

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ A Jerusalem court indicted six Israeli border policemen on charges of beating Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority plans to give video cameras to Palestinians living near Israeli checkpoints to help document any abuse by Israeli soldiers, a top Palestinian adviser said. [Page 2]

■ Israel dispatched a plane carrying medical and technical crews to aid survivors of the crash off the Comoro Islands of a hijacked Ethiopian airliner. A total of eight Israelis — only one survived — were among the more than 175 passengers and crew. [Page 3]

■ Israel denied reports that it approved plans for the construction of new settlements on the Golan Heights. The denial came after the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported on the planned construction of some 900 housing units in three new Golan settlements.

■ Hundreds of Palestinians blocked the road leading to the Jewish settlement of Netzarim to protest a ban on Palestinians using the Gaza Strip road. Israeli army officers met with their Palestinian counterparts to demand that the Palestinians clear the road.

■ Israeli journalists helped to uncover the whereabouts of 150 suspected war criminals living in Canada. Their account, reported in The Jerusalem Post, described Canada as a "near-blissful refuge" for Nazis. [Page 2]

■ Pope John Paul II beatified two Austrian priests, Otto Neururer and Jakob Gapp, who died in Nazi concentration camps. Neururer, who was sent to Dachau and then Buchenwald, was the first Roman Catholic priest to die in the camps. Gapp, an outspoken opponent of the Nazis, was beheaded in Berlin.

■ A local Argentine judge ordered police to prevent a clandestine gathering of neo-Nazis over the weekend. Large signs were posted in the southern Argentine province of La Pampa hailing the "Nazi Summit of the Americas" and inviting locals to receive the "new Fuhrer." Flags bearing swastikas were also displayed.

World Jewish Congress poised to press Poland on restitution

By David Landau

OSLO (JTA) — Leaders of world Jewry are planning a frontal assault on the government of Poland at a conference here this week on the restitution of properties of Holocaust victims or their heirs.

The planned pressure on Poland comes as Swiss and Jewish leaders are negotiating to reach an accord on the mushrooming issue of Holocaust victims' claims against Swiss banks.

Sources at the conference, organized by the World Jewish Congress, said a deal could soon be struck under which Switzerland would hand over a sizeable lump sum early next year.

Mendel Kaplan, chairman of the WJC executive, said in an interview that the decision to hold this week's biannual meeting of the WJC leadership in Oslo was made seven months ago.

He said it came in recognition of what he described as Norway's forthcoming posture on making restitution for properties seized from Norway's Jews during World War II.

The Norwegian government set up a commission earlier this year to study the restitution issue. The commission is scheduled to give its report in March.

The looming attack on Poland comes after Jewish leaders received a letter this weekend from Polish Prime Minister Wlodzimierz Cimoszewicz that rejected a call from two Polish Jewish groups.

The Jewish groups wanted the restitution of pre-Holocaust Jewish communal property in Poland to be made to a foundation comprising world Jewish organizations and the small remaining Jewish communities in Poland.

Agreements to this effect have been negotiated in recent months with the governments of Hungary and Slovakia. Romania and Latvia have also expressed readiness to enter into relationships with a similar foundation.

Cimoszewicz's letter came in response to a memorandum from the World Federation of Polish Jews and the Association of Polish Jews in Israel.

It also came after Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski told Jewish leaders in New York during the summer that he looked forward to working with world Jewish groups on the restitution issue.

The organizations submitted the memorandum to the head of the Polish council of ministers, Leszek Miller, after his recent visit to Israel and his meeting there with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The memorandum demanded that legislation now moving through the Polish Parliament be amended to include mention that the restitution will be made to the foundation.

Cimoszewicz ignored this demand in his reply.

Instead, he said the existing Polish Jewish communities are "the only competent body in Poland to represent Jewish religious interests and to act as heir for the communal properties."

He wrote that there are nine such communities.

Charges of a vast underestimation

But Naphtali Lau-Levi, deputy chairman of the World Jewish Restitution Organization, a spinoff of the WJC, said in an interview that six of the nine supported communities are "in effect fictitious."

He said the prime minister's position effectively held Poland's Jews, most of whom are elderly, for "ransom."

The prime minister's letter said restitution would cover 1,000 cemeteries, 228 synagogues, 70 prayer houses and several dozen other communal buildings.

Lau-Levi said this was a vast underestimation of the total property, adding that the WJRO's records indicate that there are alone 7,000 synagogues to be covered in a future restitution arrangement.

Some 3.5 million Polish Jews perished in the Holocaust. According to the WJC, there are now some 8,000 Jews in Poland.

Meanwhile, Swiss government and banking officials are said to be ready to come up with a sizeable restitution sum even before the conclusion of ongoing investigations into the extent of unclaimed Jewish assets still being held in unnumbered Swiss bank accounts. Their readiness to move on the

issue comes after the WJC and U.S. officials have launched a steady barrage of accusations that Swiss banks have hidden behind their secrecy laws in an effort to block the return of assets belonging to Holocaust victims or their heirs.

It also comes after the WJC unearthed a series of recently declassified documents that it says proves that Switzerland, far from being neutral during the war, helped finance Hitler's war effort by laundering money for Nazi Germany.

In the wake of its disclosures, the WJC has called on Switzerland to make a full accounting of its financial role during the war.

Earlier this month, a probe by Swiss banks reported that it found little more than \$8,000 in unclaimed accounts possibly belonging to Holocaust victims.

Jewish officials counter that the total could reach into the billions.

Informed sources here said they expect ongoing informal negotiations with Jewish leaders to result in a "without prejudice" interim settlement by the Swiss government and banks early in 1997. □

Israeli reporters aid in finding accused war criminals in Canada

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — A private investigator from New York, working with two reporters, has uncovered the whereabouts of about 150 suspected war criminals living in Canada.

The disclosure came in a two-part series published in the Jerusalem Post that describes Canada as a "near-blissful refuge" for Nazis.

Posing as academics from a non-existent university in the Central American country of Belize, Steve Rambam and the two reporters made house calls on about 60 of the alleged war criminals.

The names of those they visited were furnished by the Simon Wiesenthal Center and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

In some cases, they had to examine property records and driver registrations in order to find the people.

But in others, they did no more than look up the names in the phone book.

Many of the people they found readily admitted their involvement with groups that committed wartime atrocities.

At least one, a British Columbia resident whom the Canadian government intends to deport, admitted his direct involvement in the murder of Jewish men, women and children.

The Canadian branch of the Simon Wiesenthal Center long ago provided the government with a list of hundreds of suspected war criminals.

But Canada's Justice Department has so far initiated denaturalization or deportation proceedings against only eight and expects to launch another four cases before March.

Said Irving Abella, chairman of the war crimes committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress: "It's incredible that one person working with meager resources had little trouble tracking down and getting confessions from alleged Nazi war criminals in Canada, while the Canadian government has done very little for 50 years."

"I hope it embarrasses the country," Abella said of the disclosures in the Jerusalem Post.

The newspaper published the two-part story last Friday and Sunday.

"I hope it embarrasses the government. I hope it embarrasses the judiciary," Abella added. □

Israeli border police indicted on charges of beating Arabs

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Six Israeli border policemen were indicted this week on charges of beating Palestinians.

At the Jerusalem Magistrates Court, David Ben Abu and Tsahi Shmaya were charged with aggravated assault and abuse of power.

The judge extended their detention and was to rule later on whether to place them under house arrest or hold them until the end of legal proceedings.

The incident, which occurred several weeks ago, was recorded on video by a Palestinian who happened to be nearby. The video was broadcast worldwide last week.

The tape showed scenes of the two soldiers kicking and beating six Palestinians who had attempted to enter Israel at a roadblock in northern Jerusalem without work permits.

Yisrael Sadan, the commander of the border police, has acknowledged that Palestinians had submitted complaints of beatings by border police and that the incident involving Ben Abu and Shmaya was not the worst.

In another case, four border police were charged with aggravated assault and abuse of power in an incident that occurred five months ago.

According to the charge sheet, Eran Aldi of Arad, Benny Deri of Kiryat Bialik, Asaf Shahar of Tirat Carmel and Meir Elbaz of Kiryat Ata, were on patrol in the Jerusalem area when they detained a Hebron resident who was in Israel without a permit.

They covered his head and drove him to the Ramot forest on the outskirts of Jerusalem, where they beat him unconscious.

A passerby later found the Palestinian, and helped him receive medical care.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority plans to give video cameras to Palestinians living near Israeli checkpoints to help them document any abuse by Israel Defense Force troops, a top Palestinian adviser said.

In another recent incident, border police at a roadblock in southern Jerusalem were attacked by 10 Palestinians. Police said the Palestinians, who were apparently drunk, became violent when the border police asked to see identification papers. □

Canada eyeing hater's Web site

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — The Canadian Human Rights Commission is probing complaints that Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel, a Toronto resident, is using his Web site to promote hatred on the Internet.

Although Zundel's Web site is based in California, the commission has jurisdiction over the site because it has authority over all telephonic communications in Canada, said Maxwell Yalden, the commission's chief.

"The signal's being picked up here, and where it's originating doesn't make any difference," he said. □

Gift won't leave teachers speechless

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's 130,000 schoolteachers will be thanked for their efforts this year with cellular phones instead of apples.

The teacher's professional union and the Education Ministry have announced that the portable phone will be their annual gift. The total cost of the presents: more than \$800,000. □

Israeli technology attracts American commercial giants

By Lesley Pearl

Jewish Bulletin of Northern California

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — Microsoft Corp. and US West Interactive Services recently purchased an unspecified stake in a video company with offices in both Israel and Palo Alto, Calif., propelling the fledgling corporation to international status.

Formed in 1995, VDOnet is already a leader in Internet video technology. It provides the tools and services for individuals and organizations to view and broadcast video via computer and to converse on video-telephones.

US West Interactive Services, part of US West Media Group — which recently merged with Continental Cablevision to serve 26.2 million homes — will use VDOnet technology with its current cable and video capabilities to expand its services.

Similarly, Microsoft will use VDOnet technology to support its own programs for audio business conferencing, live audio and video transmission, and to “complement [each other’s] efforts and play a vital role in the future of network communications,” said John Ludwig, a Microsoft vice president in Seattle.

Asaf Mohr, VDOnet president and chief executive officer, said that through this partnership, viewers will be able to watch a child’s football game live from across the country or sit in on a lecture series from London.

Already, 150 organizations, including the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, are using VDO’s technology for their sites on the Internet’s World Wide Web. In April, AIPAC screened major speeches from its annual policy conference in Washington, which could then be accessed with a computer and modem.

AIPAC’s “video Web” was seen by people in 29 countries. In the three weeks after the conference, the site received 60,000 hits. Viewers from San Francisco to Kuwait watched speeches by President Clinton and former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. In addition, AIPAC has also “Webcast” its meetings at the national Democratic and Republican conventions.

‘Virtual front-row seat’

“We wanted to make our events accessible to the widest possible audience. We wanted to give people a virtual front-row seat at our convention,” said Toby Dershowitz, director of media relations for AIPAC.

“We wanted to be accessible to our members and activists and the wider audience interested in U.S.-Israel relations.”

Similarly, PBS-TV has screened some of its programs for rebroadcast on the Internet.

Unlike most downloading capabilities on the Internet, which can take several minutes to display a 30-second clip, VDOnet’s technology speeds up and refines the quality of motion video viewed via computer and allows for live screening.

“In simple terms, this is the first time you can do this live with a regular modem,” said Mike Brogan, publicist for VDOnet.

VDOnet’s technology self-adjusts based on a particular computer system’s speed and capacities. This feature means that VDOnet’s systems will not become obsolete as computers gain speed and capabilities.

VDOnet’s products include VDOLive Video Server and Personal Server for video broadcasting and VDOPhone for use with regular phone lines. Research and development takes place outside Tel Aviv, while U.S. marketing is based in Palo Alto.

Shlomo Shalev, of the Israeli economic affairs

office in Santa Clara, Calif., said VDOnet is an example of the potential for Israeli-American business collaboration.

“VDOnet made it by themselves,” Shalev said, adding that his office did not play a role in VDOnet’s merger with Microsoft and US West. Both VDOnet principals, Mohr and Gideon Barak, have done business in Silicon Valley, he added, and “know their way around.”

For Israeli entrepreneurs who do not have established connections in the United States, Shalev acts as a matchmaker between start-up companies and venture capitalists. “I couldn’t take credit for VDOnet’s success,” Shalev said. “We’re just trying to help other companies do the same thing.” □

Sole Israeli survivor saved others in African air crash

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli passenger who was tossed into the sea during the weekend crash of a hijacked Ethiopian airliner said he managed to rescue a woman and baby who also were on the plane.

When the plane hit the ocean Saturday off the Comoro Islands, “I felt a powerful shaking,” Lior Fuchs, 23, told Israel Radio. “Water started gushing into the plane. Somehow, I don’t know how, I managed to get out of the plane.”

Fuchs, a resident of a moshav in the northern Negev, said he swam over to a woman and baby and freed them from the wreckage before the three got in a boat.

Seven other Israelis were on the jet, which crashed off the Comoros, an Islamic country on a group of islands off Mozambique, after it ran out of fuel. At least 55 people of the more than 170 aboard survived the crash. By Sunday, more than 70 bodies had been retrieved.

Israel dispatched a plane carrying medical and technical crews to help locate survivors and identify the dead.

An Israeli Foreign Ministry official dispatched to the Comoros to find out the fate of the seven other Israelis said he could not confirm reports of a second Israeli survivor. The other Israeli passengers were identified as: Shraga Bar Nissna, Amram Ben David, Gadi Levy and Yehuda Soroka, all employees of Israeli Aircraft Industries; Yechezkel Raz and Eliezer Levkovitch, two Israeli businessmen; and Tel Aviv student Ya’acov Braun.

Israel does not have diplomatic ties with the Comoros.

The plane, which had originated in New Delhi, had made a stopover in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where as many as 11 hijackers apparently boarded. The hijackers demanded that the plane fly to Australia, according to reports.

But the plane ran out of fuel near the Comoros.

“At some point, the pilot got on the loudspeaker and said that one of the engines had shut down, and that the second one would in a few minutes,” Fuchs said.

Fuchs, a former paratrooper who was on his way home to Israel after a post-army, six-month tour of Africa, said it was clear to him that they would be making an emergency landing. “A friend and I decided to get up and go to the emergency exits to prepare to help people off after the emergency landing,” Fuchs said. “When we hit the water, there was a powerful shaking, and water started gushing in,” he said. “The plane broke into three parts.”

Fuchs said his life preserver came off during the crash, probably saving his life.

“It freed me of the straps, which were strangling me. I somehow managed to get up to the surface. If I had it on, I might have been stuck in the wreckage.”

Fuchs said he never saw his friend, or the other Israelis, after the crash. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Fearful but proud, Jews thrive in tiny Thai community***By Eve Rosenzweig-Kugler*

BANGKOK, Thailand (JTA) — Myron is unequivocal about what it is like to be living here.

"It's terrific to be a Jew in Thailand," he says, noting that his is the oldest Jewish family living permanently here.

A successful engineer in his mid-50s, Myron agreed to talk about Thailand's Jewish community as long as his real name was not used.

He says he has nothing but praise for the Thai people and their government.

But his fear of being publicly identified as a Jew goes back to the mid-1970s, when members of the Palestinian terrorist Black September group seized the Israeli Embassy in Bangkok.

The Thai government successfully negotiated the terrorists out of the embassy, but 20 years later, Myron, who serves as the leader to the tiny Jewish community here, still fears being targeted by extremists.

There are now fewer than 20 Jewish families living here permanently, he says.

Most came here from Iran by way of Israel; there are also a couple of Jewish families from Syria and Lebanon.

These Sephardi Jews began settling in Thailand in the 1950s and work as gem dealers, trading in the rubies, sapphires and jade that are mined in Thailand and Burma.

Myron's family is Ashkenazi. He relates how his father fled Russia in 1920, made his way to Italy and managed for a few months to make ends meet there.

Then an English engineering firm offered his father a permanent job if he would relocate either to Argentina or Thailand. A few months after he moved to Bangkok, his wife followed him.

Both of Myron's parents became naturalized citizens of Thailand, and all four of the couple's children were born in Bangkok and are Thai citizens.

Thai citizenship was a huge advantage during World War II, when the Japanese occupied Thailand, he says.

"New Zealanders, Australians, American and British men, women and children were interned, but we were not troubled," Myron says.

Three synagogues

Myron can look forward to his family's continued presence here.

Both his sons, who studied overseas, married Jewish women and brought them back to Thailand.

Myron, who earned a graduate degree in engineering from Yale University, says there are about 250 Jews living here, including expatriates from Europe, the United States and Israel who work in the country.

Many more Jews pass through Thailand each year, including businessmen and tourists — among them some 50,000 from Israel alone, according to Thai government records.

Bangkok has three synagogues. The oldest is Beth Elisheva, started in 1966 and named in honor of Elizabeth Zerner.

Hers was the first recorded European Jewish family to settle in Thailand.

Her father came here from Romania in 1890; her mother arrived in 1900.

Elizabeth Zerner, who spent all her life in Thailand, died childless in Bangkok and left her considerable fortune to the Jewish Association of Thailand.

Beth Elisheva is located in Bangkok's upscale Sukhumvit section.

A large Star of David on the face of the 3-story building is clearly visible from the street.

The building houses the synagogue, a mikvah, a meeting and recreation room and the office and living quarters of the resident rabbi, Yosef Kantor.

The rabbi, a member of the Lubavitch movement who came here three years ago, is trained as a poultry shochet, enabling him to slaughter and provide kosher chickens to members of the community.

During the past two years, two Bar Mitzvah ceremonies were held at Beth Elisheva for the sons of an American expatriate family.

The second synagogue, Even Chen — Hebrew for "precious stone" — is located in the center of Bangkok and serves the city's gem traders, along with the tourists who stay in the high-priced hotels nearby.

The third synagogue, Ohr Menachem in Chabad House, is in the city's Banglampoo section and caters to the thousands of backpackers who stay in the inexpensive hostels in that area.

Christianity is a recognized religion but Judaism is not, according to Israeli Ambassador Mordechai Levy.

To the majority Buddhist population of Thailand, "Jews are irrelevant, and Judaism is of interest only as the origin of Christianity," he says.

But Myron, who describes himself as a historian of Thai Jewry, says, "All religions can function here. There is no animosity."

Myron identifies himself as Thai, but hastens to add that it has always been easy to be a Jew in Thailand.

"Ever since I was a child, I remember that you could walk into our house and you knew it was a Jewish home.

"You could smell my mother's Jewish cooking. Her dining room was Jewish and the candles dominated the Sabbath table." □

B'nai B'rith Canada urges change in name of station*By Bram Eisenthal*

MONTREAL (JTA) — Jewish leaders here are attempting to change the name of a metro station that they say is named after a notorious racist and anti-Semite.

The Lionel Groulx metro station, one of the many entry points to Montreal's famed Underground City, is named for an abby and religious leader in Quebec who earlier this century spouted anti-Semitic diatribes during church sermons and in the pages of the French-language daily *Le Devoir*.

"Whatever Groulx's other accomplishments, he led and inspired a variety of nationalism that was ethnocentric, anti-Semitic and xenophobic," B'nai Brith Canada wrote in a letter to the executive committee of the Montreal Urban Community.

In 1901, Groulx founded the nationalist Catholic Action group.

Nearly a century later, Quebec is still riven by disputes over whether the province should separate from the rest of Canada. The letter said Groulx's "brand of nationalism has little in common with civic or territorial nationalism proclaimed by today's younger adherents to Quebec nationalism, and they will hopefully understand the pain and anger of our community."

B'nai Brith recommended that the name of the station be changed to commemorate the late Cardinal Paul Emile Leger, a Quebec cleric "whose life work was committed to the underprivileged of all races and religions." □