



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israel vowed to begin work on a construction site in southeastern Jerusalem as Jordan's King Hussein paid condolence visits to the families of the seven Israeli schoolgirls shot dead by a Jordanian soldier. The building of the Har Homa neighborhood also comes despite Israeli security officials' warnings of a violent Palestinian reaction. [Page 1]**

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would allow Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat to take off and land from a new Palestinian airport in Gaza, even before all details of its operations were completed. Despite the Israeli gesture, it was unclear whether final-status talks would resume. [Page 1]**

■ **The U.S. representative to the United Nations told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations that he would work to make the body more "Israel-friendly." Bill Richardson said one of his first acts in his new post was to cast "proudly" his veto of a Security Council resolution critical of an Israeli housing project in eastern Jerusalem, which he said placed the United States "in total isolation."**

■ **Banks in France still have the assets of some French Jews who died in the Holocaust, the French newspaper *Le Monde* reported. The paper said several thousand accounts worth at least \$175 million today were unearthed in 1951, but no action was taken and all traces of the accounts have since been lost.**

■ **Hundreds of Estonian Jews will benefit from a government decision to grant permanent-resident status to the nation's Russian speaking minority. Most of the 3,000-member Jewish community does not have Estonian citizenship. [Page 3]**

■ **New Jersey lawmakers introduced a measure in the state Legislature that would require the state government to sever all financial and commercial transactions with the Swiss government and Swiss businesses. The legislation is aimed at pressing the Swiss on compensating Holocaust survivors.**

Hussein, Netanyahu heal rifts; Israel ready to build at Har Homa

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A conciliatory visit by Jordan's King Hussein and warnings of Palestinian violence by Israeli security forces failed to deter Israeli plans to break ground this week for a new Jewish housing project in southeastern Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that Israel would stand firm in its decision to build at Har Homa, despite Arab and international pressure to back down.

"There is no change," Netanyahu said at a joint news conference with Hussein at the King David Hotel after their meeting. "Our friends can agree or not. We understand the concerns of the Palestinians and others, but we made a decision."

The Israeli Cabinet voted unanimously last Friday to start building this week at Har Homa.

The decision was made despite assessments from security officials who said the construction could prompt Palestinian violence, including new terror attacks against Israel.

Netanyahu had pressed for the construction to counter recent threats from members of his coalition that they would vote no-confidence in his government if the project did not begin.

Meanwhile, the opposition Labor Party said it would press ahead with no-confidence motions against the government's decision to build at Har Homa.

Before holding their talks Sunday, Netanyahu and Hussein spent the day paying condolence visits to the families of the seven Israeli schoolgirls killed by a Jordanian soldier last week.

Hussein's trip was widely viewed as an effort to patch up relations between the two countries days after the king had sent an angry letter to the Israeli leader warning of the dangers of building at Har Homa. The shooting occurred a day after the letter's publication.

Hussein referred to his letter during the news conference, saying that it was "never meant for publication." He added that it was "leaked mysteriously" and that it contained "many distortions."

"It was a personal letter," Hussein added. "No offense was intended."

Netanyahu echoed the king's conciliatory statements, saying, "I believe that our disagreements have to be ironed out in direct conversations and human contacts."

While Netanyahu did not budge on the Har Homa plans, he acknowledged that Israel was willing to be more flexible with the Palestinians in other areas. Both he and King Hussein confirmed that they had spoken by telephone with Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat.

"We spoke to Chairman Arafat," Netanyahu said, adding, "We cannot let our disagreements which are yet unresolved destroy the process."

Hussein pledges full investigation

At the news conference, Hussein and Netanyahu repeatedly emphasized their commitment to peace despite last week's shooting of the schoolgirls at the Naharayim enclave, which is under Jordanian control and leased to Israel under the two countries' 1994 peace treaty.

Hussein said the two discussed a special project that would be set up at the enclave in memory of the murdered children.

He also pledged a full investigation of the incident.

Countering reports that Israeli-Palestinian contacts had broken down over Har Homa, Netanyahu said that one of the joint committees negotiating unresolved issues from the Hebron agreement, which was signed in January, had met Sunday night.

In a clear gesture to Arafat, he said a joint committee discussing security at a new Palestinian airport in southern Gaza had agreed that Israel would allow Arafat to take off and land from the airport, even before all details of its operations were completed. Netanyahu also said he expected that other Israeli-Palestinian committees would continue discussions Monday.

Despite his assurances, it remained unclear whether the impasse in the

Israeli-Palestinian relations was overcome. Palestinian officials have claimed that the construction would alter the status quo of Jerusalem, whose future is to be determined in the final-status talks.

Those discussions were scheduled to resume Monday, but Palestinian leaders said they might not attend.

Israel maintains that it has the right to build anywhere in Jerusalem and that the construction is not prohibited by the Israeli-Palestinian accords.

Arafat convened foreign diplomats over the weekend in Gaza to discuss what he described as unilateral steps taken by Israel. In addition to Har Homa, Palestinians were outraged over Israel's decision to withdraw from a smaller area of the West Bank this month than they deemed adequate.

For the first of three further redeployments called for in the Hebron accord, Israel had announced that it would pull out of 9 percent of rural West Bank areas, 2 percent of which are now under sole Israeli control. But the Palestinian Authority angrily rejected the plan, prompting a delay in its implementation.

In a four-hour meeting with envoys from the United States, Russia, the European Union, Norway, Japan, Jordan and Egypt, Arafat asked his guests to "save the peace process."

"We no longer have a partner" in Israel because of Netanyahu's recent actions, Arafat said.

The envoys pledged to convey Arafat's protests to their governments and to make them clear to Israel.

Edward Abington, the U.S. consul general to Jerusalem, said the diplomats agreed that "each government would conduct intensive efforts to lower the tension and restore confidence." □

American, German perceptions debated at AJCommittee forum

By Ruth E. Gruber

BERLIN (JTA) — A recent conference sponsored by the American Jewish Committee in Berlin became a forum for a wide-ranging discussion on relations among Jews, Germans and Americans half a century after the Holocaust.

Jewish and non-Jewish participants, including prominent diplomats, scholars, politicians and journalists, debated topics ranging from lingering mutual stereotypes to Germany's reluctance to pay compensation to Holocaust victims in Eastern Europe.

"It was a stimulating exchange that touched on a lot of points," said Edward Serotta, an American photographer and author whose book on Jewish-German relations, "Jews, Germany and Memory" came out last year.

The conference was held as part of the run-up to the AJCommittee opening an office in Berlin later this year, probably in July. It was co-sponsored by the Central Council of Jews in Germany and by U.S. and German research organizations.

"Jewish interests are wrapped up with the shrinking world," said Eugene DuBow, who will be the director of the new AJCommittee office. "The continuing development of democracy in Germany is a Jewish interest."

Central to the conference was a discussion of how Germans and Americans view each other, and how Jews are perceived. "What's interesting about the conference is the interaction between German and American cultural memories," said Gary Smith, director of the Einstein Forum, a research institute in Potsdam, near Berlin. "Decision-makers are not always experts. Cultural memory and clichés are often involved."

Said Josef Joffe, editorial page editor of Munich's *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*: "Both sides look at each other

through lenses that are fogged by history and mild paranoia."

Some American Jews look at Germany convinced that "there's got to be another Germany" behind the current democratic face of the country, he said.

On the other hand, he said, the German image of American Jews was one of "power tinged with fear and paranoia."

The complexities within Germany were underscored by recent news events. On March 1, two days before the conference, police in Munich formed a human barricade between about 5,000 neo-Nazis and thousands more left-wing activists and local citizens.

The neo-Nazis had come from across Germany to protest an exhibition showing that ordinary German soldiers had taken part in Nazi atrocities. Right-wing extremists had clashed with supporters of the exhibit when it opened earlier in the week in Munich.

The exhibition had prompted debate but little open controversy when it was shown in other German cities during the past two years. It was sponsored by billionaire Jan Philipp Reemstra, whose Hamburg-based social Research Institute was a co-sponsor of the AJCommittee conference.

During the conference, Jewish as well as some German participants criticized the German government for not providing compensation payments to some 20,000 individual Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe. Such payments are made to survivors who live in Germany. Germany has provided aid to some welfare organizations in Eastern Europe, but not individuals.

"It is absurd to hear that ailing, 80-year-old survivors in the Baltic countries will get a pension if they come to Germany but won't get anything if they stay home," said a member of the opposition Greens Party, which has been active in trying to obtain pensions for Eastern European survivors.

Rabbi Andrew Baker, the AJCommittee's director of European affairs, said that compared with "the sincerity of some in dealing with the German past, you have to raise the anomaly of how East European Holocaust victims are being treated."

"Compensation leaves out East European survivors," he said. "This doesn't negate what Germany does do, but it flies in the face of reality now. There is no urgency in addressing this. It's unfinished business that is hard to understand." □

Seismologists warn Israelis to prepare for major quake

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli researchers warned last week that the country could be in for "the big one" — a massive earthquake that could leave thousands dead and cause extensive property damage.

In an appearance before the Knesset Science and Technology Committee, seismologists said they were concerned by the relative quiet recently in seismic activity.

Avi Shapira, head of the seismology division at the Geophysics Institute, said Israel's geographic location, on the Syria-Africa rift, places it in danger of a powerful tremor. He said a tremor with an epicenter in the Jordan Valley could cause a high number of casualties and extensive damage in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem.

He added that Israeli civil defense authorities were not prepared to handle such a natural disaster.

An earthquake destroyed the ancient city of Bet Shean in that area in the eighth century.

During the past two years, Israel and neighboring countries have been shaken by periodic tremors. □

Farrakhan pitch to GOP results in Jewish political name-calling

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Louis Farrakhan's latest pitch for mainstream political acceptance has resulted in partisan bickering between two Jewish politicians.

Attending an annual gathering of Republican executives and investors in Florida earlier this month, the Nation of Islam leader tried to cozy up to GOP leaders — a move that drew the ire of Jewish Democrats.

Conservative commentator Robert Novak, who moderated the conference, wrote in his nationally syndicated column that Farrakhan "seemed a man attempting to transcend his past."

Farrakhan "is knocking on the door of the Republican Party," Novak said, suggesting that someone in the GOP consider sitting down and talking to him.

Farrakhan's overtures were roundly rebuffed by some leading Republicans, among them William Bennett, co-director of Empower America, and Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition.

"How dumb can we be?" Bennett said, calling Farrakhan "a bigot, a racist and an anti-Semite."

Reed, for his part, warned against standing with "purveyors of hate, demagogues of division, loathers of liberty."

Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), one of Farrakhan's most outspoken critics in Congress, said, "Novak or anyone else who thinks Farrakhan has something positive to offer the Republican Party is completely nuts."

The National Jewish Democratic Council also weighed in on the issue, urging top GOP leaders to distance themselves from Farrakhan.

Ira Forman, executive director of the NJDC, wrote in a letter to King, "Certainly, Democrats and Republicans, Jews and non-Jews, must reject Farrakhan, and that is what we are calling upon GOP leaders to do." He added, "We call upon you, as one of your party's leaders, to repudiate any alliance between the GOP and Louis Farrakhan."

Letter touches off exchange

Forman said he was writing "not as a partisan political activist, but as an American and as a Jew."

The letter touched off an acerbic, and somewhat peculiar, exchange between the NJDC and King's office.

Jon Hymes, King's chief of staff, responded to Forman's letter "as an American and as a Jew." Accusing the NJDC of trying to use the issue for its own "partisan political purposes," Hymes wrote that he deemed Forman's comments "as unworthy of the congressman's personal attention."

He called the NJDC's record "thoroughly shameful," charging that the group had remained silent on several key issues involving Farrakhan, including reports last year of possible cooperation between the Democratic National Committee and the Nation of Islam on voter registration. "Very simply, your silence and consistent failure to try to exert influence within the Democratic Party has aided Farrakhan and helped him to grow stronger in recent years," Hymes wrote.

"This is an indelible stain on your organization and your own involvement in public policy matters.

"As an American and as a Jew," he continued, "I feel certain that knowledge of your sorry record would make virtually all members of the NJDC ashamed of their association with the group and its leadership."

The unusual exchange did not stop there.

Further exacerbating tensions, Hymes faxed his letter to reporters while sending Forman's copy through the mail. Forman shot back with another letter.

"I am writing to alert you to the fact that some lunatic has written a letter to me on Congressman King's stationery and signed the letter in your name," the NJDC leader wrote, with tongue planted firmly in cheek.

"This letter is full of ridiculous statements, sycophantic praise which would embarrass the most shameless public official, hysterical rantings and silly charges. Such a letter could only have been written by a naive, inexperienced, immature, emotionally unbalanced individual." He went on to say: "I wanted to alert you as soon as possible to this moron who is using your name and title to fire off asinine charges."

Hymes, after receiving the letter, said in an interview: "For him to take the time to hurl 13 childish insults at me, without taking the time to find any factual error in what I said, is really very sad because we take the issue very seriously here."

Responding to Hymes, Forman said in an interview: "The NJDC's record speaks for itself. We've condemned Farrakhan. We've worked within the Democratic Party to exclude Farrakhan from the political process and will continue to do so."

Behind the partisan squabbling, meanwhile, both Forman and Hymes emphasized that the real issue is about denying Farrakhan credibility within the American political system and making sure that leaders of both parties slam the door when bigots come knocking. On that matter, at least, they appeared to be on the same page. □

Jews in Estonia to benefit from eased residency criteria

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Hundreds of Estonian Jews stand to benefit from the government's decision last week to grant permanent-resident status to the nation's Russian-speaking minority.

Most members of the 3,000-member Russian-speaking Jewish community of Estonia do not have Estonian citizenship because they cannot pass the language test, according to Jewish officials in the capital of Tallinn.

And without Estonian citizenship, finding a job there is not easy. One Jewish official pointed out that it was difficult for non-Estonian speakers to get lower-level jobs, such as cleaning positions.

But now, Estonian officials say, some 130,000 "loyal foreigners" will have permanent-resident status instead of a five-year residence permit.

Having settled in Estonia after World War II, the majority of Estonian Jews had neither the need nor obligation to master the country's language during the period of Russian dominance.

But after Estonia asserted its full independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, many Jews received a non-citizen status and have found themselves with fewer employment opportunities than those available to ethnic Estonians. Jews are not the only group who found themselves given this non-citizen status, which affects about 28 percent of Estonia's 1.6 million population and primarily includes ethnic Russians.

The language provisions of Estonia's citizenship law have been sharply criticized by Moscow as discriminatory and have strained Russian-Estonian relations.

A couple of months ago, the Roundtable on Ethnic Minorities' Rights met to discuss the citizenship restrictions. The roundtable was set up by the president of Estonia four years ago to monitor human rights violations of the nation's minorities. A week after the human rights group met, the European Union agreed to subsidize Estonian-language lessons for minorities in order to smooth ethnic differences in the Baltic nation. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD
Former Soviet Jews revive
small German communities

By Alexandra J. Wall
Jewish Standard

POTSDAM, Germany (JTA) — Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Alexander Kogan, an orthopedist from Chernovitz, Ukraine, visited Berlin to buy some Western products for his family.

While there, he was approached by a man asking, "Are you Jewish?"

Unsure of the man's motives, Kogan answered yes.

"You can stay here," he said. This man, also a Ukrainian Jew, had settled in the reunified Germany. But there was a catch.

The man told Kogan to pay him \$3,250, the cost, he said, of the immigration process.

Kogan was skeptical, but continued the conversation. This was the first he had heard about Jews settling in Germany, and he sensed that the man was trying to swindle him.

He returned home and consulted the German Embassy in Ukraine. He learned that, as of 1990, Germany had indeed been inviting Jews from the former Soviet Union to immigrate. He also learned that there was no immigration fee.

Now Kogan lives with his family in Potsdam — just one of many cities in the former East Germany where Jews from the former Soviet Union are making their homes.

He told his story to a group of visiting Jewish journalists — and the city's mayor — over lunch in a redesigned room of the Cecilienhof Palace. This was the site of the Potsdam Conference, the historic meeting of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, President Harry Truman and Premier Josef Stalin at the end of World War II.

Since Germany opened its doors to Soviet Jewish immigration in 1990, Germany's Jewish population has doubled from 30,000 to 60,000.

Most of the Jews from the former Soviet Union have settled either in Frankfurt or Berlin.

Absorption in the bigger cities is somewhat easier, because the more established Jews help the newcomers. Their children are educated in Jewish schools, and they are full members of the Jewish community, without having to pay membership dues.

In a sense, Kogan is a pioneer

But some are settling in the smaller towns, like Potsdam, and most receive government assistance.

Perhaps because it is near the former Jewish cultural center of Berlin, the state of Brandenburg — of which Potsdam is a part — never had a large Jewish presence. There were about 430 Jews in Potsdam before the war; the community, however, was virtually wiped out.

In 1990, Brandenburg was the only state without a Jewish community. So Kogan and his family are, in a sense, pioneers.

Potsdam does have a Jewish cemetery, which, except for a few headstones, was left virtually untouched by the Nazis. It is one of the few Jewish cemeteries in Germany from the prewar period still in use.

The headstones reflect the German Jews' assimilationist tendencies.

Kogan pointed out how the oldest headstones were only in Hebrew, with the date of death inscribed in the Jewish calendar date. Those in the middle rows were in Hebrew and German, with both calendar dates, and those from just before the war were inscribed in German only, with no Jewish calendar date at all.

The town's synagogue was destroyed — not during Kristallnacht, but by the Allies' bombs.

Now Potsdam's Jews are 250 strong, all of them from the former Soviet Union.

As one of the first to settle here, Kogan, who is fluent in German, is working in his profession and is content with how he and his family have fared in their new homeland. He said it was harder for some of the other immigrants.

When asked why he would choose to bring his family to Germany, he said: "Why do people go anywhere? If you make your decision to leave, that is the first decision. Once that decision is made, the second is to where.

"The German government granted the Jewish community [permission] to rebuild. That's what influenced me."

Kogan said he had not wanted to settle in Israel, but had earlier applied to immigrate to the United States. He heard from the U.S. Embassy after his family was already in Potsdam.

Many ex-Soviet Jews who made Potsdam their first home have left after a few years, mostly for Berlin.

Potsdam's Jews now have access to a gathering place — they meet in a housing complex where many of them live.

Plans to build a synagogue are in the works. Several architects will soon draw up blueprints, to be decided upon by members of the Jewish community. The shul will be built on land donated by the city.

In the city of Halle, in the Saxony-Anhalt region, Eli Gampel is the Jewish community's sole German-born Jew.

"There are 249 from the former Soviet Union and me," said Gampel, who was born in Stuttgart and is married to a Soviet immigrant.

Before the war, Halle's Jewish population numbered in the low thousands. Jewish-owned factories were Halle's biggest employers. Its synagogue was destroyed on Kristallnacht, and its current synagogue, next to the old Jewish cemetery, was built for the new community in 1992. An average Friday night service draws about 120 people, Gampel said. The community has an Israeli rabbi.

Synagogue a necessity

The synagogue is cozy, with a women's section set off by a curtain.

The immigrants come knowing virtually nothing about Judaism, Gampel said. Because of that ignorance, he said, an Orthodox synagogue was a necessity, a teaching tool, and he hoped that they would "pick up at least 10 percent from that."

Over a kosher snack prepared by members of the community — Halle has a kosher butcher and restaurant — Gampel told some visitors about his decision to serve in the Israeli army. Rather than serve in the German army, as is required of all German men, Gampel would be declared exempt if he did army service elsewhere.

So he did, in Israel, and his service coincided with the war in Lebanon. But he did not stay in Israel, he said, because "there were too many Jews in one place."

Unlike Potsdam, Halle is a base for some neo-Nazi groups, Gampel said.

There have been incidents, he said, downplaying them, even as he told the group he was shot by a neo-Nazi two years ago. Since then, Halle's Jews have had police protection at their institutions and meetings.

"The mayor is a very good friend of ours," said Gampel. "But we know how to defend ourselves." Nevertheless, he continued, "let's say you should never close your eyes." □