



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Jewish officials plan to present a Holocaust survivor in Riga, Latvia with the first payment from the Swiss Holocaust Memorial Fund. But questions remain whether the fund will make available the moneys for Latvian and other needy eastern European survivors before the scheduled Nov. 18 ceremony in Riga.

■ Some 200,000 people turned out for a memorial rally for slain Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the Tel Aviv square where he was assassinated two years ago. Natan Sharansky, Israel's minister of industry and trade and the only government representative to address the rally, complained that the event was more a political rally for the left wing than a non-partisan demonstration for Israeli unity. [Page 2]

■ Holocaust survivors gathered at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp for the opening of a museum that recreates the conditions of their imprisonment. During the ceremony, the head of Germany's Jewish community said that racism and anti-Semitism is growing among that country's youth.

■ Labor Knesset member Yossi Beilin announced the establishment of a new movement to lobby for an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. The movement, which formalized growing calls for a pullout amid continuing casualties in Lebanon, includes Knesset members from the Labor, Meretz and Yisrael Ba'Aliyah parties. [Page 3]

■ A Russian Orthodox priest called Judaism an "aggressive" and "destructive" religion and said Jews kill children for their blood in order to make matzoh. The priest made his remarks during a trial of a neo-Nazi leader accused of murder in Orel, Russia.

■ Israeli National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon is slated to speak Wednesday at a New York event commemorating the second anniversary of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The Likud Knesset member's speech comes as left-wing and right-wing politicians in Israel trade allegations over the assassination.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israel sole Middle East nation eager to attend Qatar summit

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Of all the countries in the Middle East, Israel is alone in its eagerness to attend the upcoming regional economic summit in the Persian Gulf state of Qatar.

In a sign of how much the faltering peace process has dampened the prospects for expanding regional ties, only Israeli political and business leaders are showing any enthusiasm for the conference.

Some Arab countries have already announced that they are boycotting the annual Middle Eastern and North African economic summit, while others have hesitated, citing the lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Those countries that have agreed to attend did so under pressure from the United States, which views attendance as an expression of support for the peace process.

Paradoxically, the meeting, slated to be held Nov. 16-18 in the Qatari capital of Doha, is unlikely to offer Israelis impressive business opportunities. Israelis have long understood that their real markets are far from the Middle Eastern bazaars.

But for them, the fourth annual conference offers them a chance to obtain what they perhaps want most of all: regional acceptance.

Until a few weeks ago, there were numerous questions surrounding the conference, not the least of which was whether it would be held on its scheduled date or postponed until some progress was achieved in Israeli-Palestinian relations, which traditionally weigh heavily in the political decisions of the neighboring Arab states.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, citing progress in last week's Israeli-Palestinian talks in Washington, announced Nov. 6 that she would meet later this week with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

The conference is expected to be held on schedule — thanks largely to American pressures — and some 2,000 delegates are expected to attend.

Organizers have planned for the conference to address numerous regional economic issues, including gas and energy, economic reforms, computerization and transportation.

Syria, Lebanon, Libya and Iraq are boycotting the conference — as they did the three previous meetings.

The issue of Arab participation was high on the agenda of a recent meeting of the 22 foreign ministers in the Arab League.

The ministers eventually decided to allow each country to decide on its own whether to attend the conference.

Some Arab countries haggled over conditions for their participation.

Israel not planning any favors

For example, the European Union's peace envoy, Miguel Angel Moratinos, was told by the Tunisians that they would fly to Qatar only if Israel gave permission for Arafat's plane to take off from an as-yet unopened airport in the Gaza Strip.

The airport has been one of the issues in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, but with security at the forefront of Israeli concerns, no agreement has yet been reached on its operations.

Eitan Ben-Tsur, the director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, responded to the Tunisian request by saying that Israel was not planning to offer favors in exchange for any state's participation.

Arafat said recently that there would be no delegation from the Palestinian Authority attending the conference. He blamed Israel's policies for his decision.

Qatari Foreign Minister Sheik Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani recently sent some 92 invitations to the conference — mostly to foreign ministers, but also to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and officials of the European Union and other international institutions.

It appears that the only foreign ministers planning to attend are Israel's David Levy and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who has

repeatedly lobbied in support of the conference. But even Levy cast doubt this week over whether he would attend.

Unlike its Arab neighbors, Israel is planning to send numerous top political figures. Minister of Trade and Industry Natan Sharansky is expected to attend — as may National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon.

Qatar also invited Labor Party Chairman Ehud Barak and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, and there is little doubt that both will be there.

Israeli officials, keenly aware that their presence at the meeting has been controversial for some Arab states, have attempted to defuse the issue.

The conference does not revolve around Israel, they explain, adding that they are but one of many states sending representatives to a meeting whose goal, after all, is to improve the regional economy.

But the Israeli presence remains a sore spot for the other participants.

Jordan is expected to send six ministers, all with economic portfolios, but not the foreign minister.

Other participating Arab states have lowered the rank of their representatives in order to stress the economic character of the conference — and downplay its political importance.

The United Arab Emirates said last week that it would not participate if there were no tangible results emerging from the peace talks.

The general lack of enthusiasm for the Doha meeting stands in stark contrast to the first such conference.

When Israeli and Arab leaders convened in Casablanca, Morocco, three years ago, an air of euphoria prevailed amid high hopes for the recently launched peace process.

There were similar expectations at the 1995 conference in Amman, Jordan, which focused on creating regional economic institutions.

Among the political leaders attending was Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin — just weeks before he was assassinated.

The atmosphere began to change by the time last year's conference was convened in Cairo. Setbacks in the peace process and Arab concerns about Israel's recently elected Likud government prompted organizers to bill it in economic, not political terms.

The Cairo conference proved successful in terms of the Egyptian economy. Numerous multimillion-dollar contracts for Egyptian factories were signed as a result of the conference.

This year, the Qataris hope to repeat that success in terms of their own economy.

Rich in natural resources, Qatar wants to develop as a vibrant business and investment center. The country's officials recently introduced new laws to facilitate private sector investments.

They are not ruling out Israeli investments, but they are most interested in promoting business with the United States, Germany and Japan. □

200,000 attend Tel Aviv rally to mourn Rabin assassination

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Omer Granot, a 21-year-old Israeli officer, attended the rally during a week's leave from his army service in southern Lebanon.

"I came as a citizen and as an officer in the army," he said. "I think the Rabin assassination was the most horrific thing that could happen to a democracy. Even when people disagree, there has to be room for dialogue.

"We still haven't recovered from the assassination,

and I don't know whether we ever will. I don't know where we're headed as a country, and it's frightening."

Granot was one of an estimated 200,000 people who attended a memorial rally Saturday night in Tel Aviv to mark the second anniversary of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Police estimated that the crowd, which spilled over into the side streets surrounding the square where Rabin was slain, represented one of the largest gatherings ever in Israeli history.

The rally was held against the backdrop of a deeply divided nation, whose political leaders have in recent days been exchanging barbs over the events surrounding the murder and its commemoration.

While rally organizers stressed that the demonstration was apolitical, the demonstration had a clear anti-government tone.

The only member of the government to address the crowd was Minister of Trade and Industry Natan Sharansky, who was heckled by some in the crowd when he took the podium.

Referring to the deep political divisions evident at the rally, Sharansky complained in his speech that "many would not feel welcome here."

Rabin's widow, Leah, who was the first speaker at the rally, rejected charges that the political left held the right responsible for her husband's assassination.

"Stop saying we are blaming half the people. This is wrong. Whoever speaks of half the people is making a desperate effort to divide this nation.

"We are one people and we have only one country," she said.

Labor leader Ehud Barak described the turnout as a "stamp of honor" for the Israeli public.

He promised in his speech not to let the "flame of peace burn out," and swore "to you, Yitzhak, to lead the way until we bring peace. Until we return to be one people, brothers in destiny."

In the only direct attack on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during the speeches, Meretz Party leader Yossi Sarid called on the prime minister to "go home."

"We've had enough of the lying, the charlatan behavior, the irresponsibility. I promise you, Yitzhak, we will not rest until he resigns," Sarid said.

'Grief belongs to one side'

Oren Yehi Shalom, a leader of Dor Shalom, a pro-peace movement created by Yuval Rabin after his father's assassination, said he regretted Sarid's remarks.

"It is too bad they had to be stated in such a way," he said.

Participants at the demonstration said it was inevitable the gathering should take on a political dimension.

"It was a political murder, and the grief belongs to one side," one rally attendee told reporters.

A day after the rally, Netanyahu offered a hand of reconciliation to the left wing.

Addressing the Likud Party convention Sunday night in Jerusalem, Netanyahu called for an end to the recriminations.

"It's time to stop flinging accusations and blame," he said.

"It's true we have real differences over how to achieve our goals. But the purpose is the same: peace and security for our people.

"Especially in these days we must extend a hand, and someone must do it first. I am extending a hand for peace and reconciliation to all the people." □

(JTA correspondent Michele Chabin in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

Israel, Palestinians disagree on result of Washington talks*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Amid all their other differences, Israel and the Palestinians could not agree on the value of last week's talks near Washington.

Foreign Minister David Levy said Sunday that progress had been made in the discussions, telling Israel Radio, "There was no breakdown."

But Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat charged that no real progress had been made during the four days of talks.

Palestinian officials were said to be planning to press their call for a special U.N. General Assembly session this week to address continued Jewish settlement construction.

Arafat's stance contrasted sharply with that of his deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, who participated in the Washington talks. Abbas called the talks "a very good beginning" after meeting last week with Levy. "We did not reach an agreement, but we found a good deal of understanding."

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz, citing political sources in Jerusalem, reported Sunday that during last week's talks, Levy said Israel would consider suspending building projects that have not yet begun during six to nine months of accelerated permanent-status talks.

The Palestinians conditioned their agreement to these terms on there being a prior agreement regarding the scope of Israeli redeployments from rural areas of the West Bank, according to the sources.

The question of a "timeout" in settlement building would be raised during a meeting scheduled for later this week in London between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Ha'aretz reported.

Albright is also expected to meet later this week with Arafat in Geneva.

The talks last week focused on issues still unresolved from the 1995 Interim Agreement, including a Palestinian airport and seaport in the Gaza Strip, a safe passage route for Palestinians traveling between Gaza and the West Bank, and the creation of an industrial park at the Karni crossing between Israel and Gaza.

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators were scheduled to continue their meetings on these issues this week in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, Israeli officials have downplayed the significance of Netanyahu's not meeting with President Clinton next week when the premier travels to the United States to address the annual meeting of the Council of Jewish Federations.

Last week, the officials were quoted as saying that the Clinton administration had made it understood that a meeting between Netanyahu and Clinton would depend upon whether progress was made in the Israeli-Palestinian talks. But Levy told the Cabinet on Sunday that U.S. officials had not refused a meeting, and that speculation over whether one would take place was blown out of proportion. □

Israeli legislators form group to urge Lebanon withdrawal*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A group of Israeli lawmakers have thrown their support to a new movement that will lobby for an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

"Unnecessary blood is being spilled in Lebanon, and we are here today put an end to it," Labor Knesset

member Yossi Beilin told a news conference Sunday in Tel Aviv.

The movement merged with "Four Mothers," a grassroots group of mothers of Israeli soldiers who are demanding that the army pull out of the security zone.

Along with Beilin, the new movement also includes Knesset members Haim Ramon and Nissim Zvilli of Labor, Naomi Hazan and Dedi Zucker of Meretz and Zvi Weinberg of Yisrael Ba'Aliyah.

It comes at a time of renewed debate in Israel over the wisdom of a continued Israeli military presence in southern Lebanon. The debate was prompted by an ever-mounting toll of Israeli casualties there this year.

More than 40 Israelis have died in Lebanon since the beginning of the year.

Beilin stressed that the movement's purpose was not to lobby for an Israeli pullout at all costs.

He said the Israel Defense Force should not withdraw from southern Lebanon "in a panic, in shock or in hysteria."

He said there must be an organized plan which would provide security for settlements on the northern Israeli border, as well as provisions for the South Lebanon Army, Israel's ally in the region.

The group's platform states that Israel should declare its intent to redeploy along the international border with Lebanon and set up an electronic fence along the border to ensure the safety of the northern settlements.

At the same time, Israel would inform the Lebanese government that it would be held responsible for the situation in the southern part of its territory and that Israel would respond fully if hostile actions are launched from Lebanese territory.

Israel would also make clear to Syria and Iran that it would hold them responsible for any hostile activities they support. □

Court upholds musician's firing for behavior during Israel tour*By Deidre Berger*

FRANKFURT (JTA) — A German court has upheld the firing of a Berlin Opera employee for his offensive behavior in Israel.

Gerd Reinke, who was a musician with the opera company when it toured Israel in May, was dismissed after he signed a hotel bar bill with the name "Adolf Hitler."

The bassist sued to get back his job, claiming the loss of his job was too harsh a punishment for an incident that he has maintained was a joke.

Reinke also claimed that he did not remember the incident because he had consumed too much alcohol.

During the trial, the prosecutor said Reinke's behavior had harmed the image of the Berlin Opera and of Germany.

The court, upholding Reinke's dismissal, said his removal was the only way to continue the opera company's tour in Israel. The outcry in Israel and Germany over the incident had made it impossible for the opera company to continue employing Reinke, the court added.

Reinke's lawyer called the court ruling harsh because it ruins his client's professional reputation. The court agreed that its ruling was drastic but said the musician was responsible for his behavior.

Reinke also has lost teaching jobs with the city of Berlin.

Other orchestras who had scheduled him for guest performances have cancelled his appearances. The German orchestra union terminated his membership.

The musician, who later apologized for the incident, has insisted that he is not anti-Semitic. □

Papon defends wartime role, rebuts historian's statements*By Lee Yanowitch*

PARIS (JTA) — The crimes-against-humanity trial of former French Cabinet minister Maurice Papon has taken up the broader issue of the Vichy government's role during the Holocaust.

During testimony on Nov. 3, Papon said the legislation enacted by the Vichy regime against Jews "shocked me politically, intellectually and emotionally."

The next day he testified that he was "disgusted" by the string of anti-Semitic laws that Vichy adopted beginning in October 1940 on its own initiative — four months after France surrendered to the Nazis.

"Not with my heart, nor with my hands, did I participate in these laws of exclusion," said Papon, who has maintained that as a senior Vichy official he worked to save Jewish lives.

Papon, 87, went on trial Oct. 8 in the southwestern French city of Bordeaux. He is charged with ordering the arrest of 1,560 Jews, 223 of them children, between 1942 and 1944, when he was secretary-general of the Bordeaux prefect's office and head of its Jewish affairs office.

Nearly all of the Jews deported from Bordeaux died in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

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.

Legal action against Papon began in 1981 after a newspaper article detailed his past.

But proceedings against him were repeatedly obstructed by French officials reluctant to see a trial dredge up embarrassing memories of France's collaboration with the Nazi occupiers.

Vichy's anti-Semitic laws — which stripped Jews of their right to teach, practice law or medicine, work as civil servants and own property — came under scrutiny at the trial by historians who argued that they reflected wartime France's role as a willing accomplice of the Nazi occupiers.

U.S. historian Robert Paxton, in testimony Oct. 31 for the prosecution that lasted more than three hours, spoke of the Vichy regime's eager assistance to implement the Nazis' Final Solution.

Paxton explained that the Nazis, who were short of manpower, would not have been able to arrest as many Jews — 76,000 out of 300,000 Jews were deported to death camps from France — without the help of the French police, who knew the terrain and the population.

"I don't see how anyone can say that the Germans' job was made more difficult by a regime that provided them with the ways to list, track down and arrest Jews, not to mention the help of the police," said Paxton, a retired Columbia University history professor.

Fears that the trial will never be completed

Papon, who has testified that he used his position in the Vichy regime to work against the Nazis, countered Paxton's charges.

"History, like science, is a fluid matter and difficult to comprehend," Papon said.

Papon arrived at the courthouse on Oct. 31 in an ambulance, appearing for the first time since he was hospitalized a week before with a bronchial infection.

The health complaints of Papon, who underwent triple bypass surgery last year, has thrown the trial off schedule, leading some relatives of Jews deported from Bordeaux to fear it will never be completed.

Paxton — whose 1972 book, "Vichy France, Old

Guard, New Order," is credited with having "broken the mirror" in which the French saw what they believed was their laudable conduct during the occupation — depicted France under Vichy as an anti-Semitic nation eager to carve out a place for itself in a new world order led by the Nazis.

He explained that Vichy adopted anti-Semitic laws long before the Nazis asked for them.

"Many French people believed at the time, and many still do, that German pressure was the cause of Vichy's anti-Semitic laws," he said.

"The effect of Vichy's actions made the Jews more vulnerable.

"The Aryanization of property and the exclusion of Jews from many professions facilitated the big roundups for deportation," which were carried out by French police, he said.

Paxton added that the Vichy government made life worse for the Jews by negotiating with the Germans for an arrangement under which the French police could act independently.

"That meant that the French police had to act against the enemies of the Reich — Communists, terrorists and Jews.

"That was the fatal mechanism that brought France to provide the Nazis with Jews" for extermination, Paxton said.

"There were very few similar cases in occupied Europe." □

Israel pushed to bring to trial those involved in bridge tragedy*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — If Israel does not prosecute those responsible for the bridge collapse at the Maccabiah Games, the father of an Australian athlete injured in the tragedy has asked the Australian government to bar Israel from participating in the Sydney Olympics in the year 2000.

In a letter to the office of the Australian sports minister, Colin Elterman asked that Israel not be allowed to participate in the games if those responsible for the collapse are not brought to justice.

Elterman's daughter, Sasha, a tennis player, was seriously hurt when the temporary bridge collapsed.

Two Australian athletes were immediately killed July 14 and hundreds of other participants at the games injured when a pedestrian bridge collapsed during the opening ceremony at the Ramat Gan stadium, plunging scores of people into the Yarkon River.

Two more Australians died weeks later as a result of complications that medical officials linked to contaminants in the river water.

A commission investigating the accident found the engineer and contractors who built the bridge at fault for poor planning and execution.

It also criticized Maccabiah organizers for trying to cut costs and take a cheaper bid.

State Attorney Edna Arbel met last week with Australian Jewish leader Mark Liebler.

She later said that she intended to decide by the end of the month whether charges would be brought against any of those believed to be responsible for the collapse.

Liebler said that the Australian Jewish community had not requested that Israel not be allowed to participate in the Sydney Olympics.

But he added that there was a sense of frustration over what is perceived to be Israeli foot-dragging in handling the matter. □