



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Republican presidential hopeful Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) was targeted by anti-Semitic hate mail. Some of the mail against the moderate Republican threatened physical violence. [Page 3]

■ Israelis were caught off guard by the latest effort to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Public opinion appeared divided, although most were clear that the important issue is a recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the capital. [Page 1]

■ The Israeli Cabinet approved the confiscation of some 140 acres of land in eastern Jerusalem, but decided not to approve any similar measures in the future. Meanwhile, the U.N. Security Council began debate on the issue. [Page 2]

■ An longtime employee of the German Tourist Board in New York was fired from her job after her ties to the Holocaust denial movement were exposed. Elke Berg apparently helped her husband with the translation of an article for a Holocaust denial publication. [Page 4]

■ President Clinton attended a private reception with members of the Kiev Jewish community after paying tribute to the tens of thousands of Jews who were killed by the Nazis at Babi Yar. The chief rabbi of Ukraine said the community was grateful for Clinton's special attention to its historic suffering. [Page 3]

■ The Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, is scheduled to travel to Washington this week, prompting speculation that he may meet with his Syrian counterpart while in the American capital. Talks between the Israeli and Syrian military chiefs of staff were suspended in December.

■ The Islamic Jihad fundamentalist movement announced that it opposes any agreement with the Palestinian Authority aimed at curtailing the group's terror attacks against Israelis. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority said police would begin confiscating unlicensed weapons. The announcement came after the deadline for registering weapons expired.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Embassy issue surprises a divided Israeli public

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, May 14 (JTA) — The news that Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) and other key American officials are trying to relocate the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem has come as a surprise to many Israelis.

Still reeling from the political firestorm unleashed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's plan to expropriate Arab-owned land in eastern Jerusalem, many Israelis do not know what to make of the embassy issue.

If the editorials and op-ed pages of the daily newspapers are a reliable yardstick, the population is largely divided on the subject.

In an opinion piece that appeared in the Israeli daily Ma'ariv last week, commentator Ben-Dror Yemini wrote, "Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, with or without foreign embassies."

While calling the relocation "eminently desirable" from the standpoint of national honor, Yemini asked whether the transfer is "in line with the national interest, when the [Israeli-Palestinian] negotiations are going through such a delicate stage."

### Israelis seem perplexed by the whole affair

In contrast, Schmuël Shnitzer, in a complementary article in Ma'ariv, welcomed the relocation wholeheartedly, viewing it as tacit recognition of Israel's sovereignty over a unified Jerusalem.

"In the entire world, there is no other country which agrees to foreign embassies being situated outside its capital," he said. "Senator Dole is a courageous man and a true friend of ours. Let us not respond to the initiative as a nation of frightened cowards."

The mass-circulation Yediot Achronot included an opinion poll on the embassy in its weekend edition.

Asked whether Israel should encourage the United States to transfer its embassy to Jerusalem, 58 percent of those polled expressed approval. But a significant minority — 35 percent — did not. The remaining 7 percent of the 502 people surveyed voiced no opinion.

At the eye of the storm is an empty field, no larger than a couple of city blocks.

Located in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Talpiot, just west of the Green Line that marks Israel's pre-1967 border, the plot of land in question is already being prepared to serve as the location for the new American Embassy.

With the United States having already secured a building permit from the Jerusalem municipality in 1991, there is nothing to impede construction — except politics.

Although bulldozers have dug a huge crater, no construction has actually begun at the site.

The congressional legislation introduced last week — in the Senate by Dole and in the House by Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) — would force the State Department to begin construction on the embassy before the end of 1996.

The U.S. ambassador would move in no later than May 31, 1999, according to the legislation, which has received wide backing from Jewish groups.

Because the ultimate decision on whether to move the American embassy is out of their control, most ordinary Israelis seem perplexed by the entire affair.

Judging from the remarks of people enjoying a day out in the center of town, most Jews here do not seem to care where the embassy is located.

"Do I care where the embassy is?" said Maurice Sarfati, in response to a reporter's question. "Not much. I'm used to the situation and in fact, I think we have enough trouble without embassies being here."

"Heads of state bring traffic jams and closed streets. Who needs it?" he added.

Sarfati, a 47-year-old tax investigator, said that from a political standpoint, "the situation in Jerusalem is complicated enough."

"Everyone knows that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel," he said.

"We don't need to prove it." This opinion was shared by Lior Gelfand, a conference organizer from Herzliya.

"Tel Aviv is the business capital of Israel, so I think the embassy should be left there.

"Some friends of mine were just saying how odd it is to hear that the embassy may be relocated, since the existing embassy is undergoing a lot of renovation," said Gelfand.

Although Gelfand favors leaving the embassy where it is, he does not believe that Israel can compromise on eastern Jerusalem, which the Palestinians claim as the capital of an eventual state of their own.

"Personally, there is no way that Israel can give Jerusalem to the Palestinians. As far as I'm concerned, Jerusalem is not a subject open for discussion.

"I'm an Israeli, a sabra, and I'm willing to be flexible on Gaza and the other so-called occupied territories. Even the Golan, if we can assure peace. But Jerusalem is not part of the equation," said Gelfand.

One young mother, who asked that her name not be used, said moving the embassy is not the sole issue.

Referring to the fact that visas, passports and birth certificates issued by the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem bear the word "Jerusalem," not "Israel," she said, "I don't give a good god Henry where the embassy is located. I don't mind going to East Jerusalem," where the U.S. Consulate is located.

"What I want is a guarantee that the next time my children, who were born in West Jerusalem, need a new passport, their place of birth will say 'Jerusalem, Israel,' " she said.

But Daniel Moshe, a 34-year-old electrician, said moving the embassy would benefit Israel greatly.

"If the embassy comes to Jerusalem," he said, "the world will know that the Americans care about Jerusalem, and that they support our claim to an undivided city.

"This country has been around 47 years," he said. "Haven't we waited long enough?" □

## Ignoring international furor, Cabinet approves land decision

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 14 (JTA) — International opposition to Israeli confiscation of Arab-owned land in eastern Jerusalem has not deterred the Jewish state from moving forward with its plans.

At its weekly meeting Sunday, the Israeli Cabinet approved the confiscation of some 140 acres of land in eastern Jerusalem, some of which is Arab-owned, on which the government wants to build additional housing and a police station.

But the Cabinet decision was far from unanimous. Four ministers from the dovish Meretz bloc voted against the confiscations, and four Labor Party ministers abstained.

Despite its go-ahead to proceed with the confiscations, the Cabinet agreed not to approve any similar measures in the future.

In a statement read after the meeting, the Cabinet said it "does not intend to carry out additional expropriations of land for housing in Jerusalem."

The Cabinet's decision to confiscate the land was condemned by the Palestinian Authority, which convened a special meeting to discuss the matter Sunday.

Palestinian officials accused Israel of trying to change facts on the ground in Jerusalem, whose final status is to be determined in negotiations beginning in 1996, according to the Israeli-Palestine Liberation Organization accord.

"There is a serious and continuing attempt to

swallow Jerusalem land piece by piece, and this threatens the whole peace process," said Nabil Sha'ath, the Palestinian Authority official in charge of planning.

Sha'ath said Arab states would halt the normalization process with Israel unless it respects Palestinian rights in the city.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, speaking on the eve of another round of Israeli-Palestinian talks in Cairo, predicted Sunday that those talks would be overshadowed by the Israeli government's decision to go ahead with the land expropriations.

The outcry persisted in the international arena as well.

At a session of the U.N. Security Council held last Friday, more than a dozen states condemned Israel's actions during an open debate on the issue.

## U.S. vows to block Security Council resolution

All the council members, with the exception of the American representative, called for some sort of action against Israel.

The United States vowed to block a Security Council resolution condemning Israel that was circulated last Friday and that was scheduled to be discussed further Monday. The United States has maintained that any U.N. action on the matter would only hinder the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Earlier this month, a number of Western countries, including the United States, Great Britain and France, criticized Israel's plans.

Meanwhile, three leading Israeli authors, demonstrating outside the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem during the Cabinet meeting Sunday, called on the government to reverse the expropriation order.

"The step that the government is about to take today is precisely contrary to peace," one of the authors, David Grossman, told Israel Radio.

He said the confiscations would only serve to "eternalize the state of war" between Israel and the Palestinians.

The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem criticized the land confiscations as a violation of Palestinian rights and international law.

The group said in a report that the Israeli government has restricted Palestinian building, and that 88 percent of homes constructed in Jerusalem since 1967 were in Jewish neighborhoods.

Israeli officials have defended the confiscations as necessary to accommodate the city's natural expansion.

Foreign Minister Peres said last week that about 60 percent of the land to be confiscated is owned by Jews and that 400 of the new apartments planned to be built on the confiscated land would be for Palestinians.

Over the weekend, Peres went further. He proposed building a new Arab neighborhood between the two Jewish areas of Pisgat Ze'ev and French Hill.

The idea was quickly shot down by Jerusalem's mayor, Ehud Olmert, who said only municipal officials could determine such matters.

In another development, the government last week announced that it had dropped plans to expropriate land from the Cremisan Monastery outside Jerusalem to build a road linking the West Bank and Jerusalem.

The move was apparently aimed at averting a conflict with the Vatican.

Israeli Radio reported that the Vatican had summoned Israel's ambassador to the Holy See, Shmuel Hadas, over reports of the land expropriation.

A statement from Religious Affairs Minister Shimon Shetreet said other land would be expropriated for the road, but he did not specify who owned the land. □

## Sen. Specter targeted by anti-Semitic hate mail

By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, May 14 (JTA) — Hail mail sent to Republican presidential hopeful Arlen Specter has warned the Pennsylvania senator that he would pay in "blood of Jews, every man, woman and child" if he continues his bid to "take over" America.

In addition to about a dozen hate letters, Specter has received two physical threats, his campaign office revealed last week.

Specter, a moderate Republican, is the first Jew to make a serious run for the White House in decades.

Specter's campaign office has released copies of several of the letters, some of which are riddled with obscenities, others which espouse anti-Semitic rhetoric.

But officials refused to discuss the nature of the physical threats.

"It's real nasty, negative, personal hate mail," campaign spokesman Charles Robbins said.

Specter has received "unpleasant" letters in previous campaigns, but they are more prevalent in this campaign because it is national, Robbins said, adding that his office does not respond to such letters.

Most of the letters released focused heavily on Specter's pro-choice stance on abortion.

One meandering letter that was released was glaringly anti-Semitic.

A nine-page diatribe against Israel and Jews from M. Winfield of San Francisco named about 30 prominent Jews on a list of things the writer was "so sick of."

"We are entering a period of unprecedented anti-Zionist, anti-Jewish public sentiment that no amount of labeling, threats, rhetoric, etc. will allay," the handwritten letter read.

Winfield singled out film director Steven Spielberg; World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman and his family; and Martin Indyk, the U.S. ambassador to Israel.

Mr. and Mrs. W.D. Ferguson of Applegate, Ore., called the senator a baby killer and said, "It's time pro-life, Christian America takes over." They signed it: "Filled with revulsion."

A postcard from Richard Wagener of Dubuque, Iowa, depicted an aborted fetus and quoted an article on Specter's campaign trip to the area. It was addressed to "Adolph Specter."

Jupiter, Fla., resident Ray "Shali" Beesch asked Specter to "please drop dead."

One unsigned, obscenity-ridden letter suggested that Specter choose "that other Russian Jew Allen (sic) Dershowitz" as his running mate and lambasted the senator's campaign announcement.

Robbins said the letters had not prompted any extra security precautions, though the physical threats were reported to the "proper authorities."

"Clearly, attempts and attacks on the president and presidential candidates are not unheard of," he said.

"We're just moving along, business as usual," Robbins said, adding that the campaign would continue to report additional threats if they are received. □

## Clinton visits Ukrainian Jews after tribute to Babi Yar victims

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK, May 14 (JTA) — During a trip to Ukraine last week, President Clinton met privately with members of the Kiev Jewish community after paying tribute to the tens of thousands of Jews killed by the Nazis at Babi Yar.

The chief rabbi of Ukraine, Ya'acov Bleich, described the reception as an important opportunity for the president and the community to exchange ideas, according to Nate Geller, director of community services and cultural affairs for the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

Bleich also said that amid all the ceremonies marking the Allied defeat of the Nazis, it meant a great deal to the community that Clinton took the time to recognize the Jewish suffering at Babi Yar, said Geller, who spoke with Bleich by telephone after the reception last Friday.

More than 150,000 people, the majority of them Jewish, were shot at Babi Yar beginning in September 1941, when an estimated 34,000 Jews from Kiev were herded by the Nazis to the edge of the ravine at Babi Yar and were executed by machine guns. Tens of thousands of Jews and non-Jews were killed at the site in subsequent months.

The Nazis, in an effort to conceal the atrocity from the approaching Red Army in 1943, forced prisoners to dig up and burn the corpses. Most of the prisoners were themselves later killed to prevent them from recounting what happened there.

In his remarks at the Babi Yar site, Clinton said, "Here on the edge of this wooded ravine, we bear witness eternally to the consequences of evil."

Clinton traveled to Ukraine after visiting Moscow last week.

He met with President Leonid Kuchma to discuss strengthening U.S.-Ukrainian relations.

Joining Clinton and his wife, Hillary, at the ceremonies were Bleich and more than 150 members of the Kiev Jewish community.

Clinton wore a kippah during the Babi Yar ceremony; the first lady tossed a bouquet of flowers into the ravine to honor those massacred at the site.

During the Soviet era, a monument was erected at Babi Yar, but it referred only to "the people of Kiev" who were executed, with no mention of the Jewish victims.

There are now two monuments at the site. The one from the Soviet era was augmented with a plaque in Hebrew bearing witness to the Jewish victims. And in 1991, about a mile from the first, Jewish organizations erected a 10-foot-high menorah.

Last week, during the 50th anniversary commemorations of the Nazis' defeat, visitors to Babi Yar carpeted the monuments with flowers. Officials from the Israeli government placed three large wreaths at the foot of the menorah.

Before World War II, one of every three Kiev residents was Jewish.

Now there are an estimated 95,000 Jews living in the city of 3 million. □

## Kiryat Shmona protests government

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 14 (JTA) — Residents of the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona went on strike to protest what they called the government's failure to respond to the needs of the community in the wake of repeated Katyusha rocket attacks.

The rockets have been fired from southern Lebanon by the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah.

Kiryat Shmona Mayor Prosper Azran called the strike last week. Schools and businesses were closed during the event.

The latest attack came about 10 days ago, when a Katyusha rocket landed between two apartment buildings, causing property damage as well as light injuries to four people. □

## Belarus assures Jewish heads: Anti-Semitism is unacceptable

By Alexandra J. Wall

NEW YORK, May 14 (JTA) — The government of Belarus has assured visiting Jewish leaders that the country will not tolerate anti-Semitism.

In a series of historic meetings, President Alexander Lukashenko and Prime Minister Mikhail Chigir also said that previously Jewish-owned properties would be returned to the Jewish community.

If a specific site cannot be returned, an alternative site will be given in exchange, they said.

The Jewish delegation consisted of leaders from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

The visit to Belarus was the first stop of a mission that included visits with government and Jewish leaders in St. Petersburg and Moscow. In Moscow, the group was scheduled to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev on Monday.

In Belarus last week, the group met with Leonid Levin, the head of the Belarussian Jewish community, and the Israeli and American ambassadors to Belarus, Elie Valk and Kenneth Yalovitz.

Jewish leaders said they were pleased with the talks in Belarus and felt that much was accomplished, Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, said in a telephone interview from St. Petersburg last week.

Hoenlein called the discussions a "great accomplishment."

"We made a tremendous impact," he said, adding that the Jews in Belarus "are hungry for contact with the Jewish communities of Israel and the United States."

About 100,000 Jews now live in Belarus.

During their meeting, the Jewish delegation urged the president to adopt legislation to end all ethnic hatred. Lukashenko responded that he would do so through legislation, Hoenlein said.

The prime minister told the delegation that his government would look for a site for a Jewish day school, which now shares facilities with a public school.

The president expressed his support for the Middle East peace process and pledged that Belarus would remain a non-nuclear state.

The delegation attended a Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration in the city of Mogilev, and a Holocaust memorial ceremony in Minsk.

In St. Petersburg, Hoenlein reported that the Jewish community was still reeling from last week's theft of five Torahs from the St. Petersburg Synagogue.

Hoenlein said the whereabouts of the Torahs was still unknown and the Jewish community of St. Petersburg was feeling "more outrage than fear." □

## German in U.S. dismissed due to denial of Holocaust

By Alexandra J. Wall

NEW YORK, May 14 (JTA) — An employee of the German Tourist Board with ties to the Holocaust-denial movement was fired from her job last week, soon after her views were exposed.

Elke Berg worked for 18 years as director of special promotions for the tourist board, a body that officially represents the nation of Germany in the United States.

Berg apparently helped her husband, Friedrich Berg, with the translation of an article, "Typhus and the

Jews," for a Holocaust-denial publication, the Journal for Historical Review.

The article was published in the winter 1988-1989 edition of the journal, which denies that 6 million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust. The journal is published by the Institute of Historical Review of Torrance, Calif.

Mark Weitzman of the Simon Wiesenthal Center discovered Berg's connection to the denial movement last week and wrote a letter May 10 to the German consul general of New York.

"Since Holocaust denial is a crime in Germany, it is astounding that a representative of an official German body can hold such a position," wrote Weitzman, director of the center's Task Force Against Hate.

One day later, Hans Heinrich von Stackelberg, acting consul general of New York, wrote to Weitzman that Berg was being dismissed, effective immediately.

"It is totally unacceptable for the German Consulate General, that government-subsidized agencies employ people with revisionist views," the consul general wrote to Weitzman.

He noted that Berg's translations, which had been written under her maiden name, Kniekamp, "would most likely be punishable under German criminal law."

Berg has reportedly claimed that her translations for the article were of a technical nature only.

Berg reputedly had been using her maiden name to avoid detection.

Friedrich Berg's activities have been tracked for years by the Wiesenthal Center, according to Weitzman, who called him "a prime source for Holocaust denial."

In the article "Typhus and the Jews," Friedrich Berg wrote:

"In my article about the German delousing chambers in the spring 1985 issue of this journal, I included a brief discussion of the large, well-designed gas chambers which were used to fumigate entire railroad trains, one or more railroad cars at a time, with Zyklon-B.

"Those chambers would have been ideal for the mass extermination of people if the Germans had ever intended to commit mass extermination of Jews or anyone else."

The article reaches the conclusion that "the Holocaust story is absurd," Weitzman said.

Weitzman said he was pleased with the German government's immediate attention to the matter.

"I am puzzled that she could work there 18 years without them knowing, but their response was very prompt," he said, adding, "It was the morally right thing to do." □

## Auschwitz museum lends personal items to Yad Vashem

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 14 (JTA) — More than 50 personal items belonging to Auschwitz victims have been lent to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.

The shipment, which arrived recently in Israel, was unveiled last week in the presence of Polish Foreign Minister Sladislaw Bartoszewski, himself a survivor of Auschwitz. He now serves as chairman of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum's international advisory council.

Items include a canister of Zyklon-B, which was used in the gas chambers; toothbrushes; umbrella frames; and shoes and striped uniforms worn by prisoners.

Bartoszewski was among the first gentiles to be named a Righteous Among the Nations for his efforts to save Jews during World War II. □