



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ An Israeli soldier's shooting attack on Palestinians in Hebron did not stop Israeli and Palestinian negotiators from working on the final details of an agreement on the West Bank town. Still, an essential meeting between Israeli and Palestinian leaders to sign the accord appeared to remain elusive. [Page 2]

■ State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns urged Americans in Israel and the West Bank to exercise caution in public areas, avoid travel on public buses and avoid gathering at bus stops. The State Department said it had "indications of an increased likelihood of terrorist attacks over the next two weeks."

■ Israel's Knesset approved a \$58 billion budget that includes both huge spending cuts and more funds for Jewish settlements in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. The 1997 budget was passed in a vote of 60-42. [Page 2]

■ Israel denied Syrian accusations that it was behind a bomb attack on a bus that killed nine people in Damascus.

■ Vandals spray-painted swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans on the walls and shutters of shops and banks in Mentana, a small town near Rome where no Jews live. [Page 4]

■ The Jewish state will establish a model farm in India, according to a newly signed agreement between the two nations. The move occurred during Israeli President Ezer Weizman's visit to India.

■ Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert and Palestinian officials were among the guests of the inauguration in the Israeli capital of a newly decorated rotunda in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Christianity's holiest site.

■ Workers at Israel Bonds offices across the United States went on strike because of issues concerning wages, pensions, medical benefits and paid time off. Officials at the agency's New York headquarters said the strike was not affecting the sale of bonds.

## International teen contest promotes study of Jerusalem

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Who divided the Old City of Jerusalem into four distinct quarters, and why? Which Jerusalem street is named after a British monarch?

According to the latest Israeli census, how many Jews, Muslims and Christians reside in the nation's capital?

Those who do not have this information at their fingertips — sorry, referring to reference materials is not permitted — were obviously not among the thousands of Jewish teen-agers, in Israel and abroad, who spent the past 18 months cramming for the Jerusalem 3000 International Quiz.

The quiz was sponsored by the Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education of the Jewish Agency for Israel and World Zionist Organization, the Jewish National Fund and the Jerusalem Municipality.

The contest came at the end of 18 months of activities and festivities marking Jerusalem's 3,000th anniversary.

Ninety of the finalists, who proved their knowledge of Jerusalem's history and culture in qualifying rounds around the world, were in Israel this week to compete in the competition.

Although only one competitor — Atara Hoffman, 15, of Jerusalem — received top honors, the rest agreed that winning a trip to Jerusalem was reward enough.

To prepare the teens for the quiz, Israeli educators created a series of reference materials and distributed them, in translation, to Jewish schools, youth groups and synagogues in more than 30 countries.

In many cases, the 13- to 18-year-olds decided to carry out additional research, consulting everything from ancient Jewish texts to Jewish sites on the Internet.

In acknowledgement of their achievement, the contestants received a VIP welcome upon their arrival in Jerusalem. The teens were personally welcomed by President Ezer Weizman and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert.

While it sometimes has been difficult for the teens to find a common language, many of the participants said meeting Jewish kids from countries as diverse as Peru, India, Portugal and New Zealand was fun and inspiring.

"It's been very exciting to be with such a big group of Jewish students," said Selin Saylag, a 16-year-old from Turkey. "We share the same thing, sing the same songs, pray the same way, even though we're from totally different countries.

"It's made me proud to realize that wherever they are, Jews are maintaining their Jewish identity."

### 'In New Zealand, there aren't many Jews'

This sentiment was shared by 14-year-old Georgia Stone of New Zealand.

"It's amazing to see people from so many different backgrounds having so much common ground," Stone said. "Our common denominator is that everyone here can discuss Jewish history."

Coming from a country with a Jewish population of some 5,000, Stone added, "It's great to meet other Jewish kids my own age. In New Zealand there aren't many Jews and it's pretty hard socially."

Tamara Jaye, a 16-year-old South African, said, "The best part of the trip has been visiting all the places I learned about. It definitely means more to visit a historical or holy site after you've studied its history.

"When I read the street signs, which are named after important people or events in Jewish history, I recognize the people and the period."

It was the third trip to Israel for Yehuda Hausman, 14, of Los Angeles.

"The things I've learned about Jerusalem have enhanced the pleasure of visiting the sites," Hausman said.

"You walk around the Old City walls and know who built them. You walk through the four quarters and you know their history. It's a really exciting way to learn history."

Even Adi Harari, a 14-year-old from Israel, said she had learned a great deal about her country's capital by studying its history. "I live in Haifa,

so I didn't know all that much about Jerusalem," she said. "I'm not religious, but it's impossible to ignore the fact that Jerusalem is so old and so sacred. I've learned a lot about our past, and I now know Jerusalem a lot better."

David Harman, who heads the joint Jewish Agency-WZO education authority, said he and his colleagues had been extremely gratified by the overwhelmingly positive response to the Jerusalem study project.

Having 90 finalists competing in the quiz "is secondary to the fact that thousands of students all over the world have been involved in the process," he said. "Every student, not just the finalists, benefited from the experience."

Thanks to the project's success, Harman and his fellow educators hope to organize a similar quiz in honor of two important Jewish milestones: the 100th anniversary of Zionism, which is being marked in 1997, and the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel, which will be celebrated in 1998. □

### **Top Israelis, Palestinians aim to conclude Hebron pact**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Despite intensive contacts between negotiators on a Hebron agreement, an essential meeting between Israeli and Palestinian leaders appeared this week to remain elusive.

The two sides continued talking, even after an Israeli soldier shot seven Palestinians in Hebron, saying that he wanted to thwart an agreement on redeploying Israeli troops from most of the West Bank town.

Israeli and Palestinian leaders condemned the attack and appealed for calm.

Leaders from both sides had voiced optimism earlier in the week about meeting their self-imposed New Year's Day deadline to conclude the agreement on transferring much of Hebron to Palestinian self-rule.

However, as of Thursday, it was unclear whether Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat would have met to initial an accord, even if the shooting in the Hebron market had not occurred.

A hoped-for Wednesday summit was put off, in part because of Netanyahu's need to take part in a crucial Knesset vote on the 1997 state budget.

But with the budget ratified early Wednesday morning, officials said they were still grappling with outstanding issues related to the Hebron accord.

Negotiators had concluded all security matters specifically relating to a Hebron redeployment, Israel Radio reported.

Quoting political sources, the report said the two sides agreed on the gradual opening of Shuhada Street, near the Jewish quarter. The street was closed for security reasons.

Negotiators were leaving the question of security at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, a holy site to both Jews and Muslims, to Arafat and Netanyahu to decide.

Wrapping up an agreement, therefore, seemed to be delayed not because of issues specific to Hebron, but because of differences surrounding the next phase of the peace process.

Arafat's deputy Mahmoud Abbas, who also is known as Abu-Mazen, met with Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai Wednesday and Thursday.

Abbas said the sides had still not come up with a timetable for three further Israeli troop redeployments in rural parts of the West Bank that are called for under the 1995 Interim Agreement.

A commitment to implementing the further

redeployments would be included in a side letter prepared by the United States and attached to the Hebron accord. It also would include a commitment by the Palestinians to fulfill their obligations under the accords.

Netanyahu has said Israel would carry out the first of the three further redeployments six weeks after the Hebron agreement is signed.

"There are no outstanding issues unless the Palestinians raise a new issue or demand the reopening of an issue that has been concluded," said David Bar-Illan, a senior adviser to Netanyahu.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said the United States believes that "an agreement is there for the taking," but Israel and the Palestinians "have got to make the decision."

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, whose mediation efforts spurred the flurry of negotiations during the past two weeks that brought a Hebron agreement seemingly within reach, took part in talks at the residence of U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk and traveled to Gaza for consultations with Arafat.

In Hebron on Thursday, the atmosphere was tense but quiet.

Large numbers of Israeli troops were stationed in the market area, where an off-duty Israeli soldier had opened fire Wednesday, wounding seven Palestinians before other Israeli soldiers subdued him.

Noam Friedman, 22, of Ma'aleh Adumim, which is outside Jerusalem, did not serve in Hebron, but was in an administrative unit.

Friedman, a religious Jew, said he felt compelled to stop the Hebron redeployment from being carried out.

Reports that Friedman had suffered from psychological problems in the years before his compulsory army service also sparked debate over why he was drafted and issued a weapon. A Petach Tikva court on Thursday extended Friedman's detention for 15 more days.

Police also disclosed that another soldier, a friend of Friedman's, was suspected of being an accomplice in the act. Police said Yuval Jibli, 21, of Jerusalem, allegedly colluded with Friedman, and failed to prevent him from carrying out the criminal act. □

### **Knesset passes 1997 budget of \$58 billion in vote of 60-42**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Knesset this week approved a \$58 billion budget for 1997, much to the liking of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Parliament passed the budget Wednesday in a 60-42 vote. It includes huge spending cuts and more funds for Jewish settlements.

The budget cuts \$2.2 billion from existing programs. It allocates some \$9.5 billion for defense, \$5.5 billion for education and \$3 billion for health. It also includes more than \$11 million for Jewish settlements.

There was no real controversy in the coalition over the budget itself, in contrast to the vote earlier in the week on the related economic arrangements bill.

Netanyahu, who had submitted the budget to the Knesset, acknowledged that some battles lie ahead.

Addressing a meeting of industrialists Thursday, the Israeli premier said the government's next challenge is the implementation of the approved spending cuts.

In addition, the lawmakers agreed to reduce benefits to discharged soldiers and delay putting a longer school day into practice. But they rejected a Treasury plan to cancel a half-point tax credit for married, working women. The Treasury will now need to find an alternative source to fill its gap of some \$90 million. □

## New Jewish voices slated to add to Washington debate

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — New voices will soon be heard amid the bustle of Jewish organizational activity inside the Washington Beltway.

The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council is set to establish a Washington presence here in early 1997. The group's officials say the new office will provide a central address in the nation's capital for NJCRAC constituent agencies and serve as a vital conduit of information.

The move is something that the local community relations councils "have been discussing for many years," said Lawrence Rubin, executive vice chairman of NJCRAC, the umbrella organization of more than 100 local and 13 national agencies.

"They have felt that the effectiveness of the system requires that the grass-roots community be represented in Washington through the NJCRAC," Rubin said.

The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America also has plans to set up shop in Washington, albeit a bit further down the road. The move, say O.U. officials, will afford the modern Orthodox movement an opportunity to take on a more visible role in the public affairs arena.

Jewish observers say the focus on Washington operations reflects a simple reality.

"Jewish interests depend to a significant extent on public policy," said Hyman Bookbinder, a longtime Jewish activist and former director of the American Jewish Committee's Washington office.

"You don't have to have an office in Washington to effectively promote the Jewish community's public policy interests," he said. "But obviously a presence here that allows for direct contact" with the three branches of government "is helpful."

### Concern about expansion

Other Jewish organizations with Washington operations include the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League, the Council of Jewish Federations, B'nai B'rith, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and Agudath Israel of America, which represents fervently Orthodox Jews.

NJCRAC's expansion into Washington is one element of the umbrella organization's larger plan to enlarge the Jewish communal world's national public affairs body.

The plan has met with resistance from some of NJCRAC's national member agencies. The AJCommittee, the AJCongress and the ADL have expressed concern that such an expansion would create a fourth full-service agency.

"It's unnecessary to duplicate the services already being offered by three national community organizations who have offices in Washington," said Phil Baum, executive director of AJCongress.

At a time when the Jewish community "should be trying to concentrate resources, this seems to be moving in the opposite direction," he said.

After months of contentious debate, NJCRAC and the three defense organizations reached a compromise last summer concerning the nature of NJCRAC's Washington operation.

NJCRAC agreed to consult with the organizations on all legislative matters and pledged not to engage in activities on Capitol Hill without prior agreement with the defense agencies.

"The NJCRAC underscores its commitment to

complement, not compete with, the ongoing Washington operations of the national agencies," NJCRAC said in a strategic planning report issued in June.

In addition, NJCRAC said it would not attempt to "represent itself as a definitive address" in Washington for the organized Jewish community.

Instead, the office will mainly serve as the eyes and ears for the New York headquarters. The office will also represent NJCRAC on national coalitions formed in Washington, work in close cooperation with the Washington office of the CJF and serve local community relations councils seeking to send delegations to Washington.

Rubin believes that NJCRAC's presence will help fill a void in those areas. The agencies now operating in Washington "have their own priorities, their own needs and their own limitations," he said.

As a Washington player, NJCRAC officials say, the organization will continue to advance its public affairs agenda, with an eye toward such policy concerns as immigration, social welfare, civil liberties, the separation of church and state, campaign finance and the Middle East peace process.

"A structure to provide services on the multi-issue agenda could advance the interests of the community in a way analogous to what" the American Israel Public Affairs Committee "has been able to provide on the Israel agenda," Rubin said.

He added that NJCRAC is not trying to become a "domestic AIPAC," noting that policy is ultimately determined by NJCRAC's member organizations.

Although NJCRAC's historical mandate has primarily centered around helping the community coordinate consensus on public policy issues, some Jewish observers fully expect NJCRAC to use its Washington operation to begin establishing a more independent and influential role in the public affairs arena.

"I would be surprised if it didn't evolve in that direction," said one Jewish observer who has watched the umbrella group closely over the years.

NJCRAC's new office will be housed with one of the defense agencies or in CJF's office, group officials said. They say they hope to have it open in time for NJCRAC's annual meeting, to be held in mid-February in Washington.

### Debate on euthanasia, food labeling

Meanwhile, the Orthodox Union is now laying the groundwork for its Washington operation. Mandell Ganchrow, the group's president, said it would probably be 1998 before the office can be opened, pending funding.

The O.U. is already expanding its role in the public policy sphere, engaging in debate on issues ranging from euthanasia and abortion to television ratings and kosher food labeling.

The group will complement some of the activities of Agudath Israel, which has been vocal on a wide range of religious-freedom issues.

But Ganchrow said the O.U. would have a broader agenda than Agudath Israel, pursuing matters related to the U.S.-Israel relationship and working in cooperation with other segments of the organized Jewish community where possible.

On certain issues, including domestic concerns such as church-state separation, the O.U. often takes a different position than other Jewish organizations.

"We cannot be a complete full-service organization in the field of public policy unless we have a Washington office," Ganchrow said.

"If we're going to do the job properly, you can't keep running back and forth between New York and Washington." □

## U.S. gives landmark status to Lower East Side synagogue

By Yaakov Arnold  
New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK (JTA) — For Naomi Groob-Fuchs, the memories came flooding back.

“We used to have the most beautiful cantors and choirs,” said the 72-year-old, her face lighting up.

“Right over there is where I used to sit with mother,” she went on, pointing to a section of the balcony in the women’s gallery.

Groob-Fuchs, her two daughters and three great-grandchildren were on hand last month when the Eldridge Street Synagogue celebrated becoming a National Historic Landmark.

Some 600 synagogue members and their descendants, contributors, politicians and others gathered on the narrow street in front of the 109-year-old synagogue.

Fifty years ago it was Groob-Fuchs’ grandfather, Morris Groob, who collected money from the peddlers and store owners of the Lower East Side neighborhood to buy the \$10,000 mortgage on the synagogue.

Some 2,000 structures nationwide have been designated national historic sites. The Eldridge Street Synagogue is the only Eastern European synagogue and the only Orthodox one to receive such recognition. The honor comes after tireless work by the Eldridge Street Project, a not-for-profit group that was incorporated 10 years ago to restore and preserve the main sanctuary.

“This brings a legitimacy to our efforts,” said Renee Newman, program and development associate for the project.

The landmark designation comes as a new phase of the restoration begins. The project has spent \$3 million stabilizing, securing and rebuilding the synagogue’s foundations and exterior and fixing leaks.

### Symbol of hopes and dreams

The next phase will involve the completion of structural work and the installation of new heating, cooling and lighting systems. Completing the aesthetic work, such as the brass, stained-glass and paint finishes, is the final phase. Project coordinators expect the next two phases to cost \$5 million to \$8 million.

Project volunteers hope the new status will bring more than the 20,000 visitors who come annually.

Judge Paul Bookson, the synagogue president, hopes that it will attract some of the young Orthodox couples that are moving to the Lower East Side.

To some, designation of the oldest synagogue built by Eastern European immigrants is seen as recognition by the federal government of the national significance of the shul. “This recognition puts the government’s imprimatur on the synagogue,” Bookson said.

To others, the distinction is a marker to the large Jewish community that flourished here around the turn of the century. To them the synagogue looms as a symbol of the hopes and dreams of that community.

Look around at the signs and posters written in Chinese, said Roberta Brandes Gratz, president and founder of the Eldridge Street Project.

“Close your eyes” and imagine the time “when Chinese was replaced by Hebrew,” when the melodies of the seamstresses above the hum of the sewing machines were in Yiddish, she said. “Only the immigrant group changed; the hopes and aspirations remain the same.”

For Roslyn Schwartz, 79, the honor “shows that Jewish things are significant.” She still has some memory of the Torah dedication she participated in when her uncle donated a scroll. She was a young child at the time. “All

I can remember is the procession,” said Schwartz. “I remember walking under the canopy with the Torah.”

Added Dorothy Kaufman, who once scrubbed the synagogue walls: “Anytime a Jewish temple is recognized, it means that we will remain.”

The synagogue recognition “is the preservation of Jewish religion, people and culture,” she said. □

## Oldest Jewish newspaper in Chicago prints last issue

By Douglas Wertheimer  
Chicago Jewish Star

SKOKIE, Ill. (JTA) — After 85 years, the Sentinel, a weekly serving the Chicago Jewish community, has ceased publication.

The end came quickly and quietly without prior notice to either employees or readers.

The last issue, dated Dec. 26, contained no indication that the publication would not continue. The final issue was produced less than six months after longtime editor and publisher Jack Fishbein died at the age of 83.

His widow, Lillian Fishbein, had informed readers at the time of her husband’s death that plans had been made to continue the publication. An outside consultant was to run the Sentinel, Lillian Fishbein wrote, and she planned to continue her involvement in it.

But early last week, employees were told not to return to work.

“I think she just got tired of it,” one Sentinel employee said. Fishbein could not be reached for comment.

When the Sentinel began publishing in February 1911, Chicago was dominated by Yiddish newspapers. The Sentinel, which described itself as a magazine, managed to outlast most of its competitors, including the Midwest Jewish Week, which folded in September 1995.

The Sentinel’s circulation declined from 7,763 copies in 1986 to 5,416 in 1996.

Chicago is now served by the JUF News, founded in 1938 and published by the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago, and by two independent publications — the Chicago Jewish Star, founded in 1991, and the Chicago Jewish News, founded in 1994. □

## Neo-Nazis hit Italian town with anti-Semitic graffiti

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Vandals on New Year’s Eve spray-painted swastikas and racist and anti-Semitic slogans on the walls and shutters of shops and banks in Mentana, a small town near Rome where no Jews live.

The incident came only a few days after vandals last weekend desecrated tombs in the Jewish part of one of Rome’s main cemeteries. Both incidents are believed to be the work of neo-Nazi skinheads or other fringe groups.

“For Mentana, it’s not the first time,” Mayor Luigi Cignoni told the Rome daily *Il Messaggero*. “Something like this happens more or less every year, but never to such an extent as this.”

Cignoni said the vandalism was done by a “fringe of disaffected people who are against shopkeepers and banks because, according to them, they are the symbol of the accumulation of money and of capitalism.” No Jews live in Mentana, “so the anti-Semitic slogans are without meaning. It is pure political hatred,” he said.

The cemetery desecration was condemned by Italy’s leadership and the Vatican. Athos De Luca, a Green Party senator, introduced a motion in Parliament calling for greater security at Jewish cemeteries and for a new law mandating severe penalties for cemetery desecration. □