



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israeli police broke up a liberal Jewish prayer session near the Western Wall to avoid a confrontation between the egalitarian worshipers and fervently Orthodox Jews.** The event took place on Tisha B'Av. [Page 1]

■ **Israel's minister of religious affairs said he would resign rather than implement the Israeli High Court of Justice's order to seat a Reform representative on the Netanya religious council.** The court ruled last week that Joyce Brenner, a representative of the Reform movement and member of the Meretz Party, be appointed to the local council. [Page 1]

■ **Israeli and Palestinian security officials met in the West Bank city of Ramallah where they discussed security issues with U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross.** Ross is expected to return to Washington in a few days. It is unclear whether U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will travel to the region, as was previously planned.

■ **A man wounded in the July 30 double suicide bombing in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market died of his injuries, bringing the number of deaths to 14.** Eli Adorian, 49, was married and had four children.

■ **Australia's Jewish sports organization began its own investigation into the Israeli river that its athletes fell into when a bridge collapsed at the Maccabiah Games last month.** A fourth Australian athlete has died, apparently from an infection. [Page 2]

■ **An Israeli army officer who made disparaging remarks about Israeli Druze was reportedly dismissed.** The officer said Druze are allowed to serve in the Israeli army so that they will not join terrorist organizations.

■ **Closing arguments have been heard in the deportation hearing of an alleged war criminal living in Illinois.** The decision in the hearing against Juozas Naujalis, who allegedly participated in Nazi-sponsored murder in Lithuanian and then lied about his activities in order to enter the United States, is expected by Sept. 15.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israeli police force liberal Jews from prayers near Western Wall

By Michael S. Arnold

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The showdown between fervently Orthodox and liberal Jews at the Western Wall plaza this week is the latest sign of the growing struggle between the two groups to define the nature of the Jewish state.

As the Tisha B'Av holy day began Monday evening, fervently Orthodox men began trying to shout over the prayers of about 200 men and women worshiping together in a specially designated area at the entrance to the Western Wall plaza, a couple hundred yards from the wall itself.

Most fervently Orthodox Jews find such egalitarian prayer groups offensive.

Anxious to avoid a confrontation with the thousands of fervently Orthodox men milling about the plaza, police, braced for confrontation, quickly broke up the non-Orthodox prayer group and herded them forcibly through security gates at the entrance to the plaza.

Then, shoving and swearing, the police forced the group another hundred yards down a driveway leading to the Dung Gate out of the Old City, as the Conservative Jews sang a Hebrew prayer calling on God to make peace in the heavens and within the nation of Israel.

"They're symbolically, and more than symbolically, driving us out of the gates of Jerusalem," said Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center.

"Even in the former Soviet Union, Jews can pray in peace. To be excluded from the most important Jewish place in the world gives us some perspective on the issues. This isn't about freedom of worship, this is about where Israel is going."

On a range of issues — from conversion to local religious councils to the type of prayer permitted near the Western Wall — Orthodox and liberal Jews are struggling to determine whether religious life in Israel will continue to be dominated by strict adherence to Orthodox Jewish law or whether various interpretations of Jewish custom will be accepted.

"Until now, the haredim controlled the religion in Israel," Ya'akov Dahan, a member of the Eda Haredit, the haredi community's governing organization, said as he observed the liberal Jews.

Now Conservative and Reform Jews "are trying to get into the country, too. We don't know how to react to it."

Pelting liberal Jews with excrement

The reactions of the fervently Orthodox have taken mainly two forms.

One is legal: fervently Orthodox parties in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition introduced one bill this year that would cement into law an Orthodox monopoly on conversions performed in Israel and another that would give the entire Western Wall plaza the status of an Orthodox synagogue.

They also have promised to pass legislation preventing Reform and Conservative Jews from serving on the local councils that regulate much of religious life in Israel, from marriages and burial to kosher certification.

The minister of religious affairs, Eli Suissa, said he would resign this week rather than follow a recent High Court of Justice decision upholding the appointment of a Reform woman, Joyce Brenner, to the religious council in Netanya.

The other reaction verges on violence.

On the Shavuot holiday in June, haredim pelted a group of men and women worshipers with human excrement.

In an effort to avoid a repeat of those events, some leading haredi rabbis had put up posters in the Jewish Quarter asking people to refrain from violence.

Still, the possibility of violence prompted the country's Reform organizations to avoid the wall plaza Monday, choosing to conduct their egalitarian prayer service elsewhere.

But Conservative leaders said they felt the only way to claim their right to pray freely was by exercising it. Although the service at the Kotel

was organized by the Conservative movement, some Reform Jews, including Regev, participated.

Monday's confrontation may be just the latest clash between the groups, but it is perhaps the most poignant.

Tisha B'Av, a day of mourning, commemorates the destruction of the Jews' two ancient temples as well as a host of other calamities that supposedly happened on this date. According to tradition, the Second Temple was destroyed nearly two millennia ago because of senseless hatred among Jewish factions.

"My Judaism means every bit as much to me as a Conservative Jew as it does to them as ultra-Orthodox," said David Breakstone, consoling his weeping teen-age daughter, Elisheva.

"Even after 2,000 years, I see that the same hatred is still very much a part of our people." □

Fourth Maccabiah athlete dies, raising questions about pollution

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A fourth Australian has died as a result of the bridge collapse at the opening ceremonies of last month's Maccabiah Games.

Warren Zeins, 56, died in Israel of complications from an infection caused by ingesting polluted water in the Yarkon River, according to officials at Sheba Hospital.

The legal issues stemming from the July 30 tragedy could be just beginning. The president of Maccabi Australia, Tom Goldman, has just returned from Israel with water and soil samples. He has commissioned independent tests on the samples and is reportedly considering suing Israeli authorities if an investigation indicates that the water toxins caused the death of some of the athletes.

The deaths — and the 10 Australian athletes still in serious condition, reportedly as a result of ingesting water from the Yarkon — could also shed light on the issue of neglected environmental pollution in Israel's bodies of water.

Zeins was admitted to the hospital's intensive care unit four weeks ago in critical condition.

His condition improved slightly a day after his admission, but began deteriorating about three days later.

Hospital officials said Zeins' system was unable to overcome infection caused from ingesting water from the Yarkon, which they said had a high bacterial level.

Two Australian athletes were immediately killed and hundreds of other participants at the Maccabiah Games were injured when a bridge collapsed at the Ramat Gan stadium, plunging scores of people into the river below.

The two initial fatalities were Gregory Small, 37, and Yetty Bennett, 50, both of Sydney and both members of the 10-pin bowling team.

Elizabeth Sawicki, 47, died 12 days later of lung complications that hospital officials attributed to contaminants in the river water.

A week after the collapse, a public commission found that the accident was caused by a chain of failures involving the bridge's planning and construction.

Police questioned Ramat Gan Mayor Zvi Bar last week in connection with allegations that the municipality had failed to properly supervise the bridge's approval.

The deaths of Sawicki and Zeins have prompted medical officials to analyze water samples from the river.

The river has been tested for heavy metals, which were initially thought to have caused their deaths.

But lab tests conducted in Israel found that the river did not contain enough to be harmful to humans.

Officials have sent water samples to laboratories in the United States, where tests for organic matter will be conducted.

Officials at the Environment Ministry and Yarkon River Authority have ruled out contamination from organic pesticides as a cause for the deaths. They said the product used was environmentally friendly and in low concentrations. □

French court places travel ban on alleged World War II criminal

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — A French court has imposed a pre-trial travel ban on former French Cabinet minister Maurice Papon, who is alleged to have ordered the deportation of more than a thousand Jews while an official in France's World War II Vichy regime.

A court in Bordeaux, where the trial is due to start Oct. 6, ordered Papon, 86, to hand over his passport and keep the authorities informed of his whereabouts.

But days after the ruling was issued, Papon, who will be tried for crimes against humanity, had not yet delivered his passport to justice officials.

The court order had been requested by the state prosecutor and by Arno Klarsfeld, who along with his father, famed Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld, is one of several lawyers representing 36 plaintiffs in the case.

Arno Klarsfeld applauded the ruling.

"For a long time, he thought the case would be thrown out, but nothing worked for him," he said.

"This is a minimal measure, but it seems normal that Maurice Papon, who is accused of deporting Jewish children, be prevented from fleeing legally."

The court ruling came as a blow to Papon, who has enjoyed freedom of movement since legal proceedings were first filed against him 15 years ago.

One of Papon's lawyers, Marcel Rouxel, said he feared his client is being made a scapegoat for the wartime Vichy regime's collaboration with the Nazi occupiers.

"I fear that the prosecutors and, apparently, the powers that be, want to put Vichy in the dock, and that Papon is to be tried as the sole living incarnation of that era," Rouxel said.

Legal proceedings against Papon, which were first undertaken in 1981, were delayed by successive French governments in the hope that Papon would die before a trial took place that would recall an era many French people would rather forget.

As a result of a ruling by France's Supreme Court in January, Papon must now face trial for ordering the deportation of 1,560 Jews, 223 of them children, to Nazi death camps when he was secretary-general of the Bordeaux region's government during World War II.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court said Papon knew that "the arrest and deportation of Jews to the east would inevitably lead them to death," adding that his office always "sought to ensure maximum efficiency in carrying out anti-Jewish measures."

The court also said Papon often displayed unwarranted zeal by providing Nazi authorities with details about French Jews before he was asked for the information.

The charges against Papon include being an accomplice to kidnapping and murder, carrying out arbitrary arrests and perpetrating inhuman acts.

Papon has denied the charges against him, saying that he used his position in the Resistance to save Jews. Papon reportedly joined the Resistance movement in 1943.

After the liberation, Papon went on to an illustrious postwar career, serving as police chief of Paris between 1958 and 1967, then as budget minister in the French Cabinet during the 1970s.

His wartime activities became known after a 1981 newspaper article detailed his past. □

Jewish family in Alabama sues, claiming religious discrimination

By Faygie Levy

NEW YORK (JTA) — The American Civil Liberties Union has filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of a Jewish family in rural Alabama claiming that local school officials have violated their children's right to freedom of religion.

The lawsuit is the latest in a series of church-state issues that have plagued the state.

The suit, which was filed last week, alleges that over a period of several years, the three school-age children of Wayne and Sue Willis were the targets of anti-Semitic attacks, proselytizing and ridicule, some of which was directed at them from Pike County school officials.

Among the claims in the suit is that during a prayer service a school official physically forced down the head of one of the children. Another child allegedly was assaulted and called anti-Semitic slurs. He was also told by a school vice principal to write an essay on "Why Jesus loves me," according to the lawsuit.

The youngest child was told during an assembly that students who did not accept Jesus as their savior would go to hell. The child had nightmares for weeks.

"Every day that I send my children to Pike County schools, I wonder if I am sending them into a war zone," Sue Willis wrote in papers filed with the court.

"I have asked school officials how I can teach my children to be tolerant human beings and not bigots when they are subjected to outright religious persecution and bigotry in school."

The parents initially took their complaints to the school's superintendent.

According to the ACLU, the parents were told that the harassment would stop if the family converted. One teacher allegedly told one of the children that if "parents will not save souls, we have to."

The Willis' children are the only Jewish children in the 2,400 student Pike County school district, according to Pike County School Superintendent John Key.

After several years of inaction on the part of the school district, the family turned to the Anti-Defamation League. According to Jay Kaiman, Southeast regional director of the ADL, his office had originally hoped they could resolve the matter quickly.

Governor supports prayer in the schools

But an ADL investigation found that there was a "culture of problems in the school system that didn't seem to be going away," Kaiman said in a telephone interview.

Kaiman said this incident, coupled with the rhetoric from Alabama Gov. Fob James on school prayer, is "very disturbing."

James supports school prayer in public schools.

A 1993 Alabama law stated that voluntary student-initiated prayers without administration interference were legal. But in response to a lawsuit filed against two Alabama school districts, U.S. District Court Judge Ira DeMent struck down the law.

While one of the districts named in that suit has halted student-initiated prayer, DeKalb County has refused to comply with the ruling. James has sided with DeKalb County.

In another church-state dispute, James supports a judge's battle to keep a plaque of the Ten Commandments in his courtroom. James has said he would send out the National Guard if anyone attempted to remove the display.

Even though James believes that students should be allowed to pray in school, he expressed his concern over the allegations made by the Willis family.

"If any part of what is alleged in this lawsuit is correct, it is absolutely unacceptable," he wrote in a statement.

For their part, school officials say they have handled every complaint that was reported to them.

"Each time I received contact from the parents, I asked the principal to investigate and submit findings," said Key, the Pike County superintendent and a defendant in the lawsuit.

Key said he could only recall one specific complaint from the Willis family.

According to Key, the Willis' children were told by school officials they could not wear a Star of David pin to school because it was a gang symbol. But after the matter was relayed to him, Key said he told the children they could wear the pins.

Key expressed doubt over whether many of the incidents alleged in the suit actually occurred. It "seems a little far-fetched for that to be occurring," he said, but added that he would "not discount anything."

Olivia Turner, executive director of the ACLU of Alabama, said her office "fully believes" what the Willis' children are saying.

The Willis family is not suing for monetary damages. Rather, they want to ensure that their children will not be harassed and will be allowed to practice their own religion.

They are also asking for a halt to activities at the school that violate the separation of church and state.

A trial date has not been set. □

Lithuanian vandals desecrate site of 16th-century cemetery

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas has ordered police and security forces to investigate the desecration of a Jewish monument in the Baltic nation's capital of Vilnius.

Last Friday, vandals scrawled swastikas and spray-painted graffiti on a monument marking the site of Vilnius' oldest Jewish cemetery.

The cemetery was founded in the early 1500s and was destroyed by the Soviet authorities in 1950.

The desecrated monument bears an inscription indicating that the 18th-century spiritual leader of Lithuanian Jewry, Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Shlomo Zalman, also known as the Vilna Gaon, was buried in the cemetery.

Commemorations are planned for September to mark the 200th anniversary of the death of the Vilna Gaon, a renowned commentator on the Torah and Talmud.

After the desecration, leaders of Lithuanian ultranationalist groups believed to be connected to the act received warnings from the Lithuanian Security Service.

But leaders of Lithuania's Jewish community doubt that those responsible for the vandalism will ever be found.

Last month, another Jewish monument in Vilnius was desecrated.

In that incident, vandals destroyed a just-built monument marking the site from which the last inmates of the Vilna Ghetto were deported to death camps in 1943. About 100,000 Jews were killed in the ghetto.

On the eve of World War II, Lithuania had about a quarter of a million Jews.

Ninety percent of Lithuania's Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Lithuania's Jewish community now numbers about 5,000 out of a total population of 3.7 million.

According to Ilya Lempertas, a Jewish community activist in Vilnius, vandals have targeted several non-Jewish monuments during the past two years. Police have not arrested the perpetrators in any of the cases. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Arab and Jewish interns forge relations far from the Middle East***By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — What if the heads of Jewish and Arab American organizations were to come together once a week over lunch or dinner to engage in heated discussions, bat around ideas and get to know each other?

Some would call the idea ambitious. Others might dismiss it as pure fantasy.

Jonathan Kessler, executive director of the Middle East Insight Policy Forum, believes such gatherings may be possible one day.

He's already laying the groundwork.

This summer, he brought together Washington-based interns from Jewish and Arab American organizations, think tanks and government offices for a series of roundtable discussions.

The discussions addressed a variety of issues related to the Middle East peace process.

More than 100 interns — most of them college students — took part in the forums, which were clearly targeted at the next generation of policy-makers and public opinion leaders.

Most of the interns who participated were college students.

"We have no doubt that these people who interact with each other as students will interact when they're in positions of influence, maybe even in positions of enormous influence," Kessler said.

Sessions provided a safe environment

The lunchtime gatherings, which took place over more than a month, included presentations from a variety of offices, ranging from the White House liaisons to both the Jewish and Arab American communities, representatives from the pro-Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Jordan Information Bureau and key congressional aides.

It also included a candid question-and-answer session with Aaron Miller, a senior member of the U.S. peace team.

More than anything, participants said, the sessions provided a safe environment and a unique opportunity to make personal connections and engage in wide-ranging discussions with people on opposite sides of the contentious issue.

Many students, Kessler said, "stayed behind after the sessions ended to speak, in calm voices, sometimes for long periods of time."

While some discovered they had little more in common than a shared interest in the Middle East, participants agree there was something to be gained by dialogue.

Marissa Jacobs, a Lebanese American student interning at the Arab American Institute, explained that the sessions achieved something merely by their existence.

"Just the fact that people are able to come here and want to be in the same room, there obviously has to be a goal reached already."

The interns, eager for a chance to continue their dialogue in a more relaxed social setting, capped off the summer forum by breaking bread together over a seven-course Moroccan meal at the popular Washington restaurant Marrakesh.

At that dinner, some talked about gaining insights and making strides toward mutual understanding.

"You find people who disagree on 13 out of 14 things, but the idea is to get them to realize that that 14th

thing that you agree on is a fundamental concept and something that should be built upon," said Matt Kirschen, a sophomore at Brandeis University who is interning at AIPAC.

Others found the search for common ground more elusive.

"I did my best to just present what I had been taught and what I had learned," said Samer Obeid, a sophomore at Cornell University who is interning for an Arab American organization.

Young Arab Americans and young Jewish Americans "grow up learning completely different perceptions of history," he said.

"When we come together we can at least get a window into what those different histories are."

Yahya Jaboori, a 23-year-old intern at the State Department's Foreign Service Institute, said it was not lost on him that many of the young people participating in the summer program "are being groomed for leadership positions."

He said he walked away with a better sense of "what you have to deal with if you are going to be in the international community working in this area and dealing with diplomatic circles."

The program concluded one week prior to the recent double suicide bombing attack on a Jerusalem market, which dealt the peace process yet another major setback.

Noam Shelef, a 20-year-old intern at Americans for Peace Now, said he viewed the tragedy in a slightly different light because of his participation in the forum.

A better understanding of views on both sides of the fence, he said, "allows you to disassociate the stereotypes that might come up from this and puts into greater perspective the kind of terrible statements you might hear."

Shelef's father was in Jerusalem having lunch near Mahane Yehuda when the bombs went off.

Kessler said he has been struck by the change he saw in students.

By establishing personal connections, he said, "they've put a human face on their differences. They see each other as people and not just stereotypes or examples of categories."

Hoping to build on the summer's experience, at least two of the participants are planning to bring the idea back to their college campuses when school starts in September.

Bringing the lessons back to campus

Jacobs, a student at Boston College, and Kirschen, who attends Brandeis University, are planning to work together to start similar discussion forums at their own schools.

They will also try to get students from around the country interested as well.

Picking up on one of the central themes of the summer sessions, Kirschen said, "We want to create that safe environment so that Jews and Arab Americans, anyone, can feel free to express their views."

Kessler, meanwhile, plans to continue the intern sessions into the upcoming school year and "take advantage of the enormous number of students in the Washington area."

Specifically, he wants to reach out to both Arab and Israeli students visiting from the Middle East whom he said may otherwise never have an opportunity to interact with each other.

"Our goals, in one sense, are straightforward and, in another sense, quite ambitious and quite radical," he said. □