

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Reform and Conservative Jewish leaders are expected to address the Knesset committee that is preparing the conversion bill for final action by the Parliament. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a delegation of Reform and Conservative rabbis that he is committed to resolving the controversy over the bill, according to participants at the meeting.

■ Israel rejected as "fundamentally flawed" a U.N. General Assembly resolution asking it to pay compensation for damages sustained by Israeli shelling of a U.N. compound in southern Lebanon last year. [Page 3]

■ Israel's High Court of Justice rejected petitions demanding that the prime minister and justice minister be indicted in connection with the ill-fated appointment of an attorney general. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi welcomed the ruling, saying it put the Bar-On affair behind them once and for all. [Page 3]

■ Israel accused Palestinian officials of organizing violent protests in Hebron. [Page 2]

■ The U.S. House of Representatives authorized \$100 million to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem as part of its adoption of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act. The measure also requires that U.S. government documents identify Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

■ The chairman of an independent international commission looking into the fate of Jewish assets from World War II will leave his part-time post with the Union Bank of Switzerland, which is one of the banks the commission will be examining. A commission official said Jean-Francois Bergier would relinquish his bank position in November.

■ The executive director of the American Jewish Committee held talks in Moscow with Russian government officials. Last year, David Harris was denied a visa by Russia to attend an AJCommittee co-sponsored conference in St. Petersburg.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Ukraine orphanages offer refuge for Jewish children**

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Two Jewish homes for children have opened in an attempt to confront a dire social situation in the former Soviet Union.

A new facility, which opened last week in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, is providing a home for 35 Jewish girls, aged 10 to 16, from Ukraine and Russia.

The orphanage, known as the Esther and William Benenson Home for Girls, was organized by Tzivos Hashem, an affiliate of the Lubavitch movement that works with children.

A corresponding home for boys, housed in a temporary facility since last fall, will move to a new location in Dnepropetrovsk after renovation work at the site is completed.

Each facility will house 50 children, who will stay until they are old enough to look after themselves.

Dnepropetrovsk, located in southeastern Ukraine, has a total population of 1.2 million and close to 100,000 Jews.

Rabbi Benjamin Brackman, director of Tzivos Hashem in the former Soviet Union, says the two homes are sorely needed.

"The need for a Jewish facility for these children has never been greater," he says. "Every day the situation gets worse. We must get them off the streets and out of the state-run homes."

He adds that the need for Jewish children's shelters is far greater than what the two orphanages can provide.

"Unfortunately, we could fill up two, three orphanages in Russia because of the type of circumstances that we're in."

Since the fall of communism six years ago, children in the former Soviet Union have suffered greatly as the region undergoes convulsive economic changes, experts say.

These changes have affected children because the standard of living has fallen significantly, says Tatyna Vorozhtsova of Russia's Federal Committee for Youth Affairs.

"Parents are now forced to pay more attention to earning a living and less to raising children," she says.

According to one expert with the Russian Parliament, there are now more than 4 million homeless children in Russia — more than after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and ensuing civil war devastated much of the country.

According to UNICEF estimates, more than 60 percent of Russian families with children under the age of 7 are living in poverty.

Food, particularly meat, is scarce, and poor nutrition has left both children and adults susceptible to disease.

Moreover, alcoholism and domestic abuse are on the rise, tearing apart many families.

'There are many serious cases'

Not all of the children in state orphanages have lost their parents. As a result of the region's dire economic and social climate, many children were abandoned to state care.

There are now some 81,000 children living in orphanages across the former Soviet Union.

Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzky, chief rabbi of Dnepropetrovsk, says that Jewish families are generally faring better than non-Jewish families in the former Soviet Union.

"But there are many serious cases we have to take care of," he adds.

The Jewish girls' home in Dnepropetrovsk is located in a converted mansion. The mansion's owner decided that his palatial home would attract anti-Semitic attention to himself and that it could be put to better use as a children's home.

The Jewish boys' home will be housed in the former synagogue of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneerson, father of the late Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Before World War II, Levi Yitzchok Schneerson served as Dnepropetrovsk's chief rabbi until he was removed from the post by the Communist

authorities and sent into exile. The Communist government subsequently confiscated the synagogue and converted it into a clothing factory.

The Ukrainian government recently returned the synagogue to the local community, and the building is now being renovated.

"The situation of these Jewish children in our orphanage reflects the increasingly tragic condition of children across the former Soviet Union," says Kaminetzky.

Jewish children are referred to the two homes in Dnepropetrovsk by Jewish community activists and Lubavitch emissaries throughout the former Soviet Union.

One mother brought her son to the orphanage to keep him out of his alcoholic father's reach.

Kaminetzky tells of a 12-year-old girl recently taken to the orphanage because her mother is a drug addict and could not care for her.

Jewish children currently in state-run homes are facing a threat to their very heritage.

Because the understaffed and underfunded state orphanages welcome any foreign visitors or potential donors, American and European missionaries are allowed to visit the orphanages, shower the children with toys and candy, and encourage them — especially the Jewish ones — to convert to Christianity.

Some state orphanages are under the patronage of the Russian Orthodox Church.

One Jewish girl was recently taken from a state-run orphanage in Dnepropetrovsk to the new Jewish home on the eve of her planned baptism.

The two Jewish homes in Dnepropetrovsk have a minimum-age requirement.

Says Kaminetzky, "Sadly, in the meantime, we cannot take children under the age of 10 because of the special care the younger children require."

Children from the two orphanages attend a nearby Jewish day school run by the Lubavitch movement.

"We want to give the children not only family warmth but also a good Jewish education," Kaminetzky says.

The Jewish community of Dnepropetrovsk now boasts the largest Jewish day school in Eastern Europe — it has more than 700 students — as well as a number of other religious and social institutions.

In addition to the day school, a yeshiva, a teachers' seminary, two kindergartens, soup kitchens and a youth club have been established during the past six years.

Despite this communal boom, Jews are emigrating from the area to Israel, United States and Germany in significant numbers because of economic and social instability and because of the anti-Semitism that has a long history in Ukraine.

Kaminetzky says that about 100 students from the Jewish day school have left Ukraine during the past year.

He hopes that most of the children who have found a home in the orphanages will go to Israel when they grow up. □

Israel: Palestinian officials organizing Hebron violence

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Violence erupted this week in the West Bank town of Hebron, where Israeli soldiers fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse stone-throwing Palestinian demonstrators.

Sunday's clashes, which came in the wake of similar confrontations a day earlier, underscored the ongoing impasse in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

The peace talks, along with most security coopera-

tion between the two sides, came to a halt after Israel broke ground in mid-March for Jewish housing at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem and after a Palestinian suicide bomber killed three Israelis at a Tel Aviv cafe.

Israel accused the Palestinian Authority of fueling the weekend violence, saying it was an attempt to gain political concessions from the Jewish state.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quoted Sunday as saying it was clear that the unrest was organized by Palestinian officials and was not spontaneous.

He added that violence against Israel would not lead to any concessions, and he called on the Palestinians to work issues out through dialogue.

The unrest came after the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution June 10 calling on President Clinton to reaffirm that Jerusalem must remain the undivided capital of Israel.

Israel welcomed the non-binding measure, but Palestinian officials said the move harmed U.S. credibility as a mediator in the region.

The Palestinians want the eastern portion of Jerusalem, which Israel captured in 1967, as the capital of a future independent state.

Palestinian sources said that more than a dozen demonstrators were wounded Sunday in the clashes near Hebron's Jewish Quarter.

An Israeli border guard was lightly injured in the clashes, according to Israel Radio.

The clashes first erupted Saturday in Hebron when hundreds of Palestinians threw stones and firebombs at Israeli troops. More than 30 Palestinians were reportedly hurt.

Palestinian police did not intervene to stop the protesters. One Palestinian official was quoted as saying that the police were busy monitoring high school exams.

In other violence, an Israeli woman was moderately wounded last Friday night in a shooting attack in the Jerusalem hills just inside the West Bank.

Israeli security forces arrested six Palestinians from the nearby village of Bidu in connection with the shooting.

Tensions were high June 12 in the Gaza Strip, where Israeli troops and Palestinians faced off.

The Palestinians blamed Israel for instigating the tensions, saying that residents of the Jewish settlement of Morag had built a perimeter fence on Palestinian land.

They also protested the installation of a memorial for an Israeli soldier killed by Palestinian fire during rioting last September.

The three days of rioting erupted after Israel opened a second entrance to an archaeological tunnel near the Temple Mount. □

Last kibbutz children's house closes

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — One of the last traditions of kibbutz living, the children's house, is now a thing of the past.

The era ended over the weekend, when the 80 children at Kibbutz Baram in the lower Galilee moved into their parents' homes.

Among Israel's kibbutzim, Baram was the last holdout to the principle of children's houses, where boys and girls of the same age group lived together, visiting their parents during the day.

After a stormy debate, the decision to do away with the children's houses was made more than a year ago.

But kibbutz members said time was needed to expand the parents' homes to make room for their children, adding that a delay was also necessary to enable residents to adapt to the change in lifestyle. □

High Court upholds decision not to indict prime minister*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Bar-On affair may finally be over.

Israel's High Court of Justice rejected Sunday an appeal to indict Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on charges of fraud and breach of trust.

The justices ruled 4-1 that prosecutors had made a "reasonable" decision when they decided in April that there was not enough evidence to indict Netanyahu in connection with the short-lived January appointment of Roni Bar-On as attorney general.

By a 5-0 vote, the court rejected petitions demanding that Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi also be indicted in connection with the affair.

Netanyahu welcomed the court rulings, saying they had once and for all brought an end to the affair that has dogged his government for months.

"We can move forward now, and focus on achieving peace and security and economic prosperity," he told reporters.

The one justice dissenting from Sunday's ruling, Dalia Dorner, wrote that the state attorney should have been ordered to show cause for the decision not to indict the prime minister.

A three-month police investigation was launched earlier this year after an Israel Television report alleged that Bar-On was appointed as part of a deal to provide a plea bargain to Shas Knesset member Aryeh Deri, who is on trial for corruption.

In turn, Deri allegedly promised his party's support for the Hebron agreement, which was coming up for Cabinet approval at the time, the television report said.

Police investigators had recommended that Netanyahu and Hanegbi — as well as senior aide Avidgor Lieberman and Shas Knesset member Aryeh Deri — be indicted in connection with the influence-peddling scandal.

But Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein and State Prosecutor Edna Arbel decided in April that there was insufficient evidence against Netanyahu and Hanegbi, and that only Deri should be indicted.

An investigation of Lieberman's role in the affair continues.

Last month, the high court heard petitions from opposition lawmakers who challenged the attorney general's decision.

The court said at the time that its ruling would be issued at a later date.

At the hearing last month, the five-justice panel of the high court rejected petitions requesting a state commission of inquiry into the Bar-On affair and asking that the police report on the investigation be published. □

Israel rejects U.N. request to pay compensation for Kana*By Cynthia Mann*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israel has rejected as "fundamentally flawed" a U.N. General Assembly resolution asking Israel to pay more than \$1.7 million in compensation for damages sustained by a U.N. compound in southern Lebanon.

Israel maintains it is "bound by no legal or moral obligation" to assume responsibility for the reimbursement.

Israeli shelling killed about 100 refugees at the Kana compound in what Israel has maintained was a tragic accident.

The raids occurred in April 1996, in retaliation for Hezbollah attacks against northern Israel from areas

adjacent to the compound. A U.N. inquiry last year found the Israeli shelling of the compound was unlikely to have been the result of miscalculations, but that such a scenario could not be ruled out.

The call for Israeli compensation was part of a broader resolution dealing with the financing of the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon, or UNIFIL.

The resolution was adopted last Friday by 127-2, with Israel and the United States casting the no votes. Only Russia abstained.

Meanwhile, Israel charged it was being singled out unfairly.

"The singling out of one country to bear the costs of damages to a U.N. peacekeeping force, attributable to a military incident, is utterly unprecedented," said David Peleg, acting Israeli U.N. ambassador, at the General Assembly.

The resolution was adopted at the recommendation of a U.N. administrative and budget committee which Peleg charged had exceeded its mandate to deal solely with non-political matters.

"It has never been charged to assign political blame or responsibility for expenditures to individual member states," he said.

Peleg further placed the blame for the incident on Hezbollah, for provoking the artillery response, and on Lebanon, for "collusion" with the terrorists.

"The responsibility for those events lies squarely on the shoulders of the terrorist elements, who are prepared to wage their fanatic war against Israel and the peace process to the last drop of Lebanese blood," he said.

"Such responsibility lies equally with the Lebanese governmental authorities who openly justify, encourage and support such acts." □

Israel agrees to divert part of U.S. foreign aid to Jordan*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has decided to give Jordan \$50 million from the more than \$3 billion in annual aid it receives from the United States, Israeli officials said this week.

After two months of negotiations, Israel informed American officials June 12 that it was willing to forego the \$50 million a year for the next five years.

The decision was taken as a goodwill gesture toward Jordan, and as an attempt to bolster the Jordanian regime prior to parliamentary elections scheduled for November, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

Israel receives \$1.8 billion in annual military aid from the United States and \$1.2 billion in economic aid.

It also receives other funding, such as for refugee resettlement, making the total more than \$3 billion annually.

Israel's decision marks the first time that the Jewish state has been willing to give up some of its U.S. aid for the benefit of an Arab country.

American officials, quoted by Ha'aretz, said the terms of the "gentlemen's agreement" called for Israel to return \$50 million to Washington this year and next.

The first payment is to be made before the American fiscal year ends Sept. 30.

For the three subsequent years, the \$50 million would either be returned or deducted from the \$1.2 billion in economic aid.

Israeli officials prefer that those funds be returned to the United States, rather than be deducted before payment, out of concern that it might set a negative precedent for those American officials who are calling for cuts in aid to Israel. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD
Orthodox program inspires
Jewish study across nation

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

PONYTELLE, Pa. (JTA) — The Shabbaton was intended to bring Orthodox and non-Orthodox people together to study Jewish sources, but the weekend did not quite work out that way.

Of about 100 adults participating in the Orthodox Union's recent Keshet Shabbat retreat, only three described themselves as non-Orthodox.

Participants nonetheless said they found it a unique experience, as devout Jews of varying philosophies came together for worship and study at a lakeside camp and retreat center in northeastern Pennsylvania.

The Shabbaton focused on the Pardes program, initiated by the O.U. in December 1995, as a way to bring together Jews to study issues relevant to their contemporary concerns.

Some 14,000 to 15,000 Jews across the country get together once a month to discuss topics presented by the Pardes materials.

They gather in congregations of every denomination — though more often in Orthodox than liberal synagogues — in people's homes, in university dorms, on army bases and even in prisons.

"It's about getting Jews to talk to each other," said Rabbi Yaacov Haber, the O.U.'s national director for Jewish education.

"It's about getting Jews to look at subjects that they never realized the Torah even deals with, and to understand that the Torah has something to say," Haber added.

Participants in the Pardes program receive a booklet each month.

There are 11 so far, examining topics such as "Spirituality," "Can Man Change?" and "Can We Change God's Plan?"

Each sets out a trio of hypothetical dilemmas related to the theme and asks participants for their response.

Then it presents several excerpts from Jewish commentators — the kabbalists of the Zohar, Chasidic rabbis, and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, who until his death in 1993 was centrist Orthodoxy's spiritual leader.

Haber, who writes the booklets, occasionally includes a quote from non-Jews, such as Mark Twain and former U.S. President John Adams.

But he has not to date included wisdom from any of Judaism's non-Orthodox theologians and philosophers, or from any Jewish women.

At the O.U. retreat, every speaker and prayer and discussion leader was male, which prompted complaints from a couple of the female participants.

Gratitude is overwhelming response

The absence of non-Orthodox and female perspectives from the Pardes materials has also sparked occasional complaints from participants in the O.U. program.

But the overwhelming response to the study program, both from those at the retreat and those who have sent notes to the O.U., has been gratitude.

During the "feedback" session, which wrapped up the retreat on Sunday morning, one man said, "I felt a great sense of accomplishment in terms of the spirituality here, and how it reached me.

"Any individual, no matter what their level, from shomer-everything to beginner in their quest, can derive benefit" from the Pardes program, he said.

Linda Storfer is assistant director of the Block and

Hexter Vacation Center, where the Shabbaton was held from May 30-June 1.

"I'm an active member of a Conservative synagogue, but here the labels weren't important," she said. "We get so hung up nowadays on who is Orthodox, who is Reform, but this reached everyone."

People came from as far away as Dallas, though most drove from the New York City metropolitan area or from Eastern Canada.

Haber plans to set up several regional Pardes retreats across the country.

The Pardes program has participants from the tiny western Alaska town of Bethel, where members of seven Jewish families get together to study the booklets, as well as the small Alpine town of Garmisch, in southern Germany, where six employees at a U.S. military base gather to discuss the issues.

"This is our way of discussing Judaism with our secular family and friends," said Lori Miller, of Northridge, Calif.

She uses the booklets as discussion tools over the dinner table when she has guests.

Haber, a father of 11 children, was hired by the O.U. after he set up successful outreach programs in Buffalo, N.Y., and Melbourne, Australia.

Re-connecting people to Judaism's gifts

The Pardes program is not about outreach in and of itself, Haber, 41, said in an interview. Instead, it is about re-connecting people to Judaism's gifts.

"If we have any agenda it's to return the neshama [soul] to Yiddishkeit," which is as much of a need for devout Jews as it is for any others, he said, speaking in the Orthodox patois that merges Hebrew, Yiddish and English.

"I don't know when it got lost but it's gotten caught up in people's intellect, in their dress, in how machmir [strict] we should be in the chumra [stringency]-of-the-week club.

"My dream picture is to see eight or 10 Jews of all kinds sitting in a room together discussing divrei Torah, no one with an agenda, no one trying to change the other's mind," he said.

"Does it happen? I have good reason to believe it happens all over now."

At the Pardes retreat Chasidic and "yeshivish" practices and approaches, representing the two streams of fervently Orthodox life, were brought together in a way that startled even some long-time supporters of the O.U., which represents about 900 centrist Orthodox synagogues in North America and Israel.

Two rabbis wore the lush satin coats called bekeshers and one donned a streimel, the round fur hat that Chasidim reserve for holy day wear.

Many women wore sheitels, the wigs that until a few years ago were donned only by the most stringently observant married Orthodox women.

On Sunday, a few of the men wore casual pants and brightly colored shirts, though most continued to wear the sober garb, with tzitzit hanging out from their waistbands, that has become the uniform of an increasing number of centrist Orthodox men.

But no matter how people dressed, or what mode of worship they ordinarily employed, everyone came together for hours of davening to the hypnotic tunes of the much-mourned rebbe of Orthodox spiritual renewal, the late Shlomo Carlebach.

And from the makeshift synagogue, which consisted of a portable ark placed at the front of a large recreation hall, the sound of 100 Jewish voices chanting the wordless tunes in elemental harmony floated across the quiet lake. □