



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat are scheduled to meet in an effort to iron out differences in the ongoing negotiations to expand Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank. Among the thorniest topics still to be resolved is who will have control of water resources in the West Bank.

■ Israeli settlers are planning to resume their hilltop protests against the expansion of Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank. Settler leaders charged that the government was taking advantage of last weekend's hiatus in the demonstrations in order to accelerate an agreement with the Palestinians.

■ An Israeli ministerial committee rejected a request by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to grant extended interrogation powers to the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security service. Despite the ministers' opposition, Rabin repeated his position that the battle against terror requires the use of all available tools. "It is impossible to question a terrorist over a cup of coffee," he was quoted as saying.

■ Unemployment among new immigrants to Israel dropped in 1995 to 6.5 percent, a sharp decline from 1992, when the figure stood at 33 percent. Unemployment among the Israeli public at large stands at 6.9 percent.

■ Summer camps in Slovakia are proving to be the most critical form of Jewish education among youth in the tiny communities of the former Czechoslovakia. One of the sponsors of the camps, a youth group, is the only Jewish organization to remain whole since the breakup of the country into Slovakia and the Czech Republic. [Page 4]

■ The Palestinian Authority has rejected a request by Israel to hand over suspects believed to be linked to the murder of three Israelis, saying that the request did not fulfill requirements for extradition agreed to by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The Palestinians have reportedly been linking the extradition requests to the release of prisoners held by Israel.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### El Al hopes for a smooth landing as the airline takes off on its own

By Michele Chabin

TEL AVIV (JTA) — To Jews around the world, the words "El Al" are synonymous with Jewish pride and Israeli ingenuity. The Israeli airline's blue and white fleet unabashedly flies the Star of David on its wings and steadfastly refuses to operate on Shabbat.

But El Al's days as a government-owned enterprise will soon come to an end.

Determined to promote privatization as a whole, and thereby create a more competitive free-market economy, the Israeli government plans to sell 51 percent of the airline, possibly by the end of the year.

"Privatization is one of the most important steps the government can take to improve the country's financial market," said Eitan Shapir, director of the Finance Ministry's privatization department.

"The government has already sold off several large business companies and this has made them more efficient and competitive," he said. "By getting out of the business sector, the government allows the private sector to determine a company's real worth."

During the past decade, the government has gradually sold off many of its largest institutions — with good results.

Some companies, such as the Israel Shipyard, were losing millions of dollars and the government was able to cut its losses. Others, such as Israel Chemicals, were sold at a profit.

Just how going private will affect El Al is far from certain. In 1994, as a government-owned company, the airline scored a healthy \$14 million in profits on more than \$1 billion in revenues, according to official figures.

### Expanded operations, improved services

This year's profits are expected to total between \$10 million and \$14 million, with \$1.5 billion in revenues.

During the past five years, in a bid to become more competitive with other airlines, the national carrier has expanded its operations and improved its services.

According to El Al spokesman Nachman Kleinman, the airline flew to fewer than 40 destinations in 1990. This year, the company expects to fly about 2.6 million passengers to 51 destinations.

In possibly its smartest move yet, El Al entered the Far East, the fastest growing airline market, in December 1992, with weekly flights to Beijing.

It also expanded service to Hong Kong; New Delhi; Bombay, India; Bangkok, Thailand; and Seoul, South Korea. A much-awaited link to Japan will get under way as soon as the Japanese government approves the venture.

Other factors have played a role in El Al's recent success. One is the company's realization that it cannot take its customers for granted. Recent fare wars have proved that price, not security, is the bottom line for many passengers.

Another key factor is Israeli wanderlust. Kleinman pointed out that at least 1.5 million Israelis will travel overseas this year.

"Not many countries can claim that one-quarter of their citizens go abroad every year," he said.

During the past few years, "Israelis who never went abroad started going to Turkey and other nearby destinations on inexpensive package deals," he said.

"Now they are experimenting with other, more far-flung destinations like Europe and the U.S."

And even though young, post-army-age Israelis are world-renowned travelers, with a special fondness for the Far East, many older Israelis are also now experimenting with visits to Thailand or India.

Kleinman said the peace process has not yet contributed to El Al's growth. However, he also said, "We do anticipate a lot more traffic once Israel signs a peace agreement with Syria or Saudi Arabia."

Such an agreement "will give a major push to travelers, particularly Americans, who were afraid to come earlier," he said, adding, "It will also

open up the market for travelers interested in seeing more than one country in the Middle East."

In addition to passenger travel, El Al operates a successful cargo service, which accounted for 25 percent of the company's revenues last year.

The company handles 60 percent of all cargo traffic at Ben-Gurion Airport.

Although the company is flying high at the moment, with market growth at 5 percent between Israel and the United States and 12 percent between Israel and the Far East, increased competition could put a big bite in investors' pockets.

Any potential buyer must weigh El Al's standing vis-a-vis other airlines.

According to a recent report in the Israeli business monthly Link Magazine, increased competition from other carriers has dropped the company's share of the Israeli market from about 50 percent in the early 1990s to 41 percent today.

The piece of the pie could even get slimmer now that World Airways, a U.S. carrier, and Air Canada recently launched service to Israel.

The magazine also said that even though El Al now "enjoys a monopoly on direct flights out of Israel to the Far East," once the anticipated flights of Thai Airways, Air India and Korean Airlines begin, profits may go to the competition.

The "Shabbat issue" is another concern.

Although no one at El Al would dare say so publicly, its Shabbat no-fly policy is costing the airline customers.

It is not clear how privatization will affect the policy.

A couple of months ago, when local newspapers reported rumors that El Al was prepared to fly on Shabbat as a means of attracting investors and customers, the government quickly denied the reports.

When asked about the future, Joseph Ciechanover, El Al's chairman of the board of directors, said that for now, El Al could not fly on Shabbat because that is the government's decision.

But, he added, "I don't know what will happen in the future."

Despite such challenges, many travel industry insiders believe that privatization will be good for El Al — and ultimately its customers.

"Once in the private sector, El Al will really be forced to compete with other carriers," said a Tel Aviv travel agent who asked not to be named.

"Competition tends to be a good thing for business."

Whether all 51 percent of the airline's shares will be floated simultaneously on the Israeli and world stock exchanges is still under discussion.

In April, a government ministerial committee decided to postpone privatization for six months, in part to give the volatile Israeli stock market some time to calm down.

"We are discussing all our options, including whether to accept tenders," said a Finance Ministry official. "But there is a big difference between discussion and decision." □

## **Police close Temple Mount to avert possible violence**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli police closed the Temple Mount complex to visitors Sunday, after angry Muslims confronted Jews who tried to visit the site.

The incident took place on Tisha B'Av, the Ninth

of Av, the day marking the destruction of the First and Second temples.

As thousands of Jews fasted and prayed at the Western Wall, about 200 wanted to visit the Temple Mount complex above it.

The mount, holy to both Jews and Muslims, was the location of the ancient Jewish temple. The Dome of the Rock, where the Koran says the prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven on a white steed, stands on the site today.

After riots on the Temple Mount in October 1990 resulted in the deaths of 17 Palestinians, police barred Jews from worshipping at the site during Jewish holidays.

Last week, however, the Israeli High Court of Justice ruled that Jews could tour the site, as long as there was no threat to public safety.

On Sunday morning, police made two attempts to escort Israelis onto the Temple Mount, but they were forced to leave when they encountered dozens of angry Muslims.

"We tried to get in, we were allowed to get in by the police," said Gadi Servitman, one of the four Israelis who tried to enter the Temple Mount.

"After I meter the Muslims came and pushed us back, screaming in Arabic something that means like, 'The visit is forbidden,'" he said.

Police officials said that after the first attempt by Israelis to enter the Temple Mount, area mosques began calling on Palestinians to go to the site to prevent Jews from worshipping there. Large numbers of Palestinian youths amassed at some of the other gate entrances to the mount and were prevented from entering by Israeli security forces.

Jerusalem Police Chief Arye Amit closed the Temple Mount to visitors after consulting with Police Commissioner Assaf Hefetz and meeting with members of the Waqf, the Islamic trust that runs the complex, and Palestinian official Faisal Hussein.

### **Damaging Israel's sovereignty**

"We received reliable information that hundreds of youth were getting ready to 'light up' the eastern part of the city if there were any visit," Amit said.

"That was when I decided to use the authority given to me by the High Court ruling to close the site to visitors."

Opposition parties condemned the action by the police.

In written statements, they charged the police with backing down and damaging Israel's sovereignty over the area.

They also called for the dismissal of Police Commissioner Hefetz and Jerusalem Police Chief Amit.

Police Minister Moshe Shahal backed Hefetz's claim that the police had used their best judgment to accomplish their main aim: to prevent Arab and Jewish bloodshed.

Gershon Solomon, who heads the Temple Mount Faithful movement, which seeks to restore the temple, said the day marked "the real battle for the Temple Mount."

"The decision of the Supreme Court was very clear: Jews, including the Temple Mount Faithful movement, will be today inside the Temple Mount," said Solomon, adding his regret that "a weak" government "decided to close the gates of the Temple Mount before the Jewish nation."

Ultimately, police allowed the group to walk up the ramp leading to the Mugrabi Gate, above the Western Wall, but not enter the Temple Mount. They stopped about 10 meters short of the gate, where they read from the Book of Lamentations. □

## **Peres criticizes Jews in U.S. who support settlers protests**

*By Uriel Masad*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After more than four days of turbulent demonstrations by Israeli settlers — and supportive protests in New York City — Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was exasperated.

He lambasted both the settlers and their American Jewish supporters.

"I don't understand American Jews. They want to sit in Brooklyn and defend Hebron and Shechem from there?" Peres said last week at a meeting here with Jewish journalists. The meeting took place on the day settlers declared a temporary halt to their protests until the end of the Tisha B'Av fast.

The settler demonstrations dominated Israeli headlines during a week marked by daily confrontations between Israeli security forces and the settlers.

In a massive display of civil disobedience, settlers occupied one West Bank hillside after another to underscore their unwavering opposition to any extension of Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank.

Israeli security forces, given stern orders by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to protect the rule of law, removed the settlers from the hillsides, jailing hundreds of them.

Some of the settlers compared their protests to the Palestinian uprising, the intifada. Similar rhetoric was used in the New York solidarity protests.

Asked about the New York demonstrators' threat to launch an intifada in New York, Peres brushed it aside with a smile. "They can start an intifada there, and let the American authorities deal with it," he said.

But Peres became more grim when discussing the demonstrators in Israel. "They are a group of people who are undermining the democratic system and the rule of law," Peres said. "This government is not only defending its own policies, but the very rule of law and the democratic nature of Israel."

He accused the settlers of "attempting to establish an alternative government." Peres said the government was open to dialogue with the settlers and that whenever they wanted to meet with Rabin or himself they would receive a positive response. "But they don't want a dialogue," he added. "They say, 'In order to preserve the unity of our people, you must do as we say.' This is not democracy."

The foreign minister also condemned settlers who were putting their children in the front lines during the clashes with security forces. "It's a terrible thing, bringing their children to the hills. To confront children with soldiers is scandalous," Peres said. "It's unfair to the children, and it's unfair to the soldiers. A 5-year-old child cannot understand what this is all about." □

## **Israeli chief rabbi issues call for prayer as traffic deaths rise**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Israeli traffic fatalities continue to rise at a shocking rate, one of Israel's chief rabbis has called on the country to seek spiritual help in cutting down the number of deaths on the road.

Chief Sephardi Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron called last week for mass recitations of the traveler's prayer to help reduce traffic fatalities. His announcement came as organizations for traffic safety urged the government to declare a state of national emergency on the roads.

More than 25 people were killed and 70 injured in road accidents last week. Since the beginning of the year, 404 people have died on the roads, an average of about 60 people per month. According to figures recently released

by the Central Bureau of Statistics, someone is injured in a traffic accident in Israel every 14.5 minutes.

The bureau also gave some additional, sobering statistics: Every two hours, a pedestrian is hit by a car; every two hours, a child is hurt in a traffic accident; every 16 hours, a person dies in a traffic accident.

Over longer periods of time, these numbers create a particularly troubling picture. The death toll on Israeli roads nearly equals the number of dead from all of Israel's wars: more than 18,000.

Earlier this year, the Masorti, or Conservative, movement in Israel issued a driver's prayer:

"Our God and God of our ancestors ... Help me to drive with care, to keep a proper distance ... to yield the right of way; with awareness, to stop in time."

The prayer was part of the movement's attempt to compile a new prayer book that would better reflect the realities of daily life in Israel.

Police officials, noting that many accidents involve youths who have been drinking, recently began a widespread campaign to discourage drinking and driving. □

## **Nazi's citizenship revoked; judge rules he lied about past**

*By Alissa Kaplan*

NEW YORK (JTA) — A federal judge in Philadelphia has revoked the citizenship of Jonas Stelmokas, an officer in a Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian battalion that assisted in destroying the Jews of that country during World War II.

The U.S. District Court stripped Stelmokas, 78, of his citizenship because when he came to this country in 1949, he concealed his involvement with the notorious battalion. The court said his 1955 naturalization as a U.S. citizen was "illegally procured."

Judge Jan E. DuBoise found that Stelmokas, a retired architect living in Philadelphia, voluntarily joined the 3rd Lithuanian Protective Detachment Battalion in July 1941, shortly after the German invasion of Lithuania. He served in the unit, known as the Schutzmannschaft, until he was transferred to the Luftwaffe in August 1944.

The battalion, whose members swore allegiance to Adolf Hitler, was under control of German Einsatzgruppe A, a mobile killing unit.

The decision is "an important victory in the government's comprehensive effort to identify and take legal action against those who helped realize Adolf Hitler's genocidal ambitions," said Eli M. Rosenbaum, director of the Office of Special Investigations, the Nazi-hunting arm of the U.S. Justice Department.

The OSI has successfully obtained the denaturalization of 52 Nazis and deported 44 of them from America.

The Stelmokas case is the first Nazi trial in the United States to make use of the "treasure trove" of Nazi documents in the former Soviet Union that became available to Western investigators because of the collapse of Communist rule in Eastern Europe, Rosenbaum added.

DuBoise also found that Stelmokas was commander of the detachment guarding the Jewish ghetto in Kaunas, Lithuania, at a time that Jews confined in the ghetto "were subject to extreme deprivation, brutality and arbitrary shootings" and that Stelmokas was "responsible for enforcing the confinement of Jews in such conditions."

In addition, the judge found that Stelmokas was on duty when his entire battalion took part in the so-called Grosse Aktion, or Great Action, in which Nazi documents record that more than 9,000 Jews in the Kaunas ghetto were methodically killed in a 24-hour period. The "action" was the largest single act of mass murder in Lithuania during World War II. □

## Summer camps in Slovakia vital to sustaining Jewish life

By Deborah Kazis

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (JTA) — For young Jews here, summer camps are the lifeline to deepening their identity and to sustaining contact with Jewish youth in the other half of the former Czechoslovakia.

Maintaining the connection is the Czechoslovakian Union of Jewish Youth, the only Jewish organization that did not split when the country divided in 1993.

For 10 days in July, some 50 Jewish students from Slovakia and the Czech Republic came together at a summer camp organized by the union in the central Slovakian town of Liptovsky Mikulas.

Every day, the youths swam, hiked and relaxed in the sun.

But they also worked with students from the Christian Union of Slovakia to reconstruct both the town's crumbling synagogue and an old church.

Once, 5,000 Jews lived in this town, filling its enormous ornate synagogue. Today, no Jews remain.

"Summer camps take on a great importance here because there is virtually no other form of Jewish education," said Fero Alexander, the executive director of Slovakia's Jewish community.

"The camps have a big impact on their Jewish identity."

Each year, the Czechoslovakian Union of Jewish Youth holds summer camps dedicated to repairing the Jewish community both spiritually and physically.

While the camps are taking place, the youths live in towns throughout Slovakia and the Czech Republic. As they clean and fix neglected synagogues and cemeteries, they learn about the Jewish history of these once-great centers of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

The students estimated that before the Holocaust, Slovakia's 100,000 Jews lived in some 220 towns and villages.

They believe that up to 800 Jewish cemeteries and 100 former synagogues still stand.

### Only Jewish journal

Now, the synagogues are often bakeries, warehouses and public schools, said the young members of the Czechoslovakian Union of Jewish Youth.

About 400 Jews from the ages of 15 to 35 make up the union, founded only five years ago. Almost two-thirds of the members are from Slovakia, the rest from the Czech Republic.

"We are not so big a group and we would like to stay together," said Andrea Haas, a young member of the union.

"It would seem very strange to separate just because our country did."

The youths organize holiday celebrations and seminars, and publish a newspaper, which has become the only Jewish journal in Slovakia.

The students do not know how long they will be able to stem the tide of history and remain united as their countries continue to grow apart.

Problems are quickly arising as the economic situation in the Czech Republic continues to improve far more rapidly than in Slovakia.

"If there would be a divorce — a split — I think it would be the start of the end of the Jewish youth here," said Tomas Stern, a 23-year-old medical student in Bratislava who was one of the founders of the union and its president for two years. "Separate unions just couldn't organize the events that we can organize together."

Of the 4,000 Jews in Slovakia today, "about 70

percent of them are over the age of 60," said Moshe Jahoda, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's representative in Slovakia.

The JDC supports many of the Jewish activities here.

Most of Slovakia's Jews were murdered in the Auschwitz death camp during World War II.

For those Jews who survived and remained, communism forcibly eradicated much of their Jewish identity and knowledge.

Every activity that helps the younger generation discover its Jewish heritage is a lifeline for the tiny community.

In addition to the camps organized by the union, other young Jews are enjoying Jewish activities in Slovakia this summer.

In a park in the center of Bratislava, Lubavitch Rabbi Boruch Myers and his wife, Chana, have recently finished running a summer camp they call "Gan Israel," or Garden of Israel.

Under the watchful eyes of two Slovakian police officers and camp counselors from England and America, 25 children from 3 to 13 years old played and learned about their Jewish heritage.

In the mornings they made challah and sang Hebrew songs.

In the afternoons they sailed on boats down the Danube River or took horse-and-buggy rides.

They also visited Bratislava's only remaining synagogue.

For many of the children, this was the first time they had ever seen a synagogue.

The American-born Myers, 31, came to Slovakia two years ago to be the rabbi of the Jewish community of Bratislava.

He and his wife are committed to settling here permanently with their four small children and helping the community to rediscover its Jewish heritage.

They run the camp in the public park next to their home.

"We see the camp as the foundation of all our educational activities," the Myers said.

The rabbi dreams of the time when his own children will no longer need to travel more than an hour each way to Vienna to attend a Jewish kindergarten — when there will once again be Jewish schools in Slovakia.

He has already started a small Sunday school and hopes to start a kindergarten in September.

"We decided that if there are five Jewish kids of kindergarten age we would try to make a kindergarten," he said. □

## Music festival riot inquiry leads police official to resign

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Negev district police commander resigned from his post after an internal police investigation found him responsible for the tragedy at a music festival last month in which three youths were crushed to death.

Yossi Avni tendered his resignation at a meeting last week with Police Commissioner Assaf Hefetz at the national police headquarters in Jerusalem.

Avni said after the meeting that even though he disagreed with the inquiry's findings that he was personally responsible for the police's mishandling of the event, it was his judgment that he should leave the post.

Three teen-agers, including one American, died and hundreds were injured during a riot at a rock festival in the Negev town of Arad on July 18. □