



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Netanyahu cancels dinner

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu canceled a dinner with Britain's foreign secretary to protest Robin Cook's meeting with a member of the Palestinian Authority's legislative council at Har Homa.

Cook surveyed the site in southeastern Jerusalem with Israeli representatives to signal the European Union's disapproval of Israeli settlement expansion.

Cook, who faced scores of angry right-wing demonstrators, also met with Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat in the Gaza Strip, where the two declared the creation of a joint Palestinian-European committee on security.

Britain currently holds the rotating E.U. presidency. [Page 1]

### Brandeis receives gift

Brandeis University received a \$13 million gift to establish a center to teach people to learn from history.

The International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life was created by a donation from a former chairman of the school's board of trustees, Abraham Feinberg.

### Argentine judge raids market

An Argentine judge raided a flea market in Buenos Aires that was selling relics from the Jewish community building that was bombed by terrorists in 1994, killing 86 people.

One of the vendors was trying to get \$10,000 for the plaque that listed the names of the founders of the AMIA building, which was completely destroyed by the blast. [Page 2]

### Report: Jews murdered Germans

Israel's first president supported a plan to murder Germans soon after world War II, according to a London newspaper.

The action that Chaim Weizmann reportedly supported was part of an overall goal to kill 6 million Germans set by a group of Holocaust survivors from the Vilna Ghetto.

The organization called Din, the Hebrew word for judgment, poisoned several loaves of bread that were given to jailed Nazi guards, resulting in the estimated deaths of between 300 and 400 Nazis.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Visit by British official reignites Israeli anger

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Fifty years after Great Britain relinquished the Palestine Mandate, the British are back — and once again, Israel wants them to go away.

Israeli officials likened this week's visit by the British foreign secretary to someone throwing a match on a tinderbox.

So angry were Israeli officials over Robin Cook's visit Tuesday to the controversial Har Homa construction site in southeastern Jerusalem that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu canceled a scheduled dinner with him.

Israeli officials said the foreign secretary had reneged on earlier promises not to meet with a Palestinian official at Har Homa. But British officials said Israel had blown the incident out of proportion.

Cook's controversial visit came amid an atmosphere of escalating Israeli-Palestinian tensions. With the peace process stalled, the United States considering going public with its own plan to move the process forward amid new violence in the West Bank, Britain dispatched Cook to the region in an effort to jump-start the peace talks.

Britain, which currently holds the presidency of the 15-nation European Union, has repeatedly expressed its determination during the past three months to secure a more influential role in Middle East diplomacy. The effort is, in part, an attempt to protect the \$2 billion investment in economic aid that E.U. donor countries have made to the Palestinian Authority over the past four years.

But Israeli officials have been strongly resisting the Europeans, whom they perceive as tilting toward the Arab side. They prefer to see the United States serve as mediator. However, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright voiced support for Cook's visit to the region.

Albright "has great confidence" in Cook's pursuit "at the request of the European Union to visit Israel and to try to promote peace in the region," State Department spokesman James Rubin said Tuesday.

Even before he left London for the Middle East this week, Cook riled Israelis when he appeared to undercut the Jewish state's long-standing insistence on direct, bilateral negotiations with its Arab neighbors.

Pressing the case for Europe's inclusion in peace talks, Cook declared that the process would not succeed "if the parties are left to work out arrangements on their own."

After meeting with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, Cook criticized Israel's expansion of settlements, which, in his view, includes Har Homa. At a joint news conference, Arafat praised Cook's visit to Har Homa, saying it was a message to Israel that "Europe cannot accept expansion or building of new settlements."

It was a year ago that Israeli-Palestinian talks broke down after Israel announced plans to construct a Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa and a Palestinian suicide bomber struck in Tel Aviv. To signal Europe's displeasure with the Har Homa plans, Cook visited the disputed area on Tuesday, though in apparent deference to his Israeli hosts the original plans for the visit were modified even before he left England.

Cook originally had planned to visit the site with a senior Palestinian official, Faisal Husseini. But after Israel objected — Netanyahu threatened to cancel his meeting with the British minister — Cook backed off, and in the end he was accompanied by Israeli

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Reform Jew to join council

A Reform member of Netanyahu's religious council was expected to participate for the first time in a meeting of such a group in Israel.

The move came eight months after Israel's High Court of Justice ordered the appointment of Joyce Brenner, a Meretz representative, to the body.

Since the court order, the head of the council had not convened the body due to stiff opposition from some members.

Representatives of Netanyahu's rabbinate said they would not take part in the meeting.

### Palestinian dies of wounds

A Palestinian youth who was critically wounded in clashes with Israeli troops in Hebron died of his injuries. Samir Kamareh, 13, was hit in the head with a rubber bullet during rioting last week.

### Russian group curbed

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu directed Nativ, the state body formally responsible for dealing with the Jewish population in the former Soviet Union, to be active only in encouraging immigration to Israel.

Representatives of Israel's security services had previously complained that Nativ was making unauthorized, political contacts that were damaging to Israel. The directive also follows a state comptroller's report that criticized the operational and financial management of the body.

### High-speed train hits Israel

Israel's national infrastructure minister was one of the first passengers on the debut run of a high-speed train from Beersheba to Tel Aviv. The new train made the trip in 50 minutes — about half the time of a regular train. Ariel Sharon said he would give priority to outfitting the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem line with the new train as well.

Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh. But after meeting with Naveh, Cook traveled to another location abutting the building site to meet briefly with a Palestinian legislator, Salah al-Ta'amri. Cook denied he had given in to Israeli pressures, saying Israel had pressed him "not to see Jamal Abu Ghena'im," pointedly using the Arabic name for the controversial site. "I am the first European foreign minister to visit the site," he said.

The encounter with Ta'amri outraged Israel, which had insisted that if Cook visited Har Homa, he could be accompanied only by an Israeli representative.

It was in response to the Cook-Ta'amri meeting that Netanyahu canceled the planned dinner with Cook.

"We had a clear understanding with British government officials regarding the visit," Netanyahu told reporters after he cut short a meeting with the British minister.

"We were assured that there will be just a visit with Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh, and no contact with the Palestinians near the site," he said. "We were totally surprised by the change in schedule."

The diplomatic row over Cook's visit came after Netanyahu held a cool meeting earlier this month in London with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who reportedly pressed the Israeli leader to halt settlement activity and withdraw Israeli troops from more West Bank territory.

Israel has insisted that the Palestinians comply with previously signed agreements before any further redeployment of Israeli forces takes place.

As for the senior British official's visit to Jerusalem this week, Netanyahu said he made clear to Cook "in the strongest possible manner" that his attempt to intervene in the status of Jerusalem was misplaced. "We will not let anything divide the city or hurt our sovereignty over Jerusalem," Netanyahu said. □

*(JTA correspondent Douglas Davis in London contributed to this report.)*

## Argentine flea-market vendor selling Jewish bombing relics

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — "Sure it belonged to those Jews they bombed," said a vendor in a flea market here. "It's written funny, in Hebrew."

What he was trying to sell for \$10,000 is a large brass plaque bearing a long list of names in Spanish and Hebrew. The twisted plaque, commemorating the founders of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association, or AMIA, once hung in the lobby of the group's headquarters. The building was destroyed by a bomb on July 18, 1994.

The trader, who calls himself "Dani," was selling relics that were dug out by the police and firemen after the attack that left 86 dead and hundreds wounded.

In fact, he was selling court evidence.

On Monday evening, the official in charge of the bombing investigation, Judge Juan Jose Galeano, raided the flea market and impounded all the goods on sale.

Argentine judiciary sources said in interviews that Galeano is tracking down objects already sold to collectors and will press charges against the sellers for trading in stolen goods. The AMIA relics were uncovered when a local television station used a hidden camera to expose "Dani" and his partner. Posing as buyers, the television journalists got the salesmen to display an extensive collection of sacred books, clocks, paintings and Hebrew-alphabet typewriters.

The journalists were offered, in addition to the plaque, a half-burned Torah scroll for \$200 and the wrecked remains of a piano for \$1800. Asked by the "buyers" about how they got the remains of the building, the vendors gave contradictory answers.

"We just brought a truck to the place where they dumped the remains," they said, adding later in the interview that they "got them from some cops."

Luis Dobniewsky, a lawyer for AMIA, called the vendors "vultures."

"They stole evidence that could only be removed by judicial orders," he said.

The AMIA bombing, as well as the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, remain unsolved.

Argentine Jews and Israelis quietly marked the sixth anniversary of the embassy bombing Tuesday. □



### Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Swiss imprison Nazi

A Swiss court sentenced a well-known Nazi sympathizer to two months in prison for greeting a Jewish man and his daughter with the Nazi salute.

The ruling, hailed by the Jewish community, marked the first time a Swiss court sent a man to prison for anti-Semitic actions.

### Fired Swiss guard returns

The former Swiss guard who was fired for saving Holocaust-era documents from a bank shredder was back in Zurich for the first time since he fled the country last year.

Christoph Meili, who filed a lawsuit against the Union Bank of Switzerland earlier this year, said he is back to prove that the documents he saved pertained to Jewish-owned property confiscated by the Nazis.

### Qatar reconsiders ties

Qatar said it was considering closing Israel's trade mission because peace talks in the Middle East had collapsed.

The Gulf state of Qatar was one of several Arab states that opened ties with the Jewish state in the wake of the Oslo peace process.

### Papon lawyers rest case

Lawyers for Holocaust victims and their families finished their closing arguments against Maurice Papon, a former high-ranking Vichy official.

Papon, charged with ordering the arrest for deportation of 1,560 Jews, 223 of them children, during the Holocaust, has been on trial for months.

In closing remarks, one lawyer referred to Papon as an "imposter without a soul or conscience."

### Jordanian couple honored

Jordan's King Hussein and his wife, Queen Noor, were honored by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles for their efforts to bring peace to the Middle East.

King Hussein said he had hoped for "greater progress," but added that he hoped the entire region would "enjoy the freedom of working together."

### Slurs redefined?

The publisher of a popular dictionary plans to review how it defines offensive words after readers objected to the definition of a racial slur.

Merriam-Webster said it has no plans to eliminate offensive words, including "kike" and "nigger," from its dictionary but will review how it orders the definitions.

Currently, the oldest — which is often the most offensive — definition of a word is listed first.

## Poll: U.S. Jews pessimistic about prospects for peace

By Rebecca Segall

NEW YORK (JTA) — A majority of American Jews support the Israeli government's handling of peace negotiations with the Arabs, according to the latest survey of attitudes on the Israeli-Arab peace process.

The survey, commissioned by the American Jewish Committee, also found that a majority of American Jews believe that Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat is "somewhat" or "strongly" opposed to peace with Israel.

The survey is the latest in a wave of such opinion polls — many of which are seen as an effort to advance a particular political objective.

But the AJCommittee survey is widely seen as one of the most useful because it is conducted annually and can, therefore, track changing attitudes. "Our survey has come out at a timely point in the heated debate among pollsters," said David Singer, director of research for the group. "We provide some clarification."

And this year's results are telling.

"In 1993 we saw in our surveys widespread euphoria" for the Oslo peace process and five years later, "we find that there has been serious erosion in that euphoria," said David Harris, executive director of the AJCommittee.

The findings of the survey reflect widespread pessimism about the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in particular, which has virtually ground to a halt.

It comes as the Clinton administration is trying to determine whether to force the two sides to advance the process by coming out publicly with a plan that would commit Israel to a further withdrawal from the West Bank and commit the Palestinians to take stronger actions to ensure Israeli security.

Many of the survey's questions touched on these issues. Among the findings:

- 94 percent of American Jews say that the Palestinian Authority is not doing enough to control terrorist activity, up from approximately 82 percent in 1996. The question was not asked in 1997;

- Over two-thirds — 69 percent — said they favored U.S. pressure on Arafat, while 52 percent oppose pressure on Netanyahu; 45 percent believe the United States should pressure Netanyahu;

- 42 percent favor — and 49 percent oppose — the establishment of a Palestinian state. In 1996, 45 percent favored such a state, compared to 57 percent in 1993;

- 56 percent of American Jews support Netanyahu's handling of the peace process, which is down from last year, but only by 5 percent;

- 57 percent agree — and 36 percent disagree — that American Jews should support the policies of the duly elected government of Israel.

Not unexpectedly, the survey faced some criticism from both the right and the left. Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America and an outspoken critic of the Oslo peace process, said he is disappointed in the "vague" language of some of the AJCommittee's questions.

Klein suggested that specifying support for Israel trading land for peace instead of just the peace process would have garnered different results.

Still, pointing to the finding that 68 percent of American Jews believe that "the goal of the Arabs is not the return of the occupied territories but rather the destruction of Israel," Klein said the poll reflects what he has long believed: "Most American Jews are skeptical about Arab intention to having a real peace with Israel."

For his part, Jonathan Jacoby, president of the Israel Policy Forum, which strongly supported the peace policies of the former Labor government, said the wording of the questions, particularly those related to U.S. pressure on the parties, does not shed light on "how Americans feel about an even-handed approach toward mediating the conflict, because the questions only referred to pressuring one side or the other."

A recent poll commissioned by his group found that 84 percent of U.S. Jews believed the Clinton administration should pressure both Netanyahu and Arafat to work harder for peace. But Jacoby added that the AJCommittee poll is important "because it points to the troubling increase in the hopelessness American Jews feel about the situation in Israel." □

## Jewish survivor reveals plan to murder 6 million Germans

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Israel's first president supported a Jewish group's plans to murder Germans immediately after World War II, according to the man who led the group of avengers.

Details of the plan, which included poisoning bread at a bakery, were unveiled by Lithuanian-born Joseph Harmatz, 73, in an interview published last week in the British newspaper *The Observer*.

Harmatz, who lost two brothers in the Holocaust, led an organization — Din, or Judgment — made up of survivors of the Vilna Ghetto. Their overall objective: the deaths of 6 million Germans as vengeance for the Jews who died in the Holocaust.

The idea for the organization apparently came from the poet Abba Kovner — a leader of the Lithuanian partisans who is credited with describing Jews as "being led like lambs to the slaughter" — and Vitka, his partisan girlfriend and later his wife.

As a first step, Kovner was sent to Tel Aviv to win the support of the Jewish leaders in Mandatory Palestine for a plan to poison Germans.

David Ben-Gurion, then head of the Jewish Agency and later Israel's first prime minister, was appalled by the idea of mass killing and was worried that it would prejudice the chance of establishing a state.

Zalman Shazar, who later became Israel's third president, was also hostile to the plan.

Said Harmatz, who from 1960 to 1994 was the head of the World ORT network of Jewish-sponsored vocational institutions: "His idea of revenge was the reparations that Israel would later exact from the Germans."

But Israel's president, Chaim Weizmann, was more receptive.

"He approved of our plans," said Harmatz, "and recommended a scientist who would make a poison for us." The scientist was a professor at the Sieff Institute in Rehovot, which later became the Weizmann Institute.

In fact, Weizmann was not explicitly identified by Harmatz in his book "From the Wings," which is slated to be published in May in England by The Book Guild. In his book, Harmatz refers to Weizmann simply as "an elder."

But Harmatz agreed with the *Observer* interviewer that the "elder" was actually Weizmann, and that the Zionist leader was integral to Din's operation.

Why did Weizmann agree to help? "I can only think that he was leader of the Jewish people," said Harmatz, "and, like many of these leaders, he had the feeling he had not done enough during the years of the Holocaust."

At their meeting, Kovner told Weizmann that the group was planning to poison a few thousand loaves of bread intended for former SS guards who were being held at the jails and concentration camps where they had served during the war.

The story was only partly true — that was a back-up plan. Din also wanted, among its other plans, to poison the water supply of the German city of Nuremberg. But, recalls Harmatz, he did not tell Weizmann about this plan because "we did not want to frighten" Weizmann.

Eventually, the Rehovot professor recommended by Weiz-

mann produced an odorless, colorless substance that he said would be sufficient to poison one night's production of bread at the bakery that supplied four prisons and concentration camps, including Dachau.

But Kovner did not make it back to Europe with his lethal cargo. Returning to Europe on a British ship, Kovner was arrested by British police, who apparently knew of the plot. The stocks of poison, concealed in cans of condensed milk in Kovner's cabin, were thrown overboard by other members of the group, but Kovner was arrested and sent to an Egyptian jail.

Harmatz took over the leadership of Din. To this day, he is uncertain who betrayed the plan, but suspects that it was some members of the Zionist leadership who he believes feared that Din's success would have jeopardized their hopes for statehood.

With their stocks of Rehovot poison lying at the bottom of the Mediterranean, Harmatz abandoned the idea of poisoning Nuremberg's water supply. The group acquired a small quantity of arsenic and reverted to the more modest, bread-poisoning plan they had outlined to Weizmann.

One Saturday night in April 1945, members of Din broke into the Stalag 13 camp at Nuremberg and, with an artist's brush, Harmatz painted 3,000 loaves of black bread with poison.

"What was very important was that the material we used was arsenic, a poison which settles. So we had to have people mixing it all the time while I was smearing it on to the bread," he said.

At the time, he estimated that 12,000 people would be killed. For Harmatz, the following day would be wonderful: "That morning, I thought of my family," he said. "I felt very good that a job was going to be accomplished."

The plan called for them to move to Czechoslovakia. But the plan was only partially successful: They made it into the country, but the poison was not as strong as they had expected.

Only about 300 to 400 former guards at Nazi jails and concentration camps were killed, according to Harmatz.

Soon thereafter, the organization called off its plans.

The head of the research institute at the Yad Vashem museum in Jerusalem cast doubts on Harmatz's recollection of events.

Yehuda Bauer, a retired professor of Holocaust history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, said he had read accounts of the event and described the story as "old hat."

"It did happen and it is likely that many people got sick," he said, "but I believe the number of people who were killed has been exaggerated."

After the state was established, Harmatz decided that the burden of retribution had passed to Israel's new leaders, and he declined Kovner's appeals to launch a fresh revenge attempt. Kovner followed his lead and gave up dreams of vengeance, becoming one of the great poets of the new state. He died some 10 years ago.

As for Harmatz, he eventually settled in Israel. He studied law and then ran the Israel end of a French shipping line.

For the last 13 years of his work at ORT, Harmatz was based in London, where the British government consulted him about setting up vocational schools. He also advised the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris. He even went to Germany to consult on overseas aid projects.

Harmatz, now living in a suburb of Tel Aviv, harbors some regrets. "It didn't work out," he says. "The 300 or 400 we poisoned was nothing compared with what we really wanted to do." □