

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ Israel and the Palestinians appeared to be near a deal on an Israeli redeployment in the West Bank town of Hebron. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat may meet this week to finalize the details of a revised accord on Hebron.

■ Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat briefed Jordan's King Hussein in Amman on the Israeli-Palestinian talks. Hussein later telephoned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to offer his assistance in resolving the dispute over Hebron.

■ Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said he would meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, possibly in the Jewish state, once the Hebron redeployment takes place. Mubarak was speaking at a joint news conference in Cairo after meeting with Israeli President Ezer Weizman.

■ Vice President Al Gore condemned Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan as "un-American" for promoting anti-Semitism and division among "racial and ethnic groups." Farrakhan, who is scheduled to hold a World Day of Atonement rally Wednesday in New York, reiterated his invitation to meet with Jewish leaders.

■ Israel continued to ease the closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with some 4,000 Palestinians from Gaza going to jobs in Israel and an additional 1,400 entering the Erez industrial zone. Meanwhile, Israeli tank carriers reportedly were preparing to withdraw tanks stationed outside the West Bank town of Kalkilya after last month's violent riots.

■ Twenty-five Lebanese face the death penalty on charges of collaborating with Israel, according to news reports. The 25, now on trial in military court in Lebanon, are accused of acts that include supplying the Jewish state with intelligence on anti-Israel groups and planning attacks on Syrian forces in Lebanon.

■ The Israeli government survived a second no-confidence motion, this one submitted in the wake of last month's violent clashes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****Tourism officials fear violence will decrease visitors to Israel**

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The clashes in late September between Israelis and Palestinians that left 76 dead from both sides and hundreds more wounded are threatening Israel's tourism industry.

Although tourism professionals say it is too early to predict the extent of the damage, they acknowledge that the numbers of visitors are down and that new reservations are few and far between.

"Of course, we are concerned," says Ministry of Tourism spokeswoman Orly Doron, adding that if the political tensions continue, "we will have a very bad situation; we can smell it."

"It has been a disappointing year, and this just makes matters that much worse."

According to everyone from tour guides and travel agents to hoteliers and tour-bus operators, 1996 has not lived up to expectations of increased tourism because of Jerusalem 3000 observances.

"I've seen a severe drop in the tourist industry this year," says David Eisenstadt, a veteran Jerusalem-based tour guide.

"The problems started with the [Hamas] terrorist attacks in February and March, because that's the time most people were deciding on where to go on their summer vacation."

"I didn't really feel the effects until August," he adds, "but a lot of guides were complaining back in June. Business is down about 50 percent, and since this last round of violence, it's dropped even further."

Bernie Alpert, the head of Archaeological Seminars, a Jerusalem-based company that serves tens of thousands of tourists each year, agrees that business is suffering. "From what's been broadcast on TV recently, you would think that Israel is a war zone, but that's not the case," says Alpert. "Unfortunately, the tourism industry here suffers every time there are problems in the Middle East, and they don't even have to be in Israel."

"American Jews are always the first to cancel, but I'm worried that the Christians in Europe and the States might follow suit."

Alpert estimates that his company's trade has dropped about 10 percent this summer, far less than what he had anticipated.

"Given current events, we had expected a 40 percent drop, and if we hadn't sought out other markets, we would have been in trouble," he says.

As for the clashes in late September, "we do expect some losses in the near future, especially from private tours, where we've had cancellations. We've already lost a lot of our Israeli clientele because Tel Avivians are afraid to come to Jerusalem."

**'We had very high expectations'**

According to the latest statistics, which cover the period from January through August, overall tourism is down 2 percent to 3 percent from the same period last year.

"This may not seem like much," says Doron, "but you have to remember that we had very high expectations, especially after the 29 percent increase we saw in January, followed by a 27 percent increase in February."

"We expected a 25 percent increase across the board, and everyone planned accordingly. Then came the suicide bombings, Operation Grapes of Wrath (Israel's incursion in April into Lebanon). Even the American action in Iraq had its effect, and now this."

Before this year's violence, Doron says, the industry had sought to capitalize on Israel's 1994 peace treaty with Jordan and on its improved ties at the time with the Palestinians and several Arab countries.

"We added more hotel rooms, tour agencies expanded, people expanded their offices, hired more people," says Doron. "Tourism here is a \$3.3 billion business, employing about 200,000 workers, so any decrease affects the entire economy."

The Ministry of Tourism recently convened a special meeting with hoteliers, restaurateurs, representatives from travel agencies and the tour guides association to try to calm fears and to devise a strategy.

In response to the situation — government officials refuse to use the

word "crisis" — the ministry is planning an aggressive campaign aimed at convincing tour operators in the United States and Europe that Israel continues to be a safe vacation destination.

Without the backing of the tour operators, 1997 could make 1996 look rosy in comparison.

"Although reservations for the year are down just 3 percent," says Avi Rosenthal, director general of the Israel Hotel Association, "we are very concerned about the future."

"In the U.S. and Europe, our main markets, people plan their vacations several months ahead. There is a good chance that what happens now will affect New Year's and spill over into Easter and Passover, even next summer.

"That being said, if the situation doesn't get any worse, I think tourists will come back," Rosenthal says.

Even if things do improve quickly, the country's 1,500 active tour guides say it will be too little too late.

In a hastily convened meeting Monday, the Israel Tour Guide's Association called on the government to award the guides — whose on-again, off-again work schedule often makes them ineligible for standard unemployment benefits — some \$3 million in emergency assistance.

"In our industry, business is half of what it should be. One colleague told me he's had almost no work for three months," says Shmuel Bar-El, chairman of the guides association. "You can't feed a family like that."

"I know it sounds cliched, but tourism and peace really do go hand in hand," says Doron, the ministry spokeswoman. "If the peace talks go well, we can expect good results very quickly. If that happens, I have a good feeling about the end of the year.

"If not, we're in big trouble." □

### **Voided contract with U.S. firm may end Israeli-Qatari gas deal**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The future of a multi-billion-dollar natural gas supply deal between Israel and Qatar has been thrown into doubt after Israel withdrew a letter giving an American firm exclusive negotiating rights to the deal.

In mid-September, the director general of the Israeli Infrastructure Ministry, Giora Ram, sent a letter to Enron stating that the company no longer had exclusive rights to conclude a deal with Qatar for the supply to Israel of some 2 million tons of natural gas annually.

Enron's exclusive negotiating rights were granted in a letter signed by then-Energy Minister Gonen Segev at the October 1995 Middle East economic conference in Amman.

The exclusivity was granted for 180 days, which passed without any agreement being signed for delivering the gas to Israel.

The deal would have involved shipping the gas in liquid form aboard tankers from Qatar to Israel, where it would be reconverted to gas form at a plant that was to be built for the purpose at a cost of some \$300 million.

Israel was thought to have canceled the deal in order to pursue cheaper sources of gas in Egypt or Russia.

According to news reports last week, Qatar expressed dismay over the Israeli move.

But Israel's Infrastructure Ministry said it was not aware of any official protest. The ministry also said Enron could continue to negotiate with Israel to reach a deal.

The reports said the development could be a further blow to Israel's fledgling ties with Qatar.

Earlier last week, after the latest wave of violence in Israel, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheik Hamad bin Jassim

al-Thani said his country was delaying the opening of a trade office in Tel Aviv to protest what it termed Israel's hard-line policies.

The foreign minister also reportedly canceled a scheduled meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy. □

### **Reservists issue letter protesting premier's policies**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A group of 33 reserve soldiers and officers from elite Israel Defense Force combat units has blamed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policies for waning motivation to serve.

The letter, published Sunday in Israeli newspapers, said Netanyahu's policies were destroying "the hope to peace" and were dragging the country into an unjustified war.

The signatories warned that the "fighting spirit has been torn from our hearts, and without it we do not see how we will be able to participate and function in the next war, may it never come."

David Bar Illan, director of communications at the Prime Minister's Office, said the fact that the letter was published in newspapers first was a sign that it was politically motivated.

But some members of the government had a sharper reaction. Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan of the Tsomet Party said the letter seriously hurt Israel's deterrence capability.

Deputy Education Minister Moshe Peled of Tsomet said the letter's signatories were not worthy of their ranks and should be demoted. □

### **B'Tselem faults Israeli police in clashes at Temple Mount**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli human rights group has claimed that Israeli police used excessive force to disperse Muslim worshipers during clashes at the Temple Mount in late September.

At a news conference here last week, B'Tselem said Israeli police opened fire with live ammunition and fired rubber bullets at close range — contravening standing orders — to quell the disturbances.

Three Palestinians were killed and hundreds injured in the Sept. 27 clash, which erupted when Palestinian youths began throwing stones after Friday prayers that some 10,000 people attended on the Temple Mount.

Israeli police responded after stones were thrown into the Western Wall plaza, which is located below the Temple Mount. B'Tselem, which based its claims on testimony from witnesses and on an autopsy performed on one of the victims, said the police also fired into the mosques and prevented ambulances from entering to evacuate the wounded.

Without going into specifics, Israeli police officials questioned B'Tselem's conclusions. But the officials did confirm that one Palestinian demonstrator had died from police fire.

Meanwhile, the human rights group announced plans to open an office in the West Bank town of Hebron.

B'Tselem said the office would monitor the treatment of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers and settlers.

The office, to be located in the heart of the often-volatile town, will be run by an Arab fieldworker from Jerusalem. B'Tselem, Hebrew for "in the image," is a reference to the biblical statement that all people are created in the image of God. □

## St. Petersburg Jews honor 1941 Nazi massacre victims

By Rachel Katz

PUSHKIN, Russia (JTA) — A solemn ceremony was held here this week to mark the 55th anniversary of the mass murder of 600 Jews by Nazi soldiers in this small town, which is now considered to be the northernmost reach of the Holocaust.

With no relatives living here to recall the victims, members of the Jewish community of nearby St. Petersburg attended Sunday's gathering to pay their respects.

"You can't live your whole life crying," said writer Maria Rolnekaite, a survivor of the ghetto in Vilna, Lithuania, where some 100,000 Jews perished during the war. "But you must always remember."

Clustered around a bronze memorial erected five years ago in memory of the victims, the 100 attendees of the ceremony listened as schoolchildren sang Yiddish songs.

One elderly man recited El Ma'alei Rachamim, a prayer for the dead, while everyone stood in silence.

When the ceremony was over, they lined up to lay tiny stones on the monument, which depicts a crouching figure holding his weary head in his hands.

An inscription, from the 79th Psalm, on a nearby stone reads: "Their blood flowed like water ... and no one was there to bury them."

The memorial site is symbolic: No one really knows where the small community of Pushkin perished in early October 1941, when Nazi forces occupied the city on their march to Leningrad, the Soviet-era name for St. Petersburg, some 10 miles to the north.

Best known for the majestic Catherine Palace, which once served as the summer residence of the Russian czars, Pushkin carried its dark secret until 1986, when a small group of researchers began to piece together the events surrounding the murder of the Jews.

"We still know very little," said Alex Frenkel, deputy chairman of the St. Petersburg Jewish Association. "We haven't found any survivors."

### Had to register for resettlement

Nazi forces entered Pushkin on Sept. 17, 1941, barely three months after the German army first pushed into the Soviet Union. Within two weeks, Jews were told that they had to register for resettlement.

By early October, they were rounded up and shot.

There are several versions of the incident, said Frenkel, who has interviewed a number of local residents about the event.

One version claims that the Jews were imprisoned in the Catherine Palace basement for several days without food and water.

Some maintain that the Jews were shot in the shadow of the nearby Alexander Palace.

Others say it took place in a park on the edge of the town.

As the front line during the Nazis' 900-day siege of Leningrad, said Frenkel, the area around Pushkin is too full of mass graves to be able to determine which is which.

"But everyone remembers the column of Jews marching through the town center," Frenkel added.

Yevgenia, a Pushkin resident who was not at Sunday's ceremony, later recounted how her Jewish grandmother and mother fled the town immediately after the German invasion.

"Granny said that none of the [Jewish] friends she had before the war survived," she said. "She tried to find some after the war."

In the absence of relatives to recall the perished,

many of the older Jews attending the commemoration had tragic memories of their own, either of the brutal siege of Leningrad, during which 1 million Russians died, or of their lives as concentration camp inmates.

"I felt it was only right to come," said Asya Lifshitz, 76, herself a survivor of the siege. Her husband's family perished in Ukraine about the same time the Nazis destroyed the Pushkin community.

For survivors during the Soviet era, the Holocaust became a taboo subject because government officials emphasized the sufferings of all nationalities during the war, refusing to single out particular groups for special attention.

Only with the opening of Soviet society in the late 1980s could Jews begin to relate more directly to their experiences during the war. "All of this became open just recently," Lifshitz said.

Holdover sentiments from Soviet times made it difficult to receive local permission to put up the monument, Frenkel said.

But after heated debate, town authorities adopted a resolution in 1990 calling for a monument devoted to all the victims of the war.

At the end of the declaration, permission was granted for a separate memorial for the Jewish community.

One year later, the Jewish community dedicated the monument, a reproduction of the statue "Formula for Sorrow" by the well-known Soviet dissident Vadim Sidur.

The town itself never went forward with its plans for a general memorial.

"I don't think we should divide people up," said 17-year-old Anna Peshnaya, standing with a group of friends from a St. Petersburg Jewish youth club. "But each people must remember their own." □

## Austria's rightist party stuns Europeans with success at polls

NEW YORK (JTA) — The strong showing of the far-right Freedom Party in Austria's elections this week for the European Parliament was greeted ominously throughout Europe, with some warning that the party's leader could become another Hitler.

Jorg Haider's Freedom Party won 28 percent of the vote in Sunday's elections.

The results placed the Freedom Party in third place, behind the People's Party, the junior coalition party that scored 29.6 of the vote, and the governing Social Democratic Party, which gained 29.1 percent.

But the Freedom Party, which has explicitly called for a ban on immigrants and opposes Austria's presence in the European Union, nonetheless received its biggest electoral success in Sunday's vote.

The nationalist party's total was some 6 percentage points higher than what it scored in December's general elections.

Haider's Freedom Party, the strongest far-right party in Western Europe, already holds five of Austria's 21 seats in the European Union's Parliament. It emerged as the strongest party in the Austrian provinces of Salzburg and Carinthia as a result of Sunday's vote.

European newspapers reacted with concern about Austria's move to the right and warned of a rising wave of nationalism across the continent. The Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera wrote about the election under the headline "Racist Winds in Austria."

A German newspaper, Saechsische Zeitung, compared Haider's rising popularity to that of another Austrian native. "It is true that Haider is no Hitler, but it is also true that he has the capacity to become one," the newspaper said. □

**Caller: Hungarian group carried out two bombings**

*By Agnes Bohm*

BUDAPEST (JTA) — A group called the Hungarian Will of Gods has taken responsibility for two bombings in Budapest near Europe's largest synagogue, according to the Hungarian daily *Mai Nap*.

A telephone caller said last week that the group planted the bomb that exploded Oct. 9 outside the Dohany Street Synagogue as well as the bomb that blew up Aug. 25 in the heart of Budapest's former Jewish ghetto, the daily reported.

Police reported that no one was injured in last week's blast and that the synagogue was not damaged.

The bomb was hidden in a garbage can across the street from the synagogue, police said.

Immediately after the blast, police said they had no immediate plans to bolster security outside Jewish buildings in Budapest.

The 137-year-old synagogue was reopened Sept. 5 after the completion of major restoration work.

It had been closed since a bomb hit the building during World War II. □

**Leaders of varying faiths gather for dialogue in Italy**

*By Ruth E. Gruber*

ROME (JTA) — Some 400 international representatives of a dozen world faiths convened in Rome for three days of discussion and prayer aimed at promoting world peace through interreligious dialogue.

"It was an extraordinary meeting," Leon Klenicki, director of interfaith affairs at the Anti-Defamation League, said in an interview.

"It allowed face-to-face encounters with the leadership of many religions."

Titled "Peace is the Name of God," the Oct. 7-10 encounter was sponsored by the Community of San Egidio, a Roman Catholic organization dedicated to charity and aid work and the promotion of interfaith dialogue.

Held to mark the 10th anniversary of a precedent-setting interfaith march organized by Pope John Paul II in the central Italian town of Assisi in October 1986, last week's meeting included Roman Catholic, Coptic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians, as well as Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Shintoists, Zoroastrians, Hindus and Sikhs.

Participants included senior clergy as well as scholars and lay activists.

Also taking part in the Rome conference were political figures, including Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, European Union Commission President Jacques Santer and Pierre Sane, secretary general of Amnesty International.

Among the Jewish representatives were Talmudic scholar Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, former French Chief Rabbi Rene Samuel Sirat and Rabbi David Rosen, the ADL's director of interreligious affairs in Israel.

Delegates met in roundtable discussion groups on issue-focused themes touching on the ways that religion interacts with and influences contemporary life.

Topics included women's role in religion, the role of religion in the mass media, the importance of prayer, the impact of religious fundamentalism, the role of religious organizations in aid work and charity, and religion and the environment.

The meeting culminated with an emotional outdoor ceremony during which participants lit candles, prayed for world peace and issued an urgent appeal that religion not be used as an excuse for hatred.

"We address all who kill or make war in God's name," the appeal said.

"We remind them that peace is the name of God. It is absurd to speak of 'religious war.' Let not hatred nor conflict find support in religion." □

**Nottingham clinic seeks eggs from Jewish women**

*By Helen Jacobus*

*London Jewish Chronicle*

LONDON (JTA) — A Nottingham fertility clinic has become the first in Britain to appeal publicly to Jewish women to donate their eggs.

The recent move has been welcomed by infertile Jewish women, but it has highlighted the dispute among leading Orthodox rabbis as to whether egg donation contravenes Jewish law.

The national campaign was launched by the fertility clinic at Queen's Medical Centre. The clinic's director, Dr. Simon Fishel, is Jewish. The clinic is sending information — it has also offered to send speakers — to Jewish groups.

The campaign, prompted by the increasing number of Jewish women who want Jewish egg donors, encourages potential Jewish donors to contact fertility centers in their area.

"On religious grounds, it is unique," Fishel said in an interview.

Dr. Daniel Sinclair, a rabbi who also is an adviser to Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on Jewish medical ethics, said donor anonymity was an obstacle to the practice being acceptable under Jewish law, or halachah.

Debbie Weinberg, who is on a donor waiting list, said, "Many Jewish women would prefer a Jewish egg donor. It's vital that Jewish women respond to this appeal." □

**Rabbi ordered not to conduct ceremony for Jewish lesbians**

*By Charlotte Seligman*

*London Jewish Chronicle*

LONDON (JTA) — Two Jewish lesbians have called off their "commitment ceremony" after the rabbi due to conduct it was ordered not to officiate.

The two women, who wish to remain anonymous, said in a statement this week that they felt that they had no other option.

"We never sought or expected any publicity," they wrote. "The last 10 days have been a period of great pain and stress for us."

Rabbi Elizabeth Sarah, program director of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, was instructed by the Reform leadership not to conduct the ceremony after a storm of protest from members of the movement.

She announced her intention to officiate at the "commitment ceremony" of her two friends during a Kol Nidre address at Radlett and Bushey Reform Synagogue.

A number of shocked congregants walked out in protest.

Rabbi Tony Bayfield, chief executive of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, said this week that "neither Rabbi Sarah nor any other Reform rabbi will be officiating at any form of same-sex 'commitment ceremonies,' private or public, until the movement adopts a policy which says otherwise."

Bayfield also said a working group existed to examine the "commitment ceremonies."

"We have to find ways of responding to the pastoral needs of all our communities," Bayfield said. □