



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reconciled differences with the Yisrael Ba'Aliyah party on the eve of a scheduled no-confidence vote, assuring that the Knesset would not topple the government. Meanwhile, Labor Party leader Ehud Barak called on coalition members to quit the government.**

■ **The Supreme Court reversed its 12-year-old ruling banning public school teachers from providing remedial instruction at parochial schools. In a decision hailed by Orthodox Jewish groups, the high court ruled 5-4 in *Agostini vs. Felton* that the practice does not violate the constitutional separation of church and state. [Page 1]**

■ **Israel may move a soldier's memorial after acknowledging it was erected on Palestinian land. The monument at the Gush Katif intersection in the Gaza Strip, which honors a soldier killed by sniper fire last year, sparked tensions between Jewish settlers and Palestinians [Page 3]**

■ **Thousands of Jewish Holocaust survivors could be eligible for additional compensation from Germany. An accord between the German government and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany eases the criteria for receiving payments. [Page 4]**

■ **Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat said his security forces detained a woman last week who was planning to carry out a suicide bombing in the Jewish state. Israel has accused Arafat of not sufficiently preventing militant groups from launching terror attacks.**

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu requested a meeting with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in an attempt to revive the stalled peace negotiations. Arafat reportedly responded by asking the Israeli leader to implement the existing accords.**

■ **Israel's tourism industry could lose \$500 million this year. Approximately 2.1 million tourists are expected to visit Israel this year, down from 2.4 million in 1996, according to a spokesman for the Israel Hotels Association.**

NEWS ANALYSIS

Court ruling on remedial classes could benefit day-school students

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In a church-state case watched closely by the Jewish community, the Supreme Court has ruled that public school teachers can offer remedial classes at religious schools.

The move is expected to provide better access to remedial help for thousands of low-income Jewish students attending parochial schools across the country.

It also could have direct implications for the ongoing legal dispute concerning the Kiryas Joel public school district in Orange, County, N.Y., which was created as an outgrowth of the case decided this week.

However, not everyone in the Jewish community is cheering Monday's high court ruling that reversed its 12-year-old decision banning public school teachers from offering special needs instruction at parochial schools.

The court, ruling 5-4 in *Agostini vs. Felton* — one of several weighty decisions expected to come down in the court's last week of session — said the practice does not violate the constitutional separation of church and state.

Some Jewish legal activists and church-state watchdogs called the court action a setback for church-state separation.

While noting that the decision recognizes the need for safeguards to protect against government entanglement with religion, they expressed concern that the ruling could leave the door open for other forms of federal aid to religious schools.

But in the Orthodox community, where many have maintained that Jewish schools have suffered under the earlier ruling, the decision came as a welcome development.

David Zwiebel, general counsel and director of government affairs at Agudath Israel of America, which represents the fervently Orthodox, called the decision "a victory for people who are in the trenches of education and a victory for common sense."

The 1985 ruling stemmed from a New York City case that centered around the question of how to provide remedial education for parochial school students without violating the constitutional separation of church and state.

Whether or not these students are entitled to the services has never been questioned. Federal law mandates the use of public school funds to provide remedial instruction and guidance counseling for eligible students from low-income families regardless of where the children attend school.

The 1985 ruling, known as *Aguilar vs. Felton*, did not ban public school teachers from assisting parochial students, but said such assistance could not take place in sectarian schools. As a result, the instruction could only be offered in public schools, in mobile classrooms, by computer or even on school buses.

To comply with the decision, public school systems across the country have spent hundreds of millions of dollars transporting students, leasing sites for instruction and purchasing equipment.

Adverse impact on students

Citing an adverse impact on students and exorbitant costs, the Clinton administration, New York City and parents of some parochial school children had asked the justices to reopen the 1985 case.

Writing for the court majority, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor declared the 1985 ruling was "no longer good law."

She said the program was not invalid under the Constitution, noting that New York City had sufficient safeguards to prevent against improper church-state entanglement.

Outside the Orthodox community, many Jewish organizations, including the Reform movement, which operates its own day schools, were troubled by the decision.

The American Jewish Congress, speaking on behalf of several Jewish, Christian, education and civic organizations, had filed a friend-of-the-court brief, urging the justices to uphold the basic principles of the 1985 ruling.

The groups said, however, that the decision could be modified to permit federally funded remedial instruction in parochial schools provided that safeguards were in place to guarantee the separation of church and state.

These groups said they were pleased that the court left the safeguards in place, but they were concerned about the potential implications of the decision.

After the Supreme Court ruled on Monday, Marc Stern, co-director of AJCongress' legal department, said he was most troubled by a statement the court made on an issue that was not before it.

He said the court's opinion indicates that public school teachers — in addition to offering remedial instruction — might be able to offer other supplemental courses, including some that are part of a parochial school's ordinary curriculum.

Such a move, Stern said, would undermine a major pillar of church-state separation — government's prohibition against assuming responsibility for the costs of sectarian education.

On the dissenting side, Justice David Souter charged that the ruling authorizes "direct state aid to religious institutions on an unparalleled scale."

Under the majority's logic, he wrote, state government will be free next "to assume, or assume payment for, the entire cost of instruction provided in any ostensibly secular subject in any religious school."

Praising the Supreme Court

But echoing the view of many in the Orthodox day school community, one Jewish educator was quick to praise the Supreme Court's decision.

"It will make a tremendous difference," said Leya German, principal of the Be'er Hagola Institute, the largest day school serving New York's Russian Jewish community.

Between 10 and 15 percent of the school's roughly 1000 students receive remedial instruction.

German said compliance with the 1985 decision has regularly forced students to leave school premises, often on cold winter days, to receive instruction — a process that she said has proved highly "disruptive."

Other students have found themselves learning in isolation, sitting in front of computers or listening to teachers via audio feeds.

"The children miss the fact that there is no teacher that they can physically see and relate to," German said. "They still need the bond of a person, to have someone who can smile at them."

Meanwhile, legal activists involved in the Kiryas Joel dispute have been watching the Agostini case closely.

It was the 1985 decision in *Aguilar vs. Felton*, as the case was then called, that prompted the creation of a special school district for Kiryas Joel.

Kiryas Joel is an Orange County, N.Y., village whose residents are all Satmar Chasidim.

For years, learning and developmentally disabled children from the community had been provided with state-funded, special educational services by the nearest public school district, Monroe-Woodbury, whose teachers came to the Satmar yeshivas.

After the 1985 decision barred public school teachers from entering parochial schools, New York enacted a law creating a special school district for the Satmars' benefit.

The Supreme Court struck down the law as unconstitutional in 1994, paving the way for continuing legal battles over the issue.

While the immediate impact of this week's Supreme Court decision for the pending Kiryas Joel case is not yet clear, legal observers say it effectively rolls the

clock back more than 12 years, restoring the situation to where it was before the entire dispute began. □

Italians look to Jewish history to promote tolerance in society

By Ruth E. Gruber

VENICE (JTA) — The leader of Italy's Jewish community and the mayor of Venice urged this week that the Jewish experience be used to help combat increasing racism and intolerance in Italy.

The president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, Tullia Zevi, and Venice Mayor Massimo Cacciari spoke Sunday at the opening ceremony of the canal city's second International Festival of Jewish Culture.

The weeklong festival includes concerts, performances, exhibitions and lectures as well as guided tours of Venice's 600-year-old Jewish cemetery and the historic ghetto that is the heart of Jewish life in the city.

The festival, said Zevi, "comes at a moment of profound change in which there is the tendency to dehumanize the 'other' and thus render him an object."

Zevi is considered an important moral voice in Italy. She was named recently to a high-level government commission formed to investigate charges that Italian peacekeeping soldiers in Somalia committed human rights abuses against local civilians.

She said that the Jews' history as a scorned and discriminated people makes it especially important for Jews to help combat discrimination against other minorities.

"Today in Europe Jews are no longer the metaphorical outsiders," she said. Jews have a duty to help smooth out the difficulties in today's Europe, she added.

"If Europe does not learn to be multiethnic," she warned, "it could lead to tribal-style conflicts among extremists."

Cacciari stressed that the festival was an important way to teach non-Jews about a different heritage.

"We need activities that help broaden culture," he said.

He referred to recent actions by northern Italian separatists, including an incident in Verona in which teenagers distributed leaflets outside a school calling for teachers who came from southern Italy to be sent away. □

Firm in Italy establishes fund to honor Holocaust survivors

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — An Italian insurance company will establish a \$12 million fund to honor its policy holders who were murdered by the Nazis, but it will not pay out money to individual survivors.

The fund set up by Assicurazioni Generali will support cultural and social initiatives and institutions. It will also establish an information center that will furnish heirs of Holocaust victims who may have held pre-war policies with whatever documentation is available.

In a statement released Tuesday, however, the firm reiterated its position that it had no obligation to pay out individual policies because its Eastern European operations, and responsibility for payments, were taken over by post-World War II Communist governments.

It is not known how many Holocaust victims held Generali policies. The company, which was founded by Venetian Jews in 1830, had extensive operations throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

Generali recently has been involved in negotiations that led to its investment in an Israeli insurance company, Migdal. The statement Tuesday linked the decision to set up the new fund to the Migdal deal. □

Israel may move memorial to fallen soldier in Gaza Strip

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel is considering moving a soldier's memorial after acknowledging that it was erected on Palestinian land in the Gaza Strip.

The soldier, Yehuda Levy, was killed by Palestinian sniper fire during riots in September. The riots were sparked by the opening of a second entrance to an archaeological tunnel in Jerusalem. Sixteen Israeli soldiers and at least 69 Palestinians were killed in the violence that erupted in the West Bank and Gaza.

The erection of the memorial at the Gush Katif intersection in Gaza sparked tensions between Jewish settlers and Palestinians earlier this month. Palestinians said the memorial should be removed because it was on Palestinian land.

The conflict was exacerbated by an ongoing dispute between Jewish residents of the Morag settlement and Palestinians over the settlement's boundaries. During the past few weeks, the two sides have been caught in a cycle of belligerent actions.

Palestinians pull down the perimeter fences put up around the settlement's green houses. The settlers immediately reinstall them.

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai visited Morag Sunday and pledged to try to resolve the problem. During unrest on Sunday night, one Palestinian was wounded when Israeli soldiers fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse protesters near the settlement.

Israeli defense chief warns Palestinians to cease violence

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM(JTA) — Israeli-Palestinian tensions in Hebron remain high after more than a week of violent clashes in the West Bank town.

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai accused the Palestinian Authority Sunday of failing to quell last week's riots. He warned that continued unrest would result in Palestinian casualties.

Scores of Palestinians were wounded in eight days of clashes with Israeli security forces. The clashes occurred along the boundary between the enclave of about 450 Jewish settlers and the Palestinian section of Hebron, home to approximately 100,000 Arabs.

Speaking during a tour of Hebron, which was quiet Sunday, Mordechai said the Palestinian leadership was not doing enough to calm the situation. "Unfortunately, the Palestinian Authority is not doing what it has to do" to stop the violence, he said.

Israel handed over control of some 80 percent of Hebron to the Palestinians in January. The Palestinian Cabinet issued a terse statement last Friday, which charged that Israeli settlement activity had provoked the unrest.

"The arming of Jewish settlers and the protection offered to them by Israeli soldiers while they continuously attack Palestinian landowners will not leave our masses any choice but to confront these aggressions using all available means," said the statement. Tensions have escalated in the absence of ongoing peace talks. □

Two women married by rabbi in Tel Aviv wedding ceremony

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Reform rabbi married two women in a Jewish wedding ceremony in Tel Aviv this week, an Israeli newspaper reported Thursday.

The wedding came as Reform and Conservative leaders met with government coalition members in an effort to resolve a dispute over a conversion bill that would codify the Orthodox monopoly on conversions.

Rabbi David Ariel-Yoel, of the Harel synagogue in Jerusalem, performed the ceremony at a Tel Aviv catering hall, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

The two women arrived at the hall, each wearing an evening dress and carrying a bouquet of flowers. Guests held a tallit over the couple to serve as the chupah.

The couple signed a ketubah in the presence of witnesses, and exchanged vows and rings.

At the end of the ceremony, Ariel-Yoel invoked the priestly blessing.

Ariel-Yoel told Ha'aretz that it was the first time he had performed a wedding for a lesbian couple.

He said it was important that Jewish couples mark their union with some sort of religious ceremony, even if they choose not to do it with Orthodox rabbis.

"In my eyes this was certainly a wedding, and if...these women ever choose to separate, they will have to do this through a ceremony with religious context."

Ariel-Yoel said he was aware of two other same-sex wedding ceremonies that had taken place in Israel, and of numerous ones abroad.

The Reform movement in Israel has not taken an official stance on the issue of same-sex marriage ceremonies.

The movement's rabbinic council has been holding deliberations on the matter over the past two years and has yet released its final conclusions.

Non-Orthodox weddings in Israel are not recognized by law.

Ha'aretz reported that a number of Reform leaders in Israel expressed concern that the wedding could hurt efforts to reach a compromise on the conversion bill. □

Israeli police ready to question lawmakers on Russian mafia ties

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli police have drawn up a list of seven Knesset members they plan to question in connection with their investigation into Gregory Lerner, who is suspected of involvement in organized crime in Israel and Russia.

Investigators presented Knesset Speaker Dan Tichon with the list of the Knesset members on Sunday.

Although police refused to name the Knesset members, Israeli media reported that they were from the Likud, Labor and Yisrael Ba'Aliyah parties.

Police will probe whether Lerner, also known as Zvi Ben-Ari, made contributions to any of the parties or politicians.

They also want to know whether the contributions were given in the form of bribes.

Former Labor Secretary Nissim Zvilli told police last week that Lerner had offered to broadcast Labor campaign ads on Russian television stations picked up in Israel during last year's national elections, according to Israeli media.

Zvilli said the party, after consulting with its legal adviser, turned down the offer.

Absorption Minister Yuli Edelstein of Yisrael Ba'Aliyah said Lerner contributed some \$100,000 to an immigrant organization headed by Natan Sharansky before he founded Yisrael Ba'Aliyah.

Lerner is suspected of bank fraud and possible involvement in organized crime killings in Russia. A Russian prosecution team traveled to Israel this month in connection with the investigation. □

Germany agrees to increase payments to some survivors*By Deidre Berger*

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Thousands of Jewish Holocaust survivors could be eligible for additional compensation from Germany.

Under a recently negotiated agreement, qualified survivors could receive about \$290 a month.

The accord, reached between the German government and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, eases the criteria for receiving such assistance.

Those who previously received up to \$20,230 in compensation from the German government can file a claim to obtain the additional payments.

Monthly payments previously were restricted to survivors who had received less than \$5,780 in German compensation.

The money comes from a special hardship fund for Holocaust victims set up in the 1990 German unification treaty.

The criteria for the monthly payments have been often criticized by both German and Jewish groups.

To qualify to receive the \$290 monthly payment, needy survivors must prove that they spent at least six months in a concentration camp or at least 18 months in a ghetto or in hiding in Germany or Eastern Europe.

Children who were separated from their parents can file claims if they lived under a false identity for at least 18 months.

Those who lived in a Western European country at the time of persecution are not eligible because Germany paid reparations to those countries after the war.

Complicating the situation is the fact that survivors who live in Eastern Europe have never received German compensation and are not eligible for any hardship funds. This issue is at the center of a growing dispute between the German government and Jewish organizations.

The Claims Conference estimates that at least 20,000 severely persecuted survivors live in Eastern Europe. Many of them are impoverished and cannot treat physical ailments that stem from mistreatment during World War II.

The German government has refused to make individual payments to Jewish survivors in these countries, saying it cannot afford the expenditures after decades of paying compensation to Israel and survivors living in the West.

Bonn government officials also are concerned that payments to Jewish survivors could prompt claims by millions of non-Jewish victims of Nazi oppression living in those countries.

Meanwhile, representatives of the Claims Conference and the American Jewish Committee continue to discuss the issue of compensation for Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe with senior German government officials, but no solution is in sight.

In May, the AJCommittee ran an advertisement in The New York Times to call attention to the problem. □

Slovak Jews protest official support for Holocaust manual*By Randi Druzin*

PRAGUE (JTA) — Slovak Jewish leaders have accused their government of being sympathetic to the Nazi puppet regime that governed during World War II.

The state's sympathies are evident in its support of a teachers manual that romanticizes the lot of the country's Jews during the war, said B'nai B'rith and the Association

of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia in a joint statement issued June 19.

The organizations expressed "deep indignation and concern" over the recent comments of Vladimir Hagara, spokesman of the governing Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, who said that the manual is a "scholarly work that deserves the admiration and respect of all Slovaks."

Hagara's statement was a response to the controversy that erupted earlier over the distribution of the manual in Slovak schools.

The manual, "History of Slovakia for Slovaks," was written by Padua University Professor Milan Durica.

It states that during school holidays, children detained in an internment camp near Bratislava "could spend a period outside with Jewish families living in freedom."

It also says that "Jewish doctors cared for the health of the camp's residents."

"Dentists were even able to offer gold teeth," the text states, "which the great majority of the Slovak population could not afford."

Frantisek Alexander, executive director of the Association of Slovak Jewish Communities, called the manual "offensive."

He also said it "contains a completely outrageous proposition — that the Jews actually enjoyed themselves during World War II."

Some 70,000 Slovak Jews were killed during the war with the assistance of the Nazi puppet regime.

The European Union, which financed the publication and distribution of 90,000 copies of the manual, and the Slovak Ministry of Education, which included the manual on a list of publications for which it sought funding, have accused each other of being responsible for the undertaking. □

Hungarian restitution moves to compensate Catholics, Jews*By Agnes Bohm*

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Two recent decisions by Hungarian lawmakers regarding World War II restitution involve the country's Jewish community.

The Hungarian government recently agreed to give \$55 million in property and cash to the Vatican.

In addition to the return of Catholic religious assets, the bill, which will be signed into law June 20, expands religious-based schooling and social services.

Jewish leaders cautiously welcomed the agreement.

"The agreement seems advantageous for all other religions, including the Jews," said the president of the Federation of the Hungarian Jewish Communities, Peter Feldmayer.

Feldmayer explained that at a meeting with Prime Minister Gyula Horn, Budapest agreed to extend the financial support of the state to Hungary's main religious communities, including the Jews, for the next 10 years.

The Jewish community is also asking that \$5.5 million worth of religious property be returned.

In a related development, the Hungarian Parliament modified a law to include Jews among the people who can apply for compensation for forced labor service during World War II.

During the war, Jewish men between the ages of 18 and 48 were forced to serve as laborers in support of the German war effort.

Earlier legislation only gave compensation to those who fought in the Hungarian army or those who were victims of communism.

The Hungarian Parliament set an Oct. 15 deadline for applications. □