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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Cotti rejects anti-Semitism

Switzerland President Flavio Cotti called on the Swiss to reject anti-Semitism, despite what he called "unjustified" attacks against Switzerland for its dealings with Nazi Germany.

Cotti's call came in a radio and television address on Saturday as part of celebrations of Swiss National Day.

Swiss Jewish leaders welcomed the remarks, which they called long overdue.

Meanwhile, Swiss police detained about 30 skinheads in central Switzerland who displayed swastikas and gave the Hitler salute. [Page 4]

Alleged camp vandals arrested

German authorities arrested three teen-agers in connection with the desecration last week of a monument at the Buchenwald concentration camp.

The youths, who reportedly confessed to the crime, claim that they had no political motives.

They also claim that had been drinking heavily prior to the attack.

Authorities say, however, that they are part of a group of youths in the eastern German town of Weimar that has connections to extremist organizations. [Page 2]

Palestinian says talks may end

A leading Palestinian Authority official said the Palestinians would call off peace talks in less than a week if Israel does not agree to an American proposal calling for Israel to withdraw from a further 13 percent of the West Bank.

Nabil Shaath's threat comes as Israel's national infrastructure minister, Ariel Sharon, and other hawkish Cabinet ministers are expected to press Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to agree to more than a 9 percent withdrawal.

Deutsche Bank aided Nazis

Germany's largest bank admitted that it dealt in Nazi gold during World War II.

In a report released last Friday, the Deutsche Bank said it purchased more than 4.4 tons of gold from Nazi Germany's central bank at a wartime value of some \$5 million.

But the report did not disclose whether the bank's top officials knew of the gold's origin.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Holocaust survivors in Russia get chance to tell experiences

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Steven Spielberg's Holocaust video project faces some difficult challenges in the former Soviet Union.

According to Anya Verkhovskaya, East European regional manager for the filmmaker's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, one of the foundation's challenges here has been convincing survivors that they can speak freely about what they experienced during World War II.

In interviews conducted for the project in the United States, one often comes across a "typical phrase which ends the interview, 'So, in 1947, I came to America,' " Verkhovskaya said.

Interviews conducted in the former Soviet Union never have such a "happy ending," she said.

Many Jews who returned home to the Soviet Union or otherwise found themselves inside its borders after World War II were subsequently persecuted under Stalin and other Soviet leaders.

"You could have someone who survived Auschwitz, for example, only to be sent to a gulag," said Verkhovskaya.

About one-third of those approached by the foundation in the former Soviet Union have refused to tell their stories.

But many of those who agreed to be interviewed value the opportunity the interviews give them to express themselves.

"The foundation's work is very important to survivors," said Tatyana Zhvanetskaya, chairwoman of the Moscow Association of Former Jewish Prisoners of Ghettos and Concentration Camps.

"People lived with fear all their life and couldn't tell anyone, sometimes not even their children, what they had lived through," she said.

Zhvanetskaya, who as a small girl survived the war in a ghetto in the Ukrainian town of Tulchin, said she looks forward to the day when Russians will be able to hear the survivors' testimonies.

"People will learn [about the tragedy] from these testimonies charged with deep emotions. This will help avoid the repetition of this kind of tragedy," she said.

Indeed, in two or three years, much of the archive will become available to educators, students, scholars and filmmakers in the former Soviet Union and, as a result, to a broader audience.

Since 1994, the foundation has conducted close to 46,000 interviews in 32 languages and 53 countries. Some 400 new interviews are being added each week.

After the initial goal of assembling 50,000 interviews by the end of 1998 is reached, the archival project will enter its next phase — the materials will be cataloged and made accessible via computer networks to repositories, first in the United States and Israel and, later, around the world.

"This would be the greatest tragedy: to put a treasure such as this on a shelf and not to show it," said Michael Berenbaum, who heads the project.

Berenbaum, president of the Los Angeles-based foundation, recently visited Moscow to participate in a tribute honoring project volunteers from the former Soviet republics.

The other reason for Berenbaum's trip was to drum up support and find allies to

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israeli police prevent prayers

Israeli police prevented an extremist Jewish group from praying on the Temple Mount for the holiday of Tisha B'Av. Police refused the annual request made by the Ne'eman Har Habayit group on the grounds that prayers on the site — which is presently Muslim-run — could disrupt public order. Police detained three activists who tried to penetrate the site by force.

Mr. Barak goes to Washington

Members of Israel's Likud Party said the Labor Party would use its trip to Washington this week to encourage the Clinton administration to pressure Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the peace process. Labor Party officials denied the charges. The delegation, led by Labor Party leader Ehud Barak, is expected to meet with top administration officials on its weeklong visit. Meanwhile, Knesset member Ori Orr, who was quoted making anti-Sephardi remarks last week, was removed from all of his posts in the party.

Israeli soldier killed in Lebanon

An Israeli soldier was killed and five others wounded during a clash with Hezbollah forces in the southern Lebanon security zone July 30. The dead soldier was identified as Sgt. Shachar Mintz, 21, of Kfar Achim.

Arafat claims Turkish victory

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat said he had won Turkish help in helping to prevent the "Judaification of Jerusalem." Following a meeting with Arafat in Ankara, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel said he shared Arafat's concerns, adding that "Israel has played a heavy role in the failure of the peace process with its policies in Jerusalem." Demirel's comments came one month before Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz is scheduled to visit Israel.

help disseminate the foundation's materials.

The goal is especially urgent in the former Soviet Union, where much of the population is only vaguely familiar with the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Although more than 1 million of the estimated 25 million Soviet citizens who died during World War II were Jewish victims singled out for extermination by the Nazis, the particular fate of Soviet Jews has long been considered here only as part of a larger universal tragedy.

Berenbaum said the archive will help Russians develop new ways of teaching the Holocaust.

In Moscow, he met with officials at the Ministries of Education and Culture, as well as with representatives of the film industry, television and business.

He said he found some people who will be able to develop videotaped Russian-language testimonies into documentaries.

The foundation's first working foray into the former Soviet Union came in 1995, when a team was sent to St. Petersburg and Vilnius, Lithuania, to interview 50 survivors.

To date, the foundation has conducted more than 4,600 interviews in some 360 cities of the former Soviet republics, including 270 interviews with rescuers of Jews and some 80 interviews with non-Jewish survivors such as Gypsies and Jehovah's Witnesses.

In addition, some 2,300 interviews have been conducted in Russian in the United States, Israel and 11 other countries.

Berenbaum also hopes the vast archive of digitized interviews with survivors and rescuers will be used by Moscow's memorial synagogue and Holocaust museum, which is slated to open this fall.

The foundation has promised to share its Russian-language material with the museum.

But in order to make the videos accessible to visitors, the museum must acquire technology that is not available in most Russian museums and that was not part of the museum's original plan.

Spielberg's project has also interested scholars of Russian Jewry, particularly because the interviews often detail what survivors experienced before and after the Holocaust and, therefore, provide first-hand accounts of poorly documented periods of Soviet Jewish history.

Ilya Altman, a Moscow historian and director of the Holocaust Research and Education Center here, called the foundation's undertaking the "most significant project on history of Jews in the USSR ever done." □

Teens held in Buchenwald case

BERLIN (JTA) — German authorities have arrested three teen-agers in connection with the desecration of a memorial sculpture at Buchenwald.

The suspects are part of a group of youths in the eastern German town of Weimar that is connected to extremist organizations, authorities said. Two of them have previously been charged with bodily attacks and property damage.

The youths, who claimed they had no political motives for the attack, told police that they had been drinking heavily prior to driving to the former Nazi concentration camp site.

Visitors to Buchenwald discovered July 28 that vandals had partially damaged the figure of a child by partially sawing through one of the figure's legs.

The child represents the 9,000 children who survived Buchenwald.

An estimated total of 56,000 people died at the camp, including about 11,000 Jewish victims.

The sculpture of 11 figures by artist Fritz Cremer, erected in 1958, depicts a group of liberated survivors of Buchenwald.

It was the first memorial erected in Germany to commemorate Nazi concentration camp victims.

The desecration comes amid a backdrop of increased attacks on concentration camps in Germany. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Russia considers anti-Nazi bill

Russia's Cabinet approved a bill that would make it illegal for Russians to distribute pro-Nazi or fascist material or symbols. The bill, which would allow people to keep the material in their homes, is expected to be submitted to Parliament later this month.

Clinton adviser briefs Conference

President Clinton's national security adviser held an off-the-record briefing for members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations in New York on July 30.

Sandy Berger told about 50 Jewish activists that the United States planned to stay the course on the peace process and continue to press the Israelis and Palestinians to reach an accord without American representatives at the table.

Swiss take out full-page ad

A Swiss business group took out full-page advertisements last Friday in several major U.S. newspapers featuring an open letter to President Clinton urging him to help put an end to sanctions against Swiss banks.

The ad, paid for by a Washington-based group called Friends of Switzerland, calls the sanctions threatened by some U.S. states "illegal, unjustified and ultimately counterproductive."

Yiddish lives in Lithuania

A group of students from Europe and North America graduated from a Yiddish summer school held in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius.

The graduates were the first at the school, which is run by David Katz, a professor of Yiddish at Oxford University in England.

Israeli singer wins Slavic contest

Israeli pop singer Raphael won the first prize at an international song competition in the Belarussian city of Vitebsk.

The Slavic Bazaar music festival, which is held annually, is considered to be one of the most prestigious music events in the former Soviet Union.

Brother Daniel dies

The man whose case helped define the "Who Is a Jew" controversy in Israel died July 30 in Haifa. Brother Daniel Rufeisen was born a Jew in Poland, converted to Catholicism during World War II and moved to Israel in the 1950s.

In the 1960s, Israel's High Court of Justice refused his request for citizenship because of his conversion. He was 78 and was buried in a Christian cemetery in Haifa.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

New synagogue boosts identity at popular Jewish summer camp

By Michael J. Jordan

SZARVAS, Hungary (JTA) — Before coming to the Szarvas summer camp, Elina Zhitomirskaya, 13, had heard little about synagogues, only that they were places where Jews gathered to pray. Though raised by her Jewish mother, she does not know if there's a synagogue in her hometown of Bryansk, a city 250 miles southwest of Moscow.

Last Friday evening, then, was a milestone for Zhitomirskaya, who was among some 400 Jewish youth from Central and Eastern Europe celebrating Shabbat in Beit David, the camp's new synagogue.

"It doesn't matter what language it will be in — Russian, Hungarian or Hebrew," Zhitomirskaya said before the service. "What matters is that I'll be connected with God."

Through Beit David, the first synagogue to be built in Hungary since the Holocaust, future Szarvas campers will also be able to connect to their Judaism.

The airy, red-brick-and-pine synagogue was inaugurated July 17 by its American benefactor, Ronald Lauder, who founded the camp in 1990 along with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The synagogue was named in memory of David Ben-Rafael, an Israeli diplomat who was killed in the still unsolved 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires.

Ralph Goldman, the father of Ben-Rafael and the JDC's honorary executive vice president, dedicated a plaque to his son at the inauguration.

About three-quarters of Hungary's 800,000-strong community perished during the Holocaust.

Now, some 100,000 Jews remain.

It's fitting that the nation's first synagogue to be built from the ground up in more than half a century — several others have been restored — is located at Szarvas, which serves as a center for building Jewish identity among youth from the former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

"I always knew I was Jewish," said Zhitomirskaya. "But it's here that I've become interested in what being Jewish means."

The series of four two-week programs continues to grow in popularity. Youth from Belarus and Lithuania arrived this summer for the first time — and in Russia, the waiting list has stretched to 150 names.

The opening of Beit David has now made Szarvas complete, said Camp Director Yitzhak Roth.

"Synagogue is one of the pillars of Jewish life.

"Without it, it's not really complete," said Roth, an Israeli who has led the camp with his wife since 1991.

Beit David does not have a resident rabbi, he said.

Rather, an ad-hoc committee of Orthodox Israeli and Hungarian camp counselors — four of whom are students at the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary — lead the campers in prayer.

While synagogue attendance is not compulsory, "for those who have a desire to worship their own faith, we felt we owed them this opportunity," Roth said.

Boris Ploskovitev was grateful for that chance.

Like Zhitomirskaya, Ploskovitev had never been to synagogue. In fact, the 14-year-old from Moscow, who is estranged from his Jewish father, regularly attends church with his Russian Orthodox mother.

But that practice will soon end, he said.

From the moment he stepped in to Beit David last week, "I felt better and more comfortable than I had in a church," said Ploskovitev.

"I don't know what my mother will say, but I don't want to go to church anymore," he said. □

Chicago Jewish agencies host claims workshops for survivors

By Laura Weiskopf
JUF News

CHICAGO (JTA) — They came seeking a piece of their histories.

They came seeking justice.

More than 250 Russian-speaking and English-speaking people came to receive guidance in filing claims to recover unpaid insurance policies issued by European insurance companies before and during World War II.

Chicago's Jewish Community Relations Council and several other local Jewish agencies teamed up recently with the Illinois Department of Insurance in organizing two workshops to help Holocaust survivors and heirs of Holocaust victims seeking to resolve outstanding insurance claims. The Holocaust Claims Processing Office in New York will handle all claims from individuals living in the United States.

"Most people think about restitution. They think about getting their property back, but they don't think about the insurance that covered those things," said Irit Tamir, a JCRC program coordinator.

One of the goals of the workshops, she said, was to identify possible claimants. There are some 1,300 survivors in Illinois who are registered with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Because difficult memories surface as people fill out the claim forms, social workers from the various organizations paired up with volunteers from the insurance industry to make the process easier, she said.

Julius Fox's mother's family lived a prosperous existence in Dubrovicz, Poland.

His grandfather, a butcher, owned the family home and the building that housed his store. Both buildings still stand. In addition to policies covering the house and shop, Fox believes the family possessed life insurance and insurance for jewelry left in a safety deposit box.

Fox pieced together the history of his mother's family with help from one of his uncles, who escaped Nazi persecution and settled in Israel.

The uncle had preserved a book about the village that contained pictures of the family.

But it was not until the Fox family attended a celebration for Holocaust survivors in Miami last year that the couple finished the puzzle. There they met a man who grew up with Fox's mother and bought meats at the butcher shop. With his help, the family identified the buildings and drew a rough draft of its family tree.

While Fox and his wife seek restitution, the couple wants more than money. For them, the realization of the insurance claims would represent justice, they said.

"I want to see satisfaction for what they did to my mother's family," Fox said, his voice trembling with emotion.

State insurance regulators, working with the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, are negotiating with European insurance companies for a possible settlement from which the claimants would benefit, Tamir said.

"There is no way of knowing if these people will get any money at all," she said. □

Israeli defense officials debate quality of Iran's missile program

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The extent of Iran's military threat has become a subject of intense debate in Israel — and is causing division among the country's top defense officials.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai warned Sunday that Iranian efforts to develop missiles and non-conventional weapons pose a long-term threat to Israel.

"We are obliged to do everything possible to minimize the damage and the potential capabilities of Iran," said Mordechai.

But Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak, the former Israel Defense Force chief of staff, said the Shahab-3 missile, which the Iranians tested two weeks ago, does not pose a serious threat as long as it is armed with a conventional warhead.

The debate comes as Israel's Finance Ministry begins to prepare next year's defense budget.

The current chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, said the Iranian armament efforts necessitated special budget allocations to allow the IDF to deal with the challenge.

Meanwhile, Israeli television reported Sunday that the Moscow-based Tzagi aviation research institute was behind the development of the Shahab-3.

Israeli experts have said that the missile, which could strike Israel, could be operational within a year unless Russian firms are forced to stop supplying the Iranians with sophisticated parts.

During a visit to an arms exhibition in Tehran on Saturday, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami said Iran's president said Israel constitutes the major danger to peace in the region.

Khatami, who is considered a relative moderate, said his country was determined to continue to strengthen its armed forces, "regardless of any international concern." □

Cotti rejects anti-Semitism

ZURICH (JTA) — Switzerland's president has used the commemoration of Swiss National Day to issue a call against anti-Semitism.

Flavio Cotti called on the Swiss to reject anti-Semitism, despite what he called "unjustified" attacks against Switzerland for its dealings with Nazi Germany.

Cotti's call came in a radio and television address Saturday as part of Swiss National Day.

Swiss Jewish leaders welcomed the remarks, which they called long overdue.

"Finally, we got what we were looking for," Thomas Lyssy, vice president of the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, said in an interview.

Switzerland has recently experienced an anti-Semitic backlash in reaction to international pressure to settle claims dating from the Holocaust era.

One Swiss newspaper clearly welcomed Cotti's remarks.

"Thank You Mr. President for These Clear Words," read a headline in Sonntagsblick, the country's largest Sunday newspaper.

Meanwhile, Swiss police detained about 30 skinheads in central Switzerland who displayed swastikas and gave the Hitler salute. □