

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ At least four Israeli soldiers were killed and six wounded during heavy ground fighting in southern Lebanon. The Amal and Hezbollah Lebanese Shi'ite movements each claimed responsibility. Earlier in the day, two members of the pro-Syrian Amal were killed in a clash with Israeli troops, according to reports. [Page 2]

■ U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will visit Syria during her trip to the Middle East, which is reportedly scheduled to begin Sept. 9 in Israel. State Department officials said Albright would go to the region if the Palestinian Authority continues to increase security cooperation with Israel.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel was not committed to withdrawing from the Golan Heights in order to make peace with Syria. Netanyahu was commenting on an Israeli newspaper report that secret documents reveal the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had expressed Israel's willingness to withdraw to the pre-Six-Day War borders. [Page 3]

■ Israel arrested a Druse woman in the Golan Heights on charges that she spied for Syria. Meanwhile, an Israeli Arab woman originally reported to have been arrested for spying for Egypt was actually charged with spying for Iraq.

■ The Israeli daily newspaper Ha'aretz plans to publish a four-page English supplement starting in September. The supplement will be inserted in the International Herald Tribune.

■ The Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee asked Arab Americans to boycott the Days Inn hotel chain to protest a Days Inn that opened in Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip. The Jewish settlement bloc has been a source of continued tension and conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Sept. 1.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Discovery of colon cancer gene sparks Jewish alarm — and questions**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — The discovery that a genetic mutation relatively common among Ashkenazi Jews makes them predisposed to colon cancer has prompted alarm — and the search for more information.

"We've been flooded with calls," said Jill Brensinger, a genetic counselor at Johns Hopkins University's Hereditary Colorectal Cancer Registry in Baltimore.

Her department's telephone message apologizes for long-term busy signals.

Researchers at Hopkins found that a genetic defect which doubles a person's risk of colon cancer is present in about 360,000 American Jews, or 6 percent of the country's Jewish population, making it the most common cancer-causing mutation ever identified in an ethnic population.

Jews of Ashkenazi, or Eastern European, heritage, comprise 95 percent of the more than 5 million Jews in the United States.

Colon cancer is the third most common type of cancer in the United States and will likely kill about 55,000 men and women this year.

The new finding raises questions about why so many genetic mutations are being found in the Ashkenazi Jewish population. It also raises questions about the value and risks of genetic testing, especially for a disease that is often preventable.

The discovery was made by a team of researchers at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute of Johns Hopkins University. The findings appear in the September issue of the journal *Nature Genetics*.

The scientists analyzed blood and tissue samples from about 1,000 Ashkenazi Jews and concluded that Jews who carry the genetic mutation have double the odds — a 16 to 30 percent chance — of other Ashkenazi Jews of getting colon cancer.

Some in the health field warned of overestimating the chances of Ashkenazi Jews getting colon cancer, citing initial reports that mutations BRCA1 and BRCA2 conferred a 70 to 80 percent chance of Jews with those genes getting breast cancer.

Those estimates were reduced in more recent studies, which put the rate at closer to 50 percent.

The later finding marks the third time in as many years that Ashkenazi Jews have been singled out with discoveries about genetic mutations causing potentially fatal diseases. The two other discoveries revolved around breast cancer genes.

A mystery that cannot be explained

"I have trouble myself figuring out why we keep finding mutations so much in Ashkenazi Jews," said Mark Skolnik, chief scientific officer at Myriad Genetics, a Salt Lake City, Utah, laboratory.

"Why should this happen in Ashkenazim and not other populations? The answer is that we don't understand," he said.

"The mystery is not that there's a specific mutation in a specific population. That's to be expected. The mystery is that they're so frequent" among Ashkenazi Jews, he added.

The breast cancer discoveries illuminate growing concerns about the privacy of genetic test results and the way that information might be used by medical insurance companies and employers to discriminate against those whose genes deem them predisposed toward serious disease.

The colon cancer discovery has prompted the same concerns, but with a twist.

Even if a woman is tested and found to have the breast cancer mutations, there is little she can do.

She can change her diet and exercise habits, which can somewhat reduce her chances of being stricken with cancer, but short of having a prophylactic mastectomy — amputating healthy breasts — that is all.

In contrast, colon cancer can be detected very early and, in many cases, it can be prevented with periodic colonoscopies.

The uncomfortable and unloved procedure involves inserting a long,

viewing device up the rectum into the large intestine to search for and remove pre-cancerous growths called polyps.

The test is generally recommended for people over 50 and could become a way for people with the genetic predisposition to monitor their colons starting at even an earlier age. But Brensinger of Johns Hopkins said that only people with a parent, child or sibling with the disease are encouraged to have colonoscopies prior to age 50.

Because the ramifications of the discovery have not yet been explored, it is not clear yet whether health professionals will encourage genetic testing for all Ashkenazi Jews.

Only Johns Hopkins currently offers the test for the genetic mutation particular to Ashkenazi Jews, but more of the country's several dozen genetic testing labs are expected to begin doing it in the next month or two.

Hopkins began offering the test on Tuesday, but Brensinger said she wasn't sure how many people have signed up to take it.

The test, at \$200, is cheap compared to the breast cancer gene test, which costs \$2,400. Only a single genetic base must be examined for the colon cancer test in contrast to 17,500 genetic bases for the breast cancer mutation, Skolnik said.

More than 30 health insurance companies pay for the breast cancer test, he said, and more are signing up all the time.

Some are voicing concerns over potential discrimination from medical insurers and employers in connection with the new discovery, especially among those who have experienced such discrimination in relation to the breast cancer gene.

Such experience prompted congressional action to prevent health insurance discrimination against certain people found to have genetic predisposition to serious diseases.

Congress is slated to consider a new bill that would extend that legislation. Advocates hope that this new finding will help move the current bill forward.

But for Marcie Natan, of Lancaster, Pa., the fear of testing is real. She has breast cancer, as does her sister. Their mother died of colon cancer.

When Marcie's daughter and niece, who are in their mid-20s, sought genetic testing for breast cancer a couple of years ago, genetic researchers discouraged them.

"They told us that privacy wasn't guaranteed down the road" because insurance companies have access to all medical records, said Natan.

"Every time you turn around these girls are changing jobs and health insurance companies, and we just don't want to risk" their facing discrimination, she said.

For the same reasons, Natan's family is not now considering being tested for the colon cancer mutation, even though her mother died from that disease. □

At least four Israeli soldiers die as violence escalates in Lebanon

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — At least four Israeli soldiers were killed and six wounded during heavy ground fighting Thursday in the southern Lebanon security zone.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry confirmed the casualties, saying the soldiers were killed during fighting with Islamic militants in the western sector of the security zone.

In statements issued from Beirut, the Amal and Hezbollah Lebanese Shi'ite movements each claimed responsibility for the Israeli casualties.

Thursday's heavy ground fighting came after several days of relative lull in the area.

A spokesman for U.N. peacekeepers in the region said that Israeli and SLA forces were engaged Thursday in a "large-scale operation" in the security zone.

Earlier in the day, two Amal members were killed in a clash with Israeli troops north of the security zone, according to reports.

No Israelis were hurt in that clash, which occurred when Israeli and SLA troops ambushed an Amal unit.

Also on Thursday, Israeli planes raided suspected Hezbollah targets in the eastern sector of the security zone.

Lebanese security sources said two planes fired rockets at an abandoned house on a road leading to Hezbollah positions. There was no immediate word on casualties.

Thursday's violence came in the wake of fierce fighting last week, which was marked by a deadly series of tit-for-tat escalations.

The recent fighting — which represents the worst flare-up on Israel's northern border in more than a year — has prompted concerns about a major military confrontation. □

Israel plans to build dam on territory claimed by Syria

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has decided to build a dam on territory claimed by Syria, a move that could further heighten tensions between the two countries.

The new dam site is one mile farther upstream on the Yarmuk River than a site selected by the previous Labor government, according to Israeli officials.

Along with threatening a further deterioration on the Israeli-Syrian track — the two sides have not held negotiations for more than a year — the decision to build the dam at the new site could embarrass Jordan.

The new site at El Hama, located at the foot of the Golan Heights, lies on land that is within Israel's recognized international boundaries. But it is inside the border that separated Israel and Syria before the 1967 Six-Day War, and Syria has demanded a return to that border as a condition for signing a peace treaty with Israel.

Even some members of the previous Labor government balked at that demand, which would give Syria all of the Golan Heights right up to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The United States offered muted criticism of the planned new site.

"We don't know precisely where this is going to end up being constructed, if it's ever constructed," State Department spokesman James Rubin said Wednesday.

"If it turns out to be on disputed territory," Rubin told reporters, "then it is not the kind of move which would help build the confidence that we think would be necessary to negotiate solutions to outstanding disputes."

The announced new site has put Jordan on the defensive. The historic October 1994 peace treaty between Israel and Jordan included a provision for the construction of a dam somewhere on the two countries' border and called for Jordan to divert some of the water for its own purposes after the dam was built.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh said this week only that the dam would be built on non-disputed land, adding that the initial site for the project had been ruled out because it was discovered to be an archaeological site.

Tarawneh made the remarks after Israel's water commissioner, Meir Ben-Meir, told the Israeli daily Ha'aretz Monday that Jordan had agreed to build the dam on the new site. □

Was Rabin willing to give up all of the Golan Heights for peace?

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — How much of the Golan Heights was the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin willing to offer Syria in return for peace?

This was the question again circulating in Israel after the daily Ha'aretz reported this week that Rabin was ready to discuss a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the border that separated Israel and Syria before the 1967 Six-Day War.

The paper cited secret transcripts of conversations between Rabin and then-U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher that said the late Israeli leader had agreed in principle to discuss Syria's demand for a withdrawal not only from the Golan Heights, but as far as the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Israel code-named Rabin's offer to discuss such a withdrawal the "Pocket Plan" after U.S. officials said they would not hold Israel to the offer or raise it with the Syrians before Syrian President Hafez Assad agreed to Israeli terms regarding security arrangements and peace, Ha'aretz reported.

In discussions during 1993 and 1994, Rabin reportedly told Christopher he would need four to five years to implement any plan once an agreement was reached. The paper added that Rabin had briefed Israel's then-ambassador to the United States, Itamar Rabinovich, about his discussions with Christopher.

Rabinovich said Thursday that Rabin had never made any commitment to an Israeli withdrawal to the June 4, 1967, border, but that he had expressed a willingness to discuss the matter.

Labor Party leader Ehud Barak, who as then-chief of staff of the Israel Defense Force met with his Syrian counterpart at the time, said this week that Israel had never made any promises to Syria.

"During Rabin's tenure as prime minister, the Syrians were never told anything whose meaning was a prior agreement by Israel to withdraw to the June 4, 1967, lines on the Golan Heights in exchange for Syria's meeting Israeli terms," Barak said.

'Let's talk about future discussions'

He added that Rabin believed that after the Syrians made clear their intentions regarding a number of issues — including water rights, Lebanon, terror and normalization of ties — Israel would make clear its intentions.

Barak said that the Syrians' unwillingness to enter accelerated negotiations with Israel at the time was proof that Damascus had received no promises on the Golan.

Barak said that after Rabin realized there were no chances for serious negotiations with the Syrians, he decided to focus on the Palestinian track.

Israeli-Syrian negotiations were suspended in March 1996 after Assad failed to condemn a series of terror attacks Hamas launched at the time against Israeli targets.

With the subsequent election of Likud Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, prospects for resumption of the talks dimmed, given Netanyahu's stand that the Golan would not be returned.

Commenting Thursday on the Ha'aretz report, Netanyahu repeated his stance that Israel would not accept any oral agreements reached by Syria and the previous Israeli government as the basis for resuming negotiations.

"Let's not talk about past discussions, let's talk about future discussions which could bring us to serious negotiations with the Syrians," Netanyahu told a news conference in Seoul, South Korea. □

Liberal movements to open progressive yeshiva in Israel

By Marla Cohen

New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Elyse Wechterman continues her rabbinical studies in Israel this fall, her husband will also be tackling Judaism's ancient texts at a new yeshiva with a progressive flair.

"I've always been interested in studying Jewish texts," says David Nerenberg, who will be taking a year's leave from his office at the State Oversight Authority of Philadelphia. "But I've never done it in such an intensive way. And being a Reconstructionist, I wasn't interested in doing this in an Orthodox way, so this provides a text-based program that is very modern."

Nerenberg will be joining six to 10 full-time students as well as 10 others when the doors to Beit Midrash/A Liberal Yeshiva open on Sept. 2 on the third floor of the Hebrew Union College library in Jerusalem.

Sponsored by New York-based HUC and the World Union for Progressive Judaism in conjunction with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and the Leo Baeck College in London, the yeshiva seeks to be liberal Judaism's answer to Orthodox programs such as the Pardes Institute and Aish HaTorah.

The yeshiva will provide 10 months of intensive study to English-speaking foreign students. Applicants must have a college degree to attend. Their Jewish backgrounds vary. Nerenberg, for example, attended Hebrew school through high school and a Young Judea camp, and spent a year in Israel after high school.

Others grew up "without a whole lot in their homes," according to Betsy Miller Landis, the yeshiva's North American director of development and recruitment.

"Most of them haven't spent a lot of time in study," said Landis. "These are people who have been out working and feel somewhat established. They feel they can take a year off and probably would not have thought about a year of study if this particular institution did not come along." The yeshiva's opening comes at a time when the Reform and other liberal movements have been heavily lobbying for religious pluralism in Israel. And certainly one of the goals of the yeshiva is to give liberal Judaism a greater presence there.

Opportunity to study in a yeshiva setting

"Basically, we want to provide a religious liberal learning environment where one does not exist," said Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, the national dean of adult Jewish learning and living at the Hebrew Union College. "There is really nothing available for the liberal North American Jew who wants to come to Jerusalem for an extensive period of time to study liberal texts in a liberal, pluralistic environment."

At the same time, those involved in establishing the yeshiva do not see it as simply a response to the growing debate over pluralism. The primary goal, they say, is to give those who are not Orthodox an opportunity to study in a yeshiva setting.

"This is something I've wanted to see happen for a long time," said David Teutsch, president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. "The key to the future of vibrant liberal Judaism in North America is the creation of a highly literate and passionately committed laity."

Among the faculty is Rabbi Naamah Kelman, the first woman rabbi ordained in Israel; Dr. Zeev Herzberg, who has taught at HUC, the Hebrew University and the Pardes Institute; and Amy Levin, who is the coordinator of the Rabbinical Assembly of Israel's effort to produce a prayer book for the Israeli Conservative movement. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD
ADL head makes emotional visit to town where he hid from Nazis

By Lev Krichevsky

VILNIUS, Lithuania (JTA) — Abraham Foxman remembers how a 3-year-old Polish boy by the name of Henryk Stanislaw Kurpi spat on “those dirty Jews” living behind the barbed wire of the Vilna Ghetto.

Foxman remembers because he was that Polish boy.

At the time, the future national director of the Anti-Defamation League did not know that his own parents were among the ghetto residents slated for extermination.

Born in 1940 in the Belarussian town of Baranowicz, Foxman spent the first five years of his life hiding from the Nazis.

“My father said that at the age of 10, I had lived a lifetime,” Foxman has been quoted as saying.

Last week, Foxman returned to Belarus and Lithuania as the head of an ADL delegation.

He took the opportunity to revisit the places where he and his parents survived the war and where the rest of his immediate family perished at the hands of the Nazis.

He said it was a painful visit — the original intent was to say Kaddish in the places that live in his family’s memory. “I wasn’t sure what to expect,” said Foxman. “At first, those were just the names on the map.”

It turned into a journey that evoked a flood of memories.

Joseph and Helen Fuksmans — then the family name — lived in Warsaw before the war.

Once the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, they moved east to Belarus. After Abraham, their first and only child, was born, the family left for Lithuania.

Then, in June 1941, the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. Seeing the Nazi forces close around the Jews, Joseph and Helen Foxman entrusted the 15-month-old Abraham to the care of his Polish Catholic nursemaid, Bronislawa Kurpi.

She baptized him into Catholicism.

“I was a practicing Catholic,” Foxman said of his childhood in Vilna, now known as Vilnius.

His grandparents and 13 of his aunts and uncles perished in the Holocaust. Some of his family members lie in the dirt underneath Abraham Foxman’s birthplace, which is now called Baranovichi.

Foxman’s parents survived the Vilna Ghetto. His mother escaped from the ghetto and survived by posing as a Pole. She got a job in occupied Vilna and supported her son and the nursemaid.

His father was sent to several concentration camps. In 1944, he was liberated in Estonia and came back to Vilna, where the family was reunited.

Pawn in bitter custody dispute

The boy later became a pawn in a bitter custody dispute between the nursemaid and his parents, who eventually won custody rights.

The family moved to Poland and then to Austria. They came to the United States in 1950.

In Baranovichi last week, he found the house in which he was probably born. While most of the city was destroyed during the occupation, this red-brick, one-story building surrounded by chestnut trees stands unharmed.

The family that currently lives in the house said it has belonged to them since before the war.

“But I felt it was the house,” said Foxman. “Not because it belongs to me, but because I can visualize, because I remember conversations that I’ve heard from my parents about how they lived.”

Baranovichi remained permanently etched in the Foxmans’ collective memory. Since the Nazis organized the first major killing operation in Baranovichi on Purim in 1942, the Foxmans, even in the United States, never celebrated that holiday.

The war claimed the lives of 30,000 Baranovichi Jews.

Today, the 150-year-old city has 800 Jews. All of them came to Baranovichi after the war, except for Ruvim Turetsky, “the last Jew of Baranovichi,” as local Jews call him.

Turetsky was born there in 1924. After the Nazis came into town, he was one of the few Jews who managed to flee to eastern Russia. After the war he returned.

He and Foxman conversed in Yiddish. They looked like two acquaintances who were reunited after many years.

Foxman and Turetsky could not help crying at the monument to thousands of local Jews that was erected three years ago by an organization of Jews from Baranovichi who now live in Israel.

“You say Kaddish at a lot of places, but when you say it at a place where you know for certain your flesh and blood is — it touches you differently,” said Foxman.

In Vilnius, Foxman walked around with the help of the street names found in his father’s Yiddish-language memoir. The Church of All Saints once stood across the ghetto gates. It was in this church that Abraham became Henryk. During the war, he came here every day.

The priest, a man in his 30s, looked surprised to be listening to an American Jew who came to the church looking for his baptismal records.

The church was closed shortly after the war and the Soviets turned it into a warehouse. It later became a museum. It reopened as a church in 1990.

“All the wartime records are lost,” the priest said. “The older priests have already died.”

A few months after the war, Foxman began to learn about his Jewish heritage during a Simchat Torah celebration.

A Soviet Jewish officer came up to Joseph Foxman and asked if he could take his son for a minute.

“He put me on his shoulders, began to dance saying, ‘This is my Jewish flag,’ ” Foxman recalled.

The synagogue where the young Abraham Foxman experienced this moment 50 years ago still exists in Vilnius. It’s the last one operating in the city once referred to as the Jerusalem of Lithuania. □

Russian chief’s Jewish aides trade barbs in political fight

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A Russian politician and business tycoon has played the Jewish card in an escalating war of words with one of President Boris Yeltsin’s top advisers.

In a personal attack on First Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov, Boris Berezovsky said that the 37-year-old — widely considered Yeltsin’s heir apparent — could never become president because of his Jewish heritage.

Berezovsky is himself Jewish.

Drawing a distinction between his and Nemtsov’s Jewish-sounding names and Yeltsin’s Russian-sounding name, Berezovsky said, “You don’t become a president, presidents are born.”

In his recently published memoirs, Nemtsov wrote that he converted to Orthodox Christianity a few years ago.

Nemtsov last week accused Berezovsky of using his post as deputy secretary of Russia’s Security Council to promote his business interests, and hinted that he should quit his job. □