Judaism he found in the United States are good for preserving the Jewish people from assimilation, he said.

He hopes to develop in Uganda a "Reconstruvodox" Judaism — a mixture of Orthodoxy and Reconstructionism — to allow women more influence, including the opportunity to become religious leaders.

Although he'll miss New York Jewish life — the Chanukah menorahs in government windows, the Shabbat wishes of neighbors and pedestrians on Friday night — Sizomu has much to celebrate at home.

In addition to the recent conversion, Sizomu's brother, Joab Jonadav "J.J." Keki, recently became the sub-county chairman over 32 villages and more than 25,000 people. That gives him control over police and military forces — and makes him the first Jew in Uganda to win political office.

Also on Tuesday, the day they completed the conversions, the visiting rabbis officiated at Sizomu's wedding.

Most of the community took part, their high-pitched instruments blending with background laughter as Sizomu talked to JTA by telephone.

"The rabbis were dancing up and down," he said, adding that they plan to wed five more couples before leaving Uganda.

The Conservative rabbis, who do not represent an official delegation of the Rabbinical Assembly or the Conservative movement, seem almost as excited as the Abayudaya themselves about taking part in the conversion.

"It's terrific, and I feel honored to be part of this," said one of the officiating rabbis, Howard Gorin of Tikvat Israel Congregation in Rockville, Md.

Gorin said he is "incredibly impressed that people in the middle of Third World poverty still maintain their Judaism to the extent that they do."

Maybe that's what Karen Primack, a Kulanu staffer, meant when she praised the "Ugandan miracle." □



## Daily News Bulletin

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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).  
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## JEWISH WORLD

### Claims Conference leader retires

The leader of the Claims Conference says he will not seek re-election.

Rabbi Israel Miller, who has served since 1982 as president of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, said his health was the main reason for not seeking a new term.

A new leader will be chosen in April. More than 350,000 Holocaust survivors have shared \$1.8 billion in compensation and restitution during Miller's tenure.

### Commandments display OK'd

The Alabama Senate voted unanimously to require every public school in the state to post the Ten Commandments. The Feb. 14 vote also called on the state's public schools to display the Magna Carta, Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights.

The measure still needs the approval of the House and the governor.

### Accused war criminal kept out

An accused Nazi collaborator was kept off a flight bound for the United States.

Joseph Kisielaitis was prevented from flying from Montreal to Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., last Friday after his name was found on a border control watch list during preflight screening. U.S. immigration officials questioned Kisielaitis, but did not take him into custody.

According to The Associated Press, Kisielaitis admitted to having been part of a Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian battalion that is believed responsible for the death of nearly 20,000 Jews during World War II.

### Russian court backs racist paper

A Russian court ruled in favor of the publisher of a newspaper known for its anti-Semitic articles.

The judge found that articles published in a newspaper called The Bell do not incite racial hatred, "but there are criticisms of political streams like Zionism, Masonry and Judaism."

As a result of the ruling, Stanislav Terentyev, a former KGB officer who edits the Volgograd-based newspaper, is slated to receive \$1,300 in damages from Anatoly Karman, the editor of a local newspaper that published an article calling Mr. Terentyev and his paper "neo-fascist." Karman reportedly plans to appeal to the European Court on Human Rights. The Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union called the decision a "clear travesty of justice."

### Israeli films win awards

Two Israeli films won awards at the prestigious Berlin film festival.

The documentary "August" by Uzi Benziman won the "Peace Film" prize. "Storm," by Guy Nativ, won the "Glass Bear" prize for a children's short.

## Vatican releasing some of archives, but Jews want all wartime documents

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — A Vatican decision to begin opening some of its secret, Holocaust-era archives falls short of Jewish demands that all its documentation from that period be made available to scholars.

Just the same, Jews involved in interreligious dialogue welcomed the move as a major step in the quest to clarify the wartime role of the Vatican and Pope Pius XII.

Pius, who held the papacy from 1939-1958, long has been accused of turning a blind eye to the Holocaust and allowing Jews to die because of his silence.

"We welcome the Holy See's announcement that it plans to release some unpublished World War II documents from its secret archives ahead of schedule," said Seymour Reich, chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations.

"This response to the longtime request of historians and other scholars is an important development."

Unfortunately, he added, the Vatican announcement, made last Friday, was unclear as to whether all relevant documents from the pontificates of Pius XII and his predecessor, Pius XI, would be released.

"We urge that all documents be released and made available to scholars," Reich said.

Britain's Lord Janner, chairman of the Holocaust Educational Trust, agreed.

"Any opening of post-1938 documents is valuable, partly because of what they may reveal, and partly because it sets a new precedent," he told JTA.

"However, I am concerned that there may be a selective cull of the archives, and although the fact that there is an agreement to open them is new, important, and welcome, I would urge that the Vatican allows the archives to be available to independent researchers."

In its statement last Friday, the Vatican said Pope John Paul II felt it important to open the archives on Pius XII's pontificate for "evident reasons" — that is, because it coincided with World War II "and the deportation of the Jews and the tragedy of the Shoah."

In effect, the statement provided a rough timetable for executing earlier Vatican pledges that the archives would be opened when technically feasible.

It said the pope, acting "to help bring an end to unjust and thankless speculation," had decided that selected archives leading up to 1939 would be opened to scholars next year.

The first documents to be released will deal with relations between the Vatican and Germany from 1922-1939.

This was the period when the future Pius XII served as the Vatican's representative in Germany and the Vatican secretary of state.

It said documents relating to Vatican-German relations during Pius XII's papacy will be made available starting in about three years time.

A new film by Greek-born French director Constantin Costa-Gavras is sharply critical of Vatican inaction during the Holocaust.

Called "Amen," the film is based largely on "The Deputy," a 1963 play by German author Rolf Hochhuth.

The Vatican has consistently defended Pius XII, saying he did not speak out for fear of prompting reprisals.

They say he also worked behind the scene to save Jews. For his part, John Paul has been steadfast in his defense of Pius.

Scholars and Jewish groups long have called for the Vatican's secret wartime archives to be opened to clarify the matter, particularly because a process to beatify Pius XII is under way.

David Rosen, the American Jewish Committee's international director for interreligious affairs, said the decision to release some documents is "an enlightened step."

He added, however, that the move "advances things, but does not resolve" the question. □

## New call for Israeli withdrawal comes amid slew of terror attacks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After nearly 17 months of Palestinian violence, more Israelis are beginning to support a unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The support comes as prospects for a diplomatic solution to the conflict remain slim, and as the Palestinian resolve to carry out attacks remains strong, despite stepped-up military and diplomatic pressure on the Palestinian Authority.

"There is no military solution to the conflict," was the refrain heard in newspaper columns and from political figures following a week filled with rocket attacks and terrorist killings.

During the past few days, such attacks included:

- A Palestinian ambush in the Gaza Strip on Monday in which three Israelis were killed and four injured. According to Israeli television, Palestinians opened fire on a convoy of cars on a road leading to the Gush Katif settlement bloc. The attackers fired on the cars from close range and may have thrown grenades at them as well. They then set off a bomb when soldiers arrived at the scene.

- Also on Monday, a Palestinian killed an Israeli policeman and himself when he detonated a car bomb. The attack took place when police stopped the Palestinian at a roadblock near Jerusalem.

- On Saturday night, a suicide bomber killed two teen-agers and wounded 27 people in an attack in a shopping mall in the West Bank settlement of Karnei Shomron. The explosion took place in a pizzeria as people went out at the end of the Sabbath. The attack killed Keren Shatzki, 14, and Nehemia Amar, 17, both from Karnei Shomron. The terrorist, a resident of Kalkilya, belonged to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

- On Feb. 14, three Israeli soldiers were killed when a powerful mine blew up beneath their tank in Gaza. The victims were identified as Staff Sgt. Moshe Peled, 20, from Rehovot; Sgt. Asher Zaguri, 21, from Shlomi; and Staff Sgt. Ron Lavi, 20, from Katzrin.

The latest group to add its voice to the unilateral withdrawal call is the Council for Peace and Security, a forum of reserve Israeli army generals and former senior security officials.

Following four months of intensive internal discussions, the council plans to mount a public campaign for a unilateral withdrawal from all of the Gaza Strip and most of the West Bank, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Monday.

About 300 people belonging to the 1,000-member forum took part in the discussions.

According to the paper, various arguments against separation were considered.

These included concerns that a unilateral withdrawal would remove the Palestinian incentive to negotiate with Israel or would be seen as a "retreat" similar to Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, and that the council should not be addressing the matter since a withdrawal implies the dismantlement of settlements.

However, as debate continued, about 80 percent of the council members voiced support for a unilateral withdrawal.

The council also called for the immediate creation of a Palestinian state, assuming it would force the Palestinian Authority to change its behavior.

The council's president, reserve Maj. Gen. Danny Rothschild, told Ha'aretz that he began the discussions "without a formulated opinion."

"What convinced me is that in contacts I have with the

Palestinians through back channels, I have learned from them that the street has taken over the entire moderate camp, and the moderate positions they take behind closed doors change the minute there's fear that they will be exposed to the threatening street."

Rothschild said the determining factor in his decision to support the plan was the campaign recently started by reserve soldiers against serving in the territories.

He said a withdrawal also makes sense from a strategic perspective.

"Especially because we are not politicians but people looking at the situation from the security perspective of how to use force, it is clear that the same two jeeps and a tank, which today accompany a settler who refuses to travel on a bypass road, would do much more good if deployed along the seam line," he said.

Details of the plan appear in a pamphlet entitled "Say Shalom to the Palestinians." The title plays on the multiple meanings of the Hebrew word "shalom" — hello, goodbye and peace.

The plan's points include:

- The dismantling of 40-50 West Bank settlements, in which about 15 percent of the settler population live;

- A full withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, except for a narrow zone along the international border with Egypt;

- Israel would remain — at least for now — in the Jordan Valley and the Etzion settlement bloc, as well as in Hebron and nearby Kiryat Arba, all in the West Bank.

The plan does not address Jerusalem, except for noting that the withdrawal of troops from other locations would allow for greater mobilization around the city.

Opponents of the plan included reserve Maj. Gen. Shlomo Gazit, a member of the council's board.

During the discussions, Gazit supported boundary readjustments, but maintained that as many issues as possible should be determined in negotiations with the Palestinians, the paper said.

Gazit's view is shared by other organizations, which have called for separation but are concerned it will undermine the diplomatic effort.

One lobby is the "peace coalition," which includes Peace Now and members of the Meretz Party.

At a rally held Saturday in Tel Aviv, thousands of Israelis demonstrated beneath the slogan, "Get Out of the Territories." Speakers appealed for continued efforts to renew the negotiations.

In the meantime, Ha'aretz reported that the Palestinians are aware of the discord in Israeli society and are seeking ways to capitalize on the fissures and increase pressure on the Israeli government. □

## Torah ark dedicated to victim

MOSCOW (JTA) — The father of one of the victims of last year's Siberian Airlines plane crash dedicated a Torah ark in his daughter's memory.

The Jewish Agency for Israel helped Izhak Kamarae fly from Israel to Sochi, Russia, to dedicate the ark in honor of his daughter, Adi.

She was among more than 50 Israelis, many of them immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who died in October 2001 when a missile from a Ukrainian military exercise brought down the plane. Adi Kamarae was traveling to visit her mother, who worked as a Jewish Agency emissary in Novosibirsk, when she was killed. □