JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

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Volume 75, No. 179 **Monday, September 29, 1997** *80th Anniversary Year*

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Eight Knesset members pledged to lobby their colleagues to vote against legislation that would codify Orthodox control over conversions performed in Israel.** The four coalition and four opposition legislators announced their intentions in New York at the conclusion of a weeklong tour of U.S. Jewish communities sponsored by the United Jewish Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations.

■ **Israeli-Palestinian peace talks appeared likely to resume after the Palestinian Authority rounded up dozens of Hamas militants and closed down some Hamas-run institutions.** Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and Palestinian Authority second-in-command Abu Mazen are scheduled to meet in New York with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to discuss the resumption of committees dealing with outstanding issues in the 1995 Interim Agreement.

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the release of some of the tax revenues owed the Palestinian Authority.** The move comes as a result of the authority's recent crackdown on Hamas militants.

■ **Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed into law a new version of a bill that would restrict the freedom of religion for some minority faiths in Russia.** The bill had been opposed by human rights groups and by the U.S. government.

■ **Tens of thousands of Orthodox Jews gathered in New York to commemorate the completion of a cycle of reading the Talmud.**

■ **Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert was cleared of charges he committed campaign finance fraud during the 1988 elections, when he was treasurer of the Likud Party.** **[Page 2]**

■ **The leader of Berlin's Jewish community expressed concern over the attempt of a nearby community to prevent Russian Jews from settling there.** The town says it wants to use a building planned to settle some immigrants for a senior center. **[Page 4]**

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Young American Jews spend year in Israel despite terrorism

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As he was preparing to fly to Israel on a year-long program run by the Young Judaea youth movement, Daniel Gottesman heard about the two recent suicide bombings in Jerusalem.

Instead of canceling his trip, however, the 19-year-old from Houston eagerly traveled to the Jewish state in early September.

"It's tragic when events like this happen, and as a Jew I feel deeply upset, but I won't allow terrorism to deter me from coming to the Jewish homeland," says Gottesman.

"I wanted to come, and my parents supported my decision."

At a time when tourists, particularly from the United States, are becoming increasingly anxious about visiting Israel, Gottesman's resolve is all the more striking.

It is, however, far from unique.

Despite Israel's tense security situation, participation in Israel-based programs is actually on the increase.

"Terrorism has had no impact on our enrollment," says Eitan Cooper, education director of the Young Judaea Year Course. "These kids are highly motivated and insisted on coming."

Administrators of many other programs also report full or near-full enrollment.

Although the numbers are still being compiled, the people who organize and run Israel-based summer and long-term programs estimate that participation by North American teens and young adults has risen by 10 to 15 percent during the past year.

These figures include not only the approximately 8,500 teens who came on programs affiliated with the Jewish Agency for Israel, but another 3,500 who are studying in yeshivot and post-high school programs.

These numbers are admittedly a statistical drop in the bucket, since the vast majority of North American Jewish youths do not visit Israel.

But the numbers nevertheless offer encouragement to those interested in fostering Jewish identity among Diaspora teens and young adults.

Several studies have shown that Diaspora youths feel a greater tie both to Israel and their Jewish roots after spending time in Israel.

Five institutions pool resources

Armed with this data and boosted by the enthusiasm of returning teen-agers, local Jewish communities are actively promoting trips to Israel.

To market these trips in a professional manner, five institutions — the Council of Jewish Federations, the CRB Foundation, the United Jewish Appeal, the Jewish Agency and Israel's Ministry of Tourism — decided to pool their substantial resources last year.

The resulting organization, called Israel Experience, Inc., just completed its first year of operation.

Given the many factors that affect a program's popularity, the CEO of Israel Experience, Joel Schindler, refuses to estimate how much his organization has contributed to this year's increase.

"Our first year of operation has been spent in building an infrastructure. What I can say is that our very existence has enhanced the level of discussion about the Israeli experience in the North American community.

"The mere fact that people are talking about the Israel Experience at an (organizational) level has contributed to the fact that more communities, parents and kids are asking for information," he says.

Schindler stresses that the organization's guiding principal is pluralism — its executive board includes senior representatives from the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements.

A marketing expert for much of his professional life, Schindler says the organization's bid to double participation during the next few years will be based on state-of-the-art marketing techniques.

These will include a 1998 program guide in the Jerusalem Report, an Israel-based magazine read by many North Americans. It may also extend to magazine advertising and Israel Experience phone cards. Rather than confine

its efforts to ads in the Jewish media, the organization plans to involve secular magazines read by Jewish and non-Jewish teens and young adults.

"There are many marginally affiliated Jews who read Seventeen Magazine but who don't read Jewish periodicals," he says. "We're looking at the radio as a vehicle. We have a Website. We have a toll-free number."

Israel Experience's toll-free number is 1-888-99-ISRAEL.

Its Web address is www.israelexperience.org

Israel Experience is also planning to hold a series of seminars from its regional offices in Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Toronto and New York. These seminars will focus on both marketing techniques and fund-raising activities.

Officials involved with Israeli programs say they are monitoring the activities of Israel Experience.

Paul Freedman, director of English-language youth programs at the Jewish Agency, notes that participation in agency-affiliated programs rose about 30 percent this past year — before Israel Experience really got up to speed.

Israel Experience is "just gearing up. Its real test will come next summer," says Freedman, who is quick to point out that the Jewish Agency has worked hard to improve its services.

Though careful not to have the Agency take all the credit for the past year's boom, Freedman says, "More programs and individuals are turning to us because they want the best programs at the best prices."

But if the boom continues, it may not matter who claims the credit. As Freedman puts it, "If the kids come to Israel, it's all worth it." □

Lithuania marks Holocaust day by honoring Christian rescuers

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Lithuania has observed its annual commemoration of Holocaust victims by honoring Christians who risked their lives to save Jews during World War II.

Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas last week decorated 27 Lithuanians with the Life Rescuer Cross, which was established in 1992 soon after Lithuania gained its independence from the Soviet Union.

The commemoration came amid ongoing tension over Lithuania's role during the Nazi occupation.

The Israeli ambassador to Lithuania, Oded Ben Hur, recently sparked controversy when, in a speech to the Lithuanian Parliament, he criticized the Baltic country for not vigorously prosecuting its war criminals.

In an apparent response to Ben Hur's remarks, a Lithuanian extremist group recently demanded that Jews working in governmental institutions be fired and that the Israeli ambassador to the Baltic country be declared persona non grata.

The group publicized its statement in a leading daily newspaper, Kauno Diena, which is published in Kaunas, Lithuania's second largest city.

The Lithuanian Freedom Union said its statement was prompted by a desire to put an end to accusations that Lithuanians are a "nation of murderers of Jews."

It also urged that the Jewish community of Lithuania demand that Israel extradite to Lithuania former Jewish collaborators of the KGB who "carried out genocide against the Lithuanian people."

The Lithuanian Freedom Union threatened that it would take action unless the Jewish community does not adequately rebuff "all these phenomenal [speeches] coming from Israel."

During World War II, Nazis backed by Lithuanian collaborators exterminated virtually the entire local Jewish population, wiping out 94 percent of a prewar community that numbered 250,000.

Some 50,000 Lithuanians who were convicted as war criminals by Soviet courts were exonerated by the Baltic nation after it gained independence in 1991.

Among those pardoned were people who allegedly helped the Nazis kill Jews.

Holocaust survivors, American Jewish leaders and the Lithuanian Jewish community have called upon the Lithuanian government to reverse the pardons.

Lithuania announced last week that it had posthumously annulled pardons granted to five of the alleged war criminals.

Earlier this month, the Lithuanian Supreme Court annulled one of the pardons for the first time.

That pardon was also annulled posthumously.

Chief prosecutor Kazimieras Kavarskas said recently that another 200 pardons will be re-examined soon.

The 27 recipients of the Life Rescuer Cross award bring the total number of Lithuanians who have received the award to approximately 150.

More than 300 Lithuanians have been recognized as Righteous Gentiles by the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

According to Viktorija Sakaite, an employee with the Jewish Museum located in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, the museum has collected information about 2,300 Lithuanians who rescued Jews from the Nazis and will soon publish the first volume of a projected 10-volume series telling their stories.

The commemoration occurred on Sept. 23, the 54th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto. □

Vindicated Jerusalem mayor poised to challenge premier

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A court decision this week may have left Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with a strong contender for the leadership of the Likud Party.

Soon after the Tel Aviv District Court cleared Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert of charges of campaign finance fraud, Israeli analysts were speculating that Olmert would begin his quest to replace Netanyahu as the Likud candidate for prime minister in the national elections scheduled for the year 2000.

Olmert, 51, has attempted to portray himself as a more hard-line defender than Netanyahu of Israel's claim to Jerusalem.

A year ago, Olmert was on hand at the opening of a new entrance to an archaeological tunnel near the Western Wall.

The move sparked three days of Palestinian rioting that left 15 Israelis and 61 Palestinians dead.

Olmert, who was elected Jerusalem's mayor in 1993, has also been a staunch defender of Israel's right to build a new Jewish neighborhood at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem.

The start of that construction in March led the Palestinian Authority to suspend all negotiations with Israel.

In Sunday's decision, the court found Olmert innocent of charges that he had engaged in financial irregularities in the 1988 election campaign, when Olmert was treasurer of the Likud Party.

Olmert said Sunday his only mistake was that he signed financial reports without taking the trouble to double-check them. □

A NEW YEAR DAWNS

Wide choice of holiday cards available on Jewish new year

By Faygie Levy

NEW YORK (JTA) — "L'shanah tovah," literally, "To a good new year," is the greeting extended throughout the Jewish world on Rosh Hashanah.

The greeting, a tradition as old as the holiday itself, is unique among Jewish festivals.

"Nowhere else in the calendar do you have a greeting" written in a Machzor, or holiday prayer book, said Rabbi Yaacov Haber, the national director of Jewish education at the Orthodox Union.

It is not enough to just talk to God on Rosh Hashanah, Haber said. Jews must also wish each other well because "the way we bless each other is the way God blesses us."

The greeting card is an increasingly popular way to extend such salutations. An estimated 12 million Rosh Hashanah cards will be exchanged this year.

Jewish greeting cards date back to 13th-century Spain, but it is only in this century that they have proliferated.

There now are more than 150 varieties of Rosh Hashanah cards.

Most come from major card companies such as Hallmark and American Greetings. Both have divisions that create cards with Jewish themes.

A means of fund raising

Hallmark's Tree of Life division will release nearly 80 different Rosh Hashanah cards this year.

American Greetings' L'Chayim to Life division will offer more than 70 new designs. Many cards will feature photos and illustrations of Judaica.

Some Jewish organizations offer their own cards as a means of fund raising. Women of Reform Judaism, for example, has been selling Rosh Hashanah cards for more than 30 years.

Rosh Hashanah cards first became popular around the turn of the century during the wave of Eastern European Jewish immigration to the United States.

The cards were an inexpensive way for new immigrants to keep in touch with family back home, said Gabe Goldstein, curator of the Yeshiva University Museum in New York.

The cards, many of which were produced in Germany and distributed in the United States by the Hebrew Publishing Company, featured "romanticized images of the home and synagogue," Goldstein said.

The cards were made up of scraps, similar to today's stickers, that were smaller images pasted within a larger setting. Many were elaborate, with layer upon layer of scenes creating a larger-than-life image.

There were cards in Hebrew, Yiddish and English.

Often, the cards were also designed to lure others to move to the United States. Many of the cards from the early 1900s featured images of the Statue of Liberty and other famous American landmarks.

One card read, "traveling forward to prosperity and a prosperous new year."

During this era, Rosh Hashanah cards also reflected the growing appeal of Zionism.

Greeting cards were often adorned with Magen Davids.

Reflecting the conflicting dreams of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine and the better life that the United States promised, some cards featured the Statue of Liberty surrounded by Magen Davids.

There were also cards that featured pictures of Zionist leaders such as Theodor Herzl. On one card, Herzl was shown holding both the American and Israeli flags.

These cards reminded people that they could support the establishment of a Jewish state and still be an American, according to Bonni-Dara Michaels, curator and museum registrar at the Yeshiva University Museum.

In other times, and other places, Rosh Hashanah cards have transmitted a different message.

In Poland in the 1930s, as conditions worsened for Jews, many opted to head for Palestine. Some cards featured Jews waiting at a train station for their trip.

Greeting cards were so much a part of the popular culture at the time that people collected them.

One album of cards was discovered amid the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto after World War II.

That collection is held by the National Library of Warsaw and has been shown in at least one Israeli museum.

Some people design more personal — and elaborate — greeting cards. An Eskimo in 1910 Alaska created a Rosh Hashanah greeting on a walrus tusk. A gold inlaid Magen David was carved on the tusk, which bore the words "l'shanah tovah."

Another artist designed a silk banner wishing people a happy new year.

Both of these items are on display at the Jewish Museum in New York.

"The use of Rosh Hashanah greeting cards is a long-standing tradition in Jewish life that has now expanded well beyond this one holiday or one use to a wide range of cards for special occasions and festivals," Goldstein said.

Indeed, Hallmark and American Greetings produce cards for other Jewish holidays, including Passover and Chanukah.

The technological revolution also has brought a new dimension to the greeting card industry.

Cyber cards, designed and e-mailed over the Internet, can be found at several sites on the Web.

One source for cyber cards is Awesome Cyber Cards at http://www.marlo.com/hashana.htm □

Histadrut-led strike paralyzes Israel in dispute over pensions

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Some 700,000 Israelis went on strike for eight hours Sunday on orders of the Histadrut Trade Union to protest privatization plans and pension cuts.

Israel's National Labor Court gave permission for the strike, which was called after negotiations Saturday night between Histadrut and Finance Ministry officials failed to reach an agreement on a dispute over pension plans.

The previous Labor government had approved a pension plan some three weeks before last year's national election, but the current government has maintained that it cannot finance a plan that would cost more than $570 million annually over the next 20 years.

Histadrut officials said the strike was also called to protest the government's ongoing privatization process.

The strike paralyzed all major public services, closing down Israel's schools, Ben-Gurion Airport, banks and utilities.

After the strike ended, Histadrut Chairman Amir Peretz met again with Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, after which Histadrut officials decided to give the government "another chance" to resolve the differences.

They said they would not consider another strike until the end of the High Holidays. □

Grand jury begins probing 1994 murder of rabbi's wife

By Marilyn Silverstein
Jewish Exponent

PHILADELPHIA (JTA) — Rabbi Fred Neulander is most likely the target of a grand jury probe launched this month in Camden, N.J., to investigate the 1994 murder of his wife, Carol Neulander, according to the rabbi's attorney. "I'm assuming he's the target because he hasn't been subpoenaed," Jeffrey Zucker said.

Carol Neulander, 52, was bludgeoned to death the night of Nov. 1, 1994, in the family's Cherry Hill, N.J., home.

Neulander, the founder and former religious leader of Congregation M'kor Shalom in Cherry Hill, has not been ruled out as a suspect in the murder. He resigned from his pulpit in March 1995 after the murder probe disclosed his alleged involvement in extramarital affairs.

A month after his resignation, Neulander was suspended from membership in the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the umbrella organization of Reform rabbis. The suspension does not invalidate his rabbinate.

The rabbi is anxious to bring the matter of his wife's murder to closure, said Zucker. "He's certainly hopeful that whatever the grand jury is doing, it will lead to the person responsible for his wife's death."

Among those giving testimony was Len Jenoff, a private investigator who has been working for Neulander.

"He's my rabbi," Jenoff said of Neulander, explaining that he had attended M'kor Shalom from 1993 to 1995. "I still consider him my rabbi. He's still my friend, and, more important, from day one, I've been his private investigator."

His own investigation into the Neulander murder is ongoing, said Jenoff, adding, "I have hypotheses in two directions." One of his theories is that the murder was connected to a robbery at the Classic Cake Co. Inc., in Voorhees, N.J., which Carol Neulander founded. The other is "a possible organized-crime theory."

The grand jury is slated to reconvene every Monday until its investigations are over. □

Jews in Berlin protest effort to bar immigrants from Russia

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — The Berlin Jewish community has expressed concern over an attempt to prevent Russian Jewish immigrants from settling in a nearby town.

In a statement, the leader of the Berlin Jewish community, Andreas Nachama, called the incident "a new and distressing climax in the German animosity toward Jews that many considered conquered after 1945."

Nachama issued the statement after a German newspaper reported last week that the city council in the town of Gollwitz had passed a resolution criticizing the state government of Brandenburg's plan to house 50 immigrants in a villa on the town's outskirts.

Gollwitz officials want to use the building for a senior citizens' home.

Since 1991, about 85,000 Jewish and non-Jewish family members from the former Soviet Union have moved to Germany. More than 30,000 have become active members of German Jewish communities.

The Jewish immigrants came to Germany under a special program that gives them benefits, including immediate housing in refugee shelters. The immigrants are divided among the 16 German states, which share the absorption costs of the immigrants.

The Bonn government instituted this national distribution system in part to help revive Jewish life in all regions of Germany. But many of the Jewish immigrants are put in housing shelters in towns and villages that have no Jewish institutions and are more than 100 miles from existing Jewish communities.

For Russian Jewish immigrants sent to eastern Germany, the situation has been even more difficult.

There are few existing Jewish community structures in the formerly Communist part of Germany, and the immigrants often know too little about their religion to establish synagogues and other Jewish institutions.

In addition, right-wing violence and xenophobia in many parts of eastern Germany continues to rise, despite its decline in other parts of Germany. □

Restored Jewish cemetery in Czech Republic desecrated

By Randi Druzin

PRAGUE (JTA) — A historic Czech Jewish cemetery has been seriously damaged by vandals.

The attack came just one week after the cemetery had been restored by a German benevolence group.

Petr Bacharach, head of the Jewish Religious Community in Ostrava, said last week he was convinced that the Sept. 16 desecration of the local cemetery, which had been declared a historic site by the Czech Ministry of Culture, was an act of racial hatred rather than random delinquency because a nearby Christian cemetery was not desecrated.

"I am convinced that this was not an act of simple vandalism," he said. "It was racially motivated."

More than 80 granite and sandstone tombstones were damaged or overturned by nine vandals. A witness saw the vandals approach the 150-year-old cemetery in a van.

Police have not made any arrests in the crime — which resulted in more than $29,000 in damage. They told Bacharach that several teen-agers were prime suspects.

All but 10 of the damaged tombstones had recently been repaired by the Movement for Atonement, an organization of German students dedicated to atoning for the sins of Nazi Germany.

"The cemetery was starting to look good after months of refurbishment," Bacharach said. "I am disgusted with what [the vandals] did. How else can we feel about them destroying what we have tried so hard to protect?" □

Germans plan to pay Baltic Jews

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A German province is planning to compensate — and lobby for — Lithuania's Holocaust survivors.

The Brandenburg Parliament has already earmarked several thousand dollars to compensate Jews living in the Baltic nation, and it intends to ask the German government to further compensate these survivors, according to Herbert Knoblich, the chairman of the province's Parliament.

Knoblich made the comments in a meeting with the leadership of Lithuania's Jewish community in Vilnius, the country's capital. Some public organizations, companies and individuals from Brandenburg, which is located in eastern Germany, have already offered to aid some members of the Lithuanian Jewish community.

Ninety-four percent of Lithuania's prewar Jewish community of 250,000 was exterminated in the Holocaust. Like Holocaust survivors in other parts of the former Soviet Union, Lithuanians were unable to file for individual compensation from Germany during the Cold War. □