



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The White House sent a letter to the Council of Jewish Federations expressing regret that President Clinton would not attend the group's annual General Assembly slated for Indianapolis in November. Israeli officials said there is a possibility that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu might also cancel his scheduled appearance at the G.A., opting instead to come to the United States later in the month for a summit with Clinton.

■ U.S. Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.) lifted the hold on \$75.6 million in economic aid to Israel. The move came after the State Department guaranteed that Israel would follow through on its pledge to return \$50 million of its aid, which will be sent to Jordan. Congress agreed to provide an additional \$220 million to Jordan.

■ The Reform movement plans to send an emergency delegation of rabbis to Israel over the weekend to lobby Knesset members not to vote for religious councils legislation that would bar non-Orthodox participation.

■ U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross left Israel after four days of talks amid reports that Israeli Defense Minister Yitzchak Mordechai and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat had agreed to hold regular meetings. Israeli officials said progress was being made, but a Palestinian official said Ross' mission had failed and warned of renewed violence.

■ A U.S. House of Representatives committee postponed until next week a vote on a constitutional amendment that would allow prayer in public schools. The delay came after U.S. Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) protested that the hearing was going to be held on the Jewish holiday of Shemini Atzeret. Several Jewish groups also had asked for a delay.

■ Israeli left-wing politicians demanded that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologize for his statement that leftists "have forgotten what it means to be Jewish." The prime minister made the remark as he visited the sukkah of an elderly religious leader. Netanyahu did not know that an Israel Radio microphone was taping his remarks. [Page 2]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israeli women find 'fulfillment' as Orthodox prayer groups grow

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Raised as an Orthodox Jew in Jerusalem, Dvori Ross went to synagogue on Shabbat mornings and listened to the Torah reading from the women's side of the mechitzah, the divider that separates men and women in Orthodox congregations.

The experience, she says, was frustrating.

"I knew that I could read the Torah myself, because my father taught all of us when my brothers were approaching their Bar Mitzvahs, but I wasn't allowed to do so in shul because I was a woman."

Although she knew that Reform or Conservative egalitarian prayer offered her the level of participation she sought, it was incompatible with her religiously observant lifestyle — something she wasn't prepared to relinquish.

The answer to Ross' dilemma came in the late 1980s — in the form of an invitation to an Orthodox women's prayer service in Jerusalem.

The group, which based its practices on the precepts of modern Orthodoxy, was a revelation to the young Israeli.

"The idea of women's participation wasn't strange to me because I had heard about Reform and Conservative congregations in America," she says.

"But finding that religious women can participate so fully is very satisfying.

"I don't like being passive; I feel like I belong only when I'm taking an active role."

The issue of women's tefillah groups, as they are known, has prompted controversy here as well as in America.

They take on particular significance around Simchat Torah, when Jews celebrate the end of the cyclical reading of the Torah.

Women's prayer groups provide an alternative for women, who are banned from ritual leadership roles in Orthodox synagogues.

Traditionally, Jewish law prohibits men from hearing women's voices, lest they be distracted from their prayer, and does not allow women to be counted in a minyan.

Less clear is the right of women to pray or read Torah on their own.

Earlier this year, a group of Orthodox rabbis in Queens, N.Y., issued a ruling banning such groups.

Some 1,000 Israeli women participating

Ross' feeling of belonging in women's tefillah groups is shared by a growing number of observant Israeli women, who during the past few years have founded several prayer groups, most of them in Jerusalem.

Debbie Weissman, an American immigrant who co-founded the first Israel-based women's prayer group in the early 1970s, estimates that approximately 1,000 Israeli women participate in these groups.

"That's not an overwhelming number," she concedes, "but it's a lot more than when we started.

"That number could be much higher if more women were aware of their options in halachah," or Jewish law.

While the majority of Israeli rabbis continue to balk at the idea of religious women reading from the Torah or conducting a prayer service, a sizeable minority accept the principle and actually encourage it.

Another category of rabbis, while believing that halachah allows for a larger women's role, don't want that role expressed in their synagogue.

Pnina Peli, whose late husband, Pinchas, an Orthodox rabbi, encouraged his wife to hold a women's prayer group in their home after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, says, "Many women simply take it for granted that halachah prohibits them from many roles. When they study the texts, they learn how wrong they were."

Noting with delight that at least eight Orthodox synagogues in Israel permit women to dance with and read from the Torah on Simchat Torah, Peli says, "Many Orthodox people insist that a menstruating woman must be prevented from holding a Torah.

"What they don't know, or refuse to admit, is that a Torah can't be

made impure, by a woman, a non-Jew, not by anyone." The reason why women aren't permitted to touch or read aloud from the Torah, Peli asserts, "is due to sociological circumstances.

"People say it can't be done because it hasn't been done. That's different from saying it's against halachah," Peli says.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, the chief rabbi of Efrat, says that even when women's participation is halachically acceptable, community sensitivities must be taken into account.

"I believe that it's halachically permissible for women to dance with a Torah scroll behind a mechitzah," Riskin says.

"However, the custom for thousands of years has been for women not to do so. Therefore, if it would cause a split and bad will in the synagogue, then it should not be done."

This is why, he says, a number of separate women's prayer groups were formed.

Finding a balance between their own needs, the needs of the larger community and halachah "is part of the challenge," says Ariel Lester, who organizes women's Torah readings at the Orthodox synagogue Kehillat Yedidiah in Jerusalem, and at Shirat Sarah, a Jerusalem group that meets every six weeks.

On special occasions and on Simchat Torah, the women at Yedidiah read the Torah separately and then return to the services, which are lead by the men in their congregation.

Shirat Sarah, on the other hand, is a women-only group, and conducts its own service from start to finish.

"There's a creative edge to working within the halachah, and I think that for those who choose to be within a halachic framework, there's a lot of space to move and to create. It sounds paradoxical, but that's the case."

When women engage in serious text study and read from the Torah, she adds, "the result is both intellectual and spiritual fulfillment.

"It's an expression of one's soul."

While acknowledging that their form of prayer isn't for everyone, most involved in women's prayer groups expect thousands of others to join them in the years to come.

American-born Felicia Epstein, a leader of Shirat Sarah, says the Israeli women she encounters are intrigued by Orthodox prayer groups.

"In Israel, the religious community tends to be more conservative, so the Americans have led the movement," Epstein says. "However, as more Israelis have become involved, the movement has taken on its own integrity."

Noting that about 40 percent of the 35 women who participate in Shirat Sarah are native-born Israelis, Epstein adds, "We are struggling to help the rest feel more comfortable." □

Netanyahu remarks on leftists spur new internal controversy

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An open microphone has created a new controversy for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israeli left-wing politicians are demanding that Netanyahu apologize for his statement that left-wingers "have forgotten what it means to be Jewish."

Netanyahu made his remarks Tuesday when he visited the sukkah of religious leader Rabbi Yitzchak Kadouri to celebrate their birthdays, which fall on the same date.

Netanyahu did not know that an Israel Radio microphone was taping his remarks.

Netanyahu is 48. Kadouri's exact age is unknown, but he is believed to be more than 100.

As Netanyahu leaned over to the hard-of-hearing rabbi, an Israel Radio microphone also recorded him saying that leftists "believe they can trust our security in the hands of the Arabs."

His comments triggered an uproar.

Labor Party head Ehud Barak said Israel deserved a premier who is more serious, mature and responsible.

"Netanyahu will not teach me or anyone else what Judaism is," said Barak.

Yossi Sarid, leader of the dovish Meretz Party, said, "Netanyahu has forgotten what it means to be a human being, and he has never known what it means to be a prime minister."

Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau said Netanyahu's comments reminded him of the "last days of Pompeii" and that they should not have been made at a time when "Israel faces dangers such as missiles from Syria and Iran."

In an interview Wednesday on Israel Radio, Netanyahu said his comments had been taken out of context and that he had merely wanted to explain to Kadouri his differences with the left regarding the negotiations with the Palestinians.

"They were not about Judaism as a religion or Judaism as a nationality, but rather as something that we, as members of the Jewish nation, have learned — a principle that has guided us over the course of the past 100 years or so in Israel." □

Likud Party erupts in brouhaha over proposal to cancel primaries

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Likud Party activists are up in arms over a proposal to change the way the party nominates candidates for the next Knesset elections.

A heated debate erupted when Avigdor Lieberman, director general of the Prime Minister's Office, floated the idea that the party call off its primaries for Knesset candidates and return to a narrower party forum — perhaps the party's convention — for selecting candidates.

The proposal, which was believed to have emanated from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself, did not extend to choosing the next candidate for prime minister, who would continue to be chosen via party primaries.

The suggestion was interpreted as an attempt by Netanyahu to achieve a tighter grip over his party and have some close associates, such as Lieberman, chosen as Knesset candidates.

Some senior activists charged that Netanyahu was seeking to establish authoritarian rule over the party.

After the brouhaha erupted, Netanyahu said he had not yet made up his mind about the proposal, adding that he would do so before the Likud convention scheduled for next month.

Opposition to any changes in party rules is led by Knesset member Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, who resigned as science minister earlier this year rather than approve the Israeli withdrawal in January from most of the West Bank town of Hebron.

Also opposing the suggestion is Knesset member Dan Meridor, who resigned as finance minister after running afoul of Netanyahu.

After he resigned, Meridor strongly indicated he would run against the prime minister in the next vote for the Likud leadership. □

Papon's claim that he helped Jews outrages families of Vichy victims

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — The families of Jews deported from Bordeaux during the Nazi occupation of France were angry and stupefied after accused wartime collaborator Maurice Papon told a court that he had spent the war years helping Jews.

"I spent the occupation fighting for Jews and for others. Since then, I have mourned in my heart for the deaths of my Jewish compatriots and foreign Jews," Papon said last week. He was speaking for the first time at his trial, which began earlier this month.

"I risked deportation, maybe even my life, by taking the names of 139 Jews off the lists," he snapped when questioned by Arno Klarsfeld, one of 23 lawyers for the civil plaintiffs.

Papon, 87, is accused of ordering the arrest and deportation of 1,560 Jews, 223 of them children, when he was a senior official for the pro-Nazi Vichy regime.

Nearly all of them died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

After proceedings against him were obstructed by French officials for 16 years, his trial for crimes against humanity, which is expected to last until the end of December, is now under way in the southwestern French city of Bordeaux.

The trial was delayed Wednesday after Papon fell ill.

The trial of Papon — who will in all likelihood be the last Frenchman to face trial for crimes against humanity — is also seen as the nation's last chance to come to terms with a past it has long tried to forget.

His remarks provoked a wave of protests by the civil plaintiffs, many of them relatives of Holocaust victims, and their lawyers.

'He showed himself for what he is'

"He showed himself for what he is — the hard, cold and cruel man who signed the deportation orders without any scruples," Georges Gheldman, whose mother was deported from Bordeaux in 1942, said in an interview.

Therese Stopnicki, whose younger sisters Nellie, 5, and Rachel, 2, were taken out of hiding, allegedly on Papon's orders, and sent to Auschwitz, said Papon's remarks created "the impression that the cover of a sewer has been lifted and everything inside is flowing out."

Papon also told the court that as prefect of the French Mediterranean island of Corsica in 1947, he was in charge of a secret mission to set up air bases on the island for American planes to send arms to help "the Israeli people in their struggle for independence."

"It is an honor for me to have always protected the Jewish community."

Papon went further Monday, denying that he ever signed arrest or deportation orders when he was a Vichy official and demanding to see proof of the charges against him. Alain Levy, the lawyer for an association of former Resistance fighters and deportees, described the testimony as "totally pernicious."

In a dramatic turn Tuesday, a historian who in 1981 helped uncover Papon's wartime role said further research had convinced him that Papon had indeed helped Jews rather than send them to their deaths.

Michel Berges said in an interview with the daily newspaper *Le Monde* that prosecutors had erred in their assessment of wartime documents and had turned Papon "into a political myth."

He said Papon had struck the names of more than 100 Jews from deportation lists.

He also stated that Papon had in other instances merely countersigned orders decided upon by his superiors and had no authority to initiate roundups.

Michel Touzet, a lawyer representing some of the civil plaintiffs, criticized Berges for making the comments before he was scheduled to testify in December.

Papon, who enjoyed an illustrious political career after the war, has maintained in the past that he joined the Resistance in 1943 and remained in his job as wartime secretary-general of the Bordeaux prefect's office — the second highest-ranking official in the region — at the anti-Nazi movement's request.

But some of the plaintiffs noted that being a member of the Resistance did not necessarily imply he was innocent of anti-Jewish actions.

"People are suddenly losing sight of the objective. The defense is trying to prove that he was a member of the Resistance, a good civil servant, but the essential is the deportation of the Jews," Stopnicki said.

During the second week of the trial, the court heard witnesses for the defense attest to Papon's character and his devotion to his work in various postwar government positions.

One of them was Raymond Barre, current mayor of Lyon, who as France's prime minister in 1978 named Papon his budget minister.

Barre was questioned by a juror — a rare procedure in the French legal system — about whether he had inquired about Papon's past before appointing him.

"I did not have to ask many questions. Maurice Papon had an excellent reputation," Barre replied.

'He showed great loyalty'

"I benefited from his devoted and efficient assistance. He showed great loyalty. I am grateful to him," he said.

Perhaps one of the most revealing testimonies in demonstrating how Papon was able to continue his career under postwar French leader General Charles de Gaulle and rise to become Paris police chief from 1958 to 1967 came from Olivier Guichard, one of de Gaulle's closest aides.

Guichard said de Gaulle had sought to readmit senior Vichy officials into government service after the war in the name of national unity.

"After the liberation, General de Gaulle had a very strong desire to protect the unity of France. Thus was born the Gaullist myth which said that the Vichy regime had never existed. And the other myth was that we had won the war," Guichard told the court.

De Gaulle "did not want the conduct of France and of the French to be re-examined."

That myth was finally destroyed in 1995, when President Jacques Chirac, himself a Gaullist, acknowledged in a historic speech the role of French police and other civil servants in sending Jews to their deaths during the war.

Documents incriminating Papon in the deportation of Jews were first made public in 1981, but legal proceedings were repeatedly obstructed by French officials, particularly the late President Francois Mitterrand, who did not want a trial that would force the country to re-examine the painful aspects of its wartime past.

The trial is also forcing France to confront the truth about another painful period of its history — the brutal Algerian war for independence. Several witnesses referred to a demonstration in Paris by pro-independence Algerians in October 1961, when Papon was police chief.

While historians agree that more than 200 demonstrators were massacred by police under Papon's command, the official toll was two dead — although for weeks after, dozens of bodies were fished out of the Seine River. □

Fugitive teen vows to appeal Israeli decision on extradition

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Clinton administration and pro-Israel activists heaved a sigh of relief this week when Israel announced it would extradite a suburban Washington teen-ager accused of a grisly murder.

But the joy over the decision was tempered by Samuel Sheinbein's decision to fight the extradition and seek an Israeli trial.

The legal battle could take up to two years, Israeli officials told American prosecutors.

Sheinbein fled the United States for Israel in September after police named him the chief suspect in the dismemberment and burning of his 19-year-old friend.

The 17-year-old remains in an Israeli jail pending extradition.

A former classmate of Sheinbein's at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in suburban Maryland, Aaron Benjamin Needle, surrendered to police days after the Sept. 18 attack.

The case erupted into a diplomatic imbroglio because of an Israeli law that prevents the extradition of its citizens.

In an unprecedented move, Israel rejected Sheinbein's claim of dual U.S.-Israeli citizenship without revoking the citizenship from his father.

The younger Sheinbein has never lived in the Jewish state.

Sheinbein's father was born in British-mandate Palestine.

Under Israeli law, citizenship traditionally passes from parents to children.

But Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein, citing the extraordinary circumstances of the case, this week ruled that the younger Sheinbein is not a citizen.

The decision was based in part on U.S. and Canadian documents from the late 1940s, when the Sheinbein family first sought to leave Israel.

Sheinbein's lawyers immediately protested the decision and vowed to appeal the matter all the way to Israel's Supreme Court, if necessary.

David Libai, a former Israeli justice minister who is representing Sheinbein, said he would challenge the extradition based on the decision to leave the father's citizenship in place.

Albright 'grateful' for Israel's cooperation

In a news conference after the decision was announced, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "Clearly the State of Israel is a country governed by law, and we act only within the framework of the law.

"If according to the law it is possible to extradite the fugitive to the United States, we will do it," the premier added.

"That was our intention to begin with, and I hope it will happen."

Netanyahu had faced pressure from some American Jewish groups, members of Congress and the Clinton administration.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who had urged Netanyahu in a personal letter to find a way to extradite Sheinbein, welcomed the Israeli decision.

Albright is "grateful for the government of Israel's full cooperation in this case," said State Department spokesman James Rubin.

The United States plans to file a formal extradition request.

Israeli courts then have 60 days to act on the extradition.

Israeli officials said that if the extradition is overturned, Sheinbein would be tried in Israel.

U.S. pressure reached a fevered pitch last week when Rep. Bob Livingston (R-La.), chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, promised to force a vote on cutting as much as \$1.2 billion in U.S. aid to Israel if Sheinbein was not extradited.

After the Israeli decision, Livingston told his colleagues that he does not expect to take any action on the U.S. aid to Israel, which amounts to more than \$3 billion each year.

The chairman of the committee responsible for writing the foreign aid bill, Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.) lifted the hold on \$75.6 million in aid to Israel, which was scheduled to receive part of its aid this week.

Callahan said he had been holding the money for leverage in a debate over how much U.S. aid should go to the Middle East. He said he was "encouraged" by the Israeli decision on Sheinbein.

Embattled by the rising crescendo of criticism directed at Israel's handling of the case, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations issued a statement praising the Israeli justice system.

"Once again, Israel has demonstrated its commitment to due process and the pursuit of justice," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the conference.

"Israel's action validated that it is a nation governed by the rule of the law and once again exposed those who were so quick to condemn and criticize." □

Get your peanuts, Cracker Jack and sukkah at this World Series

By Faygie Levy

NEW YORK (JTA) — There was something new to go along with the traditional peanuts and Cracker Jack at this year's World Series — a sukkah.

The sukkah mobile, a portable sukkah perched atop a U-Haul truck, greeted baseball fans as they arrived at Pro Player Stadium in Miami, home to the Marlins, before Game 2 of the Series.

The sukkah, with Jewish music playing from loudspeakers and signs welcoming fans to the "official sukkah" of the World Series and cheering "Go Marlins," was sponsored by Chabad of South Broward, Fla.

This was the first time that a sukkah mobile, which Lubavitch started in the 1970s to allow people to observe the mitzvot, or commandments, of Sukkot, was at a World Series.

Chabad of Cleveland also parked its own sukkah mobile in front of Jacobs Field on Tuesday for Game 3.

Rabbi Raphael Tennenhaus, the executive vice president of Chabad of South Broward, said he picked the World Series as a place to park the sukkah mobile because the jovial mood of the crowds matched the mood of the Sukkot holiday, which is also called the time of happiness.

He also compared the unity of fans rooting for the Marlins to the unity of Jews when they gather in a sukkah.

Ten yeshiva students served as hosts. They showed people how to use a lulav and etrog, the palm branch and citrus fruit that are shaken after reciting a blessing on Sukkot.

Refreshments were provided to help people fulfill the mitzvah of eating in the sukkah.

More than 500 hundred baseball fans took advantage of the sukkah, Tennenhaus said in a phone interview.

For some, it was the first time they had held a lulav and etrog.

People had "to go to the World Series to fulfill the mitzvah of lulav and etrog," Tennenhaus said. □