

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ The Council of Jewish Federations joined a coalition of pro-immigrant groups at a Capitol Hill news conference to ask Congress to reinstate food stamps for tens of thousands of immigrants. Under last year's welfare reform law, all immigrants to the United States and refugees after their first five years in the country lose their eligibility for food stamps at the end of this week.

■ The Israeli government-appointed committee charged with finding a solution to the crisis over conversions met briefly and agreed to reconvene after its chairman, Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, returns from an official visit abroad. The committee had originally sought to conclude its deliberations by Aug. 15, but was unable to reach a consensus.

■ The Israeli army admitted that it conducted AIDS testing on Ethiopian draftees without their knowledge. The chief army medical officer said the special blood tests, also given to homosexuals, were for safety reasons.

■ Palestinians began enforcing a partial boycott of Israeli goods. [Page 3]

■ The Israel Women's Network petitioned the High Court of Justice to rescind a decision by the transportation minister to separate the sexes on buses that serve fervently Orthodox neighborhoods in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak. [Page 3]

■ U.S. Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) urged critics not to blame all Swiss people for the actions of some during and after World War II. Lantos, a Holocaust survivor, held a news conference in Zurich to help "begin the process of restoring Switzerland's image."

■ Israel and Russia signed an agreement broadening cooperation between their law enforcement agencies. The efforts will include work to combat organized crime and prevent terrorism.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is slated to visit Asia beginning Sunday. Netanyahu is expected to try to build economic ties during his trip.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****Israeli Arab leader stirs debate over Palestinian right of return**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It is the one issue dividing Israelis and Palestinians that appears irreconcilable.

The right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes in Israel they abandoned during the 1948 War of Independence and the 1967 Six-Day War is different from the other topics slated to be discussed in the final-status negotiations because it seems to offer little hope of compromise.

All the other final-status issues — including borders and the question of Palestinian statehood — are likely to be resolved.

Even the question of Jerusalem has its potential compromise: Members of the previous Labor government floated the idea of giving the Palestinians a capital in the Jerusalem suburb of Abu Dis — and the Palestinian leadership was, at the time, apparently considering the idea.

But the question of the Palestinian right of return is something else altogether.

So when a member of an Israeli Arab delegation visiting Syria last week raised the issue, red lights flashed across Israel.

"I swear to you in Allah's name that you will return to Palestine," Knesset member Abdel Wahab Darawshe told 20,000 cheering Palestinians at the Al-Yarmuk refugee camp outside Damascus. "If not you, then your children and grandchildren."

To make sure no one missed his point, he used the Arabic word for "return" — "awda" — three times.

Darawshe, who was a member of the Labor Party before he founded the Arab Democratic Party in 1988, is a seasoned politician: He knew the effect his comments would have on all Israeli Jews, regardless of their political persuasion.

Indeed, the reaction came swiftly.

Darawshe and the 41 other Israeli Arabs who visited Syria are "acting against the very existence of the Jewish state," said Likud Knesset member Reuven Rivlin, reflecting the fears of many Israelis.

Darawshe's comments were also criticized by doves like Meretz Party leader Yossi Sarid and Yossi Beilin of Labor.

Even some Israeli Arabs joined the chorus of criticism.

"Darawshe speaks in Damascus to please [Syrian President Hafez] Assad, when he is in Gaza he wants to please [Palestinian Authority leader Yasser] Arafat, and when in Tel Aviv he wants to please" Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said Lutfi Mash'ur, editor of the popular Arabic-language newspaper A-Sinara that is published in Nazareth.

Writer Salem Jubran took a similar stance, describing Darawshe's speech as "political prostitution."

**'Delegation touched a very sensitive Israeli nerve'**

Darawshe later sought to backtrack from his speech, explaining that his remarks actually referred to the right of Palestinians to move to an independent Palestinian state once it is established.

With some 350,000 Palestinians living in Syria and a total of some 3.3 million refugees elsewhere in the Middle East and other Arab countries, it comes as no surprise that Israeli Jews do not accept the Palestinian right of return.

For days after Darawshe made his speech, the Israeli media would not let go of the issue.

"The criticisms would not have been that sharp, had not members of the delegation touched a very sensitive Israeli nerve — the issue of return," columnist Gideon Levy wrote in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

"Whenever the Palestinians raise the issue, there is an Israeli sigh of relief: 'Why, here lies the ultimate proof that the conflict has no solution. There is no one to talk to. They want Jaffa.'"

Whether used as a rallying call, or as nostalgia, the right of return has repeatedly been raised by Palestinian politicians, artists and the average person on the street.

Arafat has referred to the issue in many of his speeches. Emil Habibi,

one of the most popular Palestinian writers, wrote about it years ago in his book "The Opssimist" — a combination of optimist and pessimist, which is the way he describes Israel's Arab population. Mohammad Darwish, who is one of the Palestinians' leading poets, has written love poems for the Palestine of his childhood.

"The Palestinians have never really given up on their right of return," said Israeli Arab Knesset member Azmi Beshara of the Communist Hadash Party. "They have the right to dream."

Journalist Jawdat Odeh, also a member of the delegation, got a chance to witness the emotions attached to that dream.

"You should have seen those people at the refugee camps," said Odeh, who drove more than 200 miles from Damascus to the town of Homs so he could visit with family members he had never met. "The entire camp came out to see me. They held on to me, they smelled me, as if they could smell the land through me. They asked me: 'Why didn't you bring with you some soil?'"

"Yes, they want to come back," Odeh added. "Most of them realize that it is not politically feasible to return to their homes, but they want to come back to the places they — or their parents — had left 50 years ago, at least for a visit."

Professor Yossi Ginat of Haifa University, a former Arab affairs adviser to Israel's premier, agrees with Odeh's assessment. According to Ginat, most Palestinian refugees have given up on their former homes and would prefer to stay where they are — although under better conditions — even if they were given the choice of returning.

Ginat based his conclusion on studies he has conducted in Palestinian refugee camps in the territories, as well as in Lebanon and Jordan. The refugees have become rooted: They are building two- and three-story homes in the refugee camps and their children are marrying members of the local population, according to Ginat.

"No father will leave his daughter and his grandchildren behind to go to Palestine," Ginat said in an interview. "Yes, the dream to come back exists, but the real dream is to turn the existing refugee camps into better homes."

Even the Palestine Liberation Organization has been purchasing land near the refugee camps in Lebanon, because, according to Ginat, PLO officials also realize that this is the only workable long-term solution.

"One should draw a line between ideology and reality," said Ginat. "It is difficult to change reality, therefore the Palestinians should change their ideology."

A potential resolution to the right-of-return question would be for Israel to offer compensation to the refugees for the assets they lost.

But will the Palestinians sell their dream for money? Past experience shows they would not: In 1971, the Knesset passed a special law offering Arab residents of eastern Jerusalem compensation for real estate they owned in western Jerusalem prior to the 1948 war.

Few Arabs accepted the offer at the time. But if, as Ginat suggested, the Palestinians alter their ideology, a future offer of compensation could elicit a far different response. □

### Legislators join Jewish officials in a solidarity mission to Israel

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A delegation of U.S. lawmakers and American Jewish leaders traveled to Israel this week to demonstrate their support for the victims of last month's terrorist attack at the Mahane Yehuda market.

During the two-day visit, which was organized by

the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, about a dozen legislators and Jewish leaders paid condolence calls to the bereaved families in Jerusalem and in the Arab village of Abu Ghosh.

The delegation also visited a local hospital where several of the bombing victims continue to receive treatment.

Accompanied by Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert and U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk, the delegates met with the market's still-traumatized shopkeepers.

Standing at the site of one of the two fatal bomb blasts, where a tarmac has replaced the destroyed roof, Indyk said the "shuk" holds a special place in the hearts of Israelis.

Speaking to a group of Arab and Jewish vendors and shoppers, he said, "When I wanted to give my children a real taste of Israel during their first visit here, I brought them to this place," Indyk said.

"Mahane Yehuda is the real Israel."

The American people, Indyk said, "are united in anguish and anger at this terrible event. We will fight for a secure and lasting peace for the people of Israel and the entire region, and we will win."

Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.) vowed to "revisit and strengthen anti-terrorism legislation" passed last year in Washington.

He said that the U.S. government must provide "more money, more personnel and other resources" in the fight against terrorism.

Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, took the hardest line, criticizing Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat for not cracking down on Palestinian militants in the territories.

"The question is, has Arafat truly committed himself to the path of non-violence? So far, I'm not convinced."

Arafat, Gilman said, "must undertake unequivocal action against terrorists. Without such a commitment there can be no peace process."

"Arafat is facing a fork in the road and he must make a choice." □

### Israeli police add bikes to arsenal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's border police have added mountain bikes to their arsenal for fighting infiltration from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The head of the southern command of the border police came up with the idea.

He said the bikes are maneuverable, can handle difficult terrain and are quiet.

The bikes will be added to the border police's regular jeep patrols.

Israel's boundary with the territories extends hundreds of miles and poses a problem for security forces.

This is particularly true when a closure of the territories is in effect. □

### Lithuanian fans say 'Jews Out'

VILNIUS, Lithuania (JTA) — Some 70 soccer fans chanted Nazi slogans during a recent game here between a local team and the Israeli squad Hapoel Beersheba.

The fans, including a group of skinheads, chanted in German "Juden Aus," or "Jews Out," and "Sieg Heil."

They also hung a big banner with the word "Hezbollah" on it.

Police and military officials intervened to stop the chants and have the sign taken down. □

## Israel faces crisis in Lebanon, decaying ties with Palestinians

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Appealing for calm in southern Lebanon, Israeli leaders have sent a message to Syria via American intermediaries calling on Damascus to control Hezbollah.

And while confronting the situation in the north, Israeli officials also contended with a two-day unity conference that brought Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat together with leaders of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements. Also on the Israeli-Palestinian track, further signs of an eroding peace process became evident Thursday when the Palestinians began imposing a boycott on Israeli goods.

In southern Lebanon, a Lebanese civilian was killed Thursday in the Christian enclave of Jezzine after the truck he was driving detonated a roadside charge.

Reports from Lebanon said Hezbollah positions came under fire following the explosion.

The attack came a day after Israeli planes struck Hezbollah and other targets in Lebanon, in what was termed by Israeli officials as a "warning signal" to the Lebanese government to rein in the pro-Iranian group.

Thursday's explosion was the latest in a cycle of hostilities this week which quickly escalated following the killing of two children of a South Lebanon Army commander in Jezzine. The SLA, in turn, shelled the port city of Sidon, killing seven people. Hezbollah then fired dozens of Katyusha rockets into northern Israel. Three Israelis were wounded.

Lebanese army troops also reportedly cooperated with Hezbollah in shelling SLA positions in southern Lebanon.

### Mordechai rejects more aggressive response

Discussing the week's escalation in Lebanon, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai rejected calls from hawkish members of the government for a more aggressive Israeli response to the Hezbollah attacks.

"I'm against acting in a brazen manner which will disrupt civilian life on both sides," Mordechai said during a visit to the Druse village of Daliat al-Carmel.

"I believe that civilians must be kept out of the circle of violence and that we must fight Hezbollah," he added. "I don't support any action that will destroy" the April 1996 cease-fire that ended Operation Grapes of Wrath, Israel's cross-border action aimed at stopping Hezbollah rocket attacks on northern Israeli communities.

The five-nation monitoring group that was created to monitor the cease-fire convened Thursday to discuss complaints filed by Israel and Lebanon over the week's violence. The United States appealed to all the parties to "do their utmost to restore calm," said State Department spokesman Jamie Rubin.

In Jerusalem, the Cabinet was briefed by security officials on the situation in the north as well as in the territories.

Parallel to the tensions in the north, Israel and the Palestinian Authority have been involved in an ongoing battle this week over Israeli demands that the self-rule authority crack down on terrorism.

Israeli officials this week accused Arafat of being "two-faced" for holding conciliatory talks with representatives from Islamic militants groups.

"On the one hand he says he is against terrorism, and afterwards he runs to embrace the killers of women and children," Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh said.

A photo of Arafat embracing Abdelaziz Rantissi, a leader of the Hamas movement, was featured in Israeli

newspapers and on the front page of Thursday's edition of The New York Times.

After meeting with militant leaders Wednesday in Gaza, Arafat held a second such meeting the next day in the West Bank town of Ramallah. Arafat said he was convening what he termed "national unity" talks in response to Israeli policies adopted after a July 30 twin suicide bombing in Jerusalem killed 14 Israelis.

After the attack, Israel imposed a closure on the territories, began withholding tax revenues it owed the Palestinian Authority and demanded that Palestinian officials crack down on terrorism. A portion of the tax revenues — \$12 million — was released earlier this week.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quoted Thursday as telling the Cabinet that the Palestinian leadership was still not doing enough to combat terrorism, adding that Israel could not ignore this and move forward with the peace process.

In retaliation for the sanctions Israel imposed after the attack, the Palestinian Authority on Thursday began enforcing a partial boycott of Israeli goods. Trucks carrying goods such as cookies and toilet paper were turned away by Palestinian officials and security forces, and merchants were told they could not sell Israeli goods beyond what they had on their shelves. □

## Israeli schoolchildren equip Rwandan orphans with supplies

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Thanks to the efforts of 50,000 Israeli schoolchildren, 1,500 Rwandan orphans will be equipped with school supplies when classes begin next month.

The supplies were purchased with funds raised by the schoolchildren, the Israel office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the U.S.-based Jewish Coalition for Rwanda.

In addition, "Project Back to School" will pay high-school tuition fees for 250 Rwandan orphans during the next four years.

To ensure that the supplies arrive on time, students at the Boyer School in Jerusalem spent part of their summer filling specially designed backpacks with notebooks, pencils, uniforms and shoes. The packs are scheduled to be flown to Rwanda next week.

The project is part of a four-year Israeli assistance program to Rwanda that began in 1994. Other Israeli initiatives in the area have included shipments of food and medicine, and a survey of medical, agricultural and community-development needs. □

## Women oppose 'back of the bus'

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An umbrella group representing Israeli women's organizations has petitioned the High Court of Justice to rescind a decision by the transportation minister to separate men and women on buses that serve fervently Orthodox neighborhoods in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak.

Under the decision by Minister Yitzhak Levy of the National Religious Party, women would be required to sit in the rear of the bus, while the front would be reserved for men.

The Israel Women's Network said in its petition that the decision was discriminatory and violates the right to freedom of movement. The petitioners also called on the Dan and Egged bus cooperatives to refuse to implement the new policy. Defending his decision, Levy said it was only meant to take into account the sensitivities of the Orthodox population served by those bus routes. □

## Senior U.S. official urges Swiss to augment fund for survivors

By Fredy Rom

ZURICH (JTA) — A senior U.S. official has called on Swiss banks and businesses to increase the size of a Swiss fund established earlier this year to help needy Holocaust survivors.

U.S. Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs Stuart Eizenstat, in an interview this week on Swiss Television, praised the efforts already made by the Swiss government and the country's largest banks to create the Holocaust Memorial Fund. But at the same time, he added, "We feel there are other banks and insurance companies as well as big industrial firms which should pay money into this fund."

A Swiss Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said the government, which has not contributed to the fund, has no plans to add to the total. But, she added, "Of course, the banks and industrial concerns are free to do so."

In May, Eizenstat issued a blistering 200-page U.S. government report that accused Switzerland of cynically profiting from the war and of bankrolling the Nazi war machine through its purchases of Nazi gold.

The Holocaust Memorial Fund, valued at about \$116 million, was created in February with contributions from Switzerland's largest banks and industrial firms to help Jewish Holocaust victims.

Gays, Gypsies and Catholics, who were also victimized during the Holocaust, are expected to receive a portion of the fund's distributions.

Fund officials have said they plan to issue the first checks in September. Because of the number of potential recipients, the one-time payments may only be in the \$500 to \$1,000 range.

The Swiss National Bank, the country's central bank, pledged an additional \$70 million to the fund earlier this year.

Officials with the bank have said the pledge must first be approved by a parliamentary vote that was scheduled for next month.

But a debate has emerged over whether the vote is legally necessary, and there are predictions that the contribution from the Swiss National Bank may not be made until next spring at the earliest.

Some Swiss Jewish leaders are hoping that a parliamentary vote will not be required, fearing that it would only fuel the anti-Semitism that has marked recent public debate regarding Switzerland's responsibility for its wartime actions.

The head of the legal commission of the Swiss Parliament, Lili Nabholz, said in an interview that the commission would meet next week to discuss whether a parliamentary vote is required. "We will do everything possible to let the national bank pay this money as early as possible," Nabholz said. □

## ADL opens center in Austria to combat prejudice in Europe

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — The Anti-Defamation League has opened an office in Vienna — its first in Europe — to serve as a base for fighting anti-Semitism, prejudice and bigotry in Central and Eastern Europe.

"We put up the mezuzah," said the ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman.

Foxman said the two-person staff will carry out traditional ADL operations, including media monitoring, security training for Jewish organizations and victim advocacy.

"Vienna traditionally has been a window on the region," he said. "From here, we can reach out."

He said the office will be underwritten by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation for the first three years of its operation and added that the Austrian government was eager to have the office as part of its efforts to fight anti-Semitism and racism.

The government's support for the ADL reflects its concern over the rise in Austria of the anti-immigrant Freedom Party, which is one of the strongest far-right parties in Europe.

Austrian government officials, diplomatic representatives and a high-level ADL delegation attended Wednesday's opening ceremony, during which an Austrian Justice Ministry official stressed the need to fight prejudice.

Ronald Lauder, explaining his commitment to the ADL office, said in a statement, "We look forward to strengthening the ADL's ability to serve the newly revitalized Jewish communities of Eastern and Central Europe."

Through the foundation that bears his name, Lauder has sought to revitalize Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe through the establishment of schools and a broad range of communal programs.

The opening of the ADL office in Vienna marks a further expansion of American Jewish organizational efforts in Europe. Last month, the American Jewish Committee opened an office in Berlin. □

## Kazakh Jews open new center, restoring life to old community

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A new synagogue and community center has opened for business in Central Asia.

Located in Almaty, the capital of the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan, the new building was dedicated this week — one year after groundbreaking began.

It includes classrooms, a library, community offices, mikvah and a soup kitchen to feed elderly and needy Jews.

The Beis Menachem Center, affiliated with the worldwide Lubavitch movement, was named after the late Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

The rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, was among thousands of Jews who were exiled to Kazakhstan during Josef Stalin's dictatorship for practicing Judaism.

Historical records show that the first known Jewish community — including 48 soldiers who had completed their army service — settled in Kazakhstan in the 1880s.

Since then, Jews have generally gathered in private houses for services.

Kazakhstan is the second largest republic in the former Soviet Union. The country's Jewish community numbers about 32,000, with some 7,000 Jews living in Almaty.

For many of the Jews in Kazakhstan, Beis Menachem represents a historic triumph.

In addition to being a place of exile, many Eastern European Jews fled to Kazakhstan during the Holocaust.

Hundreds of those Jews are buried in a cemetery a few blocks from where the new community center stands.

Among those buried there is Levi Yitzchak Schneerson. Removed from his post as chief rabbi of Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, Schneerson was exiled to Kazakhstan in 1939.

Five years later, he passed away in Almaty. His grave has since become a pilgrimage site for many Jews.

According to local officials, many Soviet Jews moved to Kazakhstan after the war because it was easier to find economic prosperity in remote regions. □