



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ President Clinton is set to meet Friday at the White House with former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Leah Rabin, the widow of slain Israeli leader Yitzhak Rabin. The meeting comes the same week that the White House said Clinton could not find time to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The president plans to meet with Netanyahu next month.

■ Swiss banks are planning to pay out some dormant accounts belonging to Holocaust victims by the end of November, a Swiss official said. The Swiss Bankers Association has released two lists containing the names of about 5,500 accounts opened by non-Swiss citizens.

■ Eighty-two Latvian Holocaust survivors received the first checks from Switzerland's Holocaust Memorial Fund. [Page 4]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cut short his trip to the United States to meet with Jordan's King Hussein in London. The monarch had requested the meeting to discuss the crisis in Iraq.

■ The regional economic summit held in Doha, Qatar, ended with a communique critical of Israel. Only six Arab states sent official delegations to the conference. But Arab businessmen from several countries boycotting the conference were in attendance.

■ Israeli Absorption Minister Yuli Edelstein will meet with Jonathan Pollard on Nov. 24. Pollard is serving a life sentence in an American prison for spying for Israel.

■ Israeli officials criticized allegations made by the European Union that Israeli orange juice exports violated a free trade agreement. The E.U. charges that Israeli juice sold duty-free in Europe was mixed with concentrates from Brazil.

■ Jewish settlers began work on a new apartment building in Hebron. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has repeatedly called for a "timeout" in settlement activity.

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### Crisis of Jewish unity dominates annual assembly

By Cynthia Mann

INDIANAPOLIS (JTA) — North America's Jewish federation world pulled out all the stops here this week to try to prevent the rifts over pluralism in Israel from widening into an unbridgeable divide.

But it is far from certain how the current crisis, which threatens Jewish peoplehood, can or will be resolved.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Labor Party Leader Ehud Barak discussed the volatile political landscape of the Middle East in their remarks before the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations.

And President Clinton was slated to speak to the gathering by satellite.

Of course, there were also countless workshops, seminars and discussions on Jewish education and identity, spirituality, lay-professional relations and fund raising.

But it is incontestable that the theme of preserving Jewish unity dominated the conference for the more than 3,500 delegates.

Even the weekend concert of Israeli singer Achinoam Nini, who is known as Noa, ended in a lament over divisiveness and a plea for tolerance and peace.

The Jewish fund-raising establishment has been stunned by the explosion of anger and anguish triggered in the last year among grass-roots non-Orthodox Jews over legislation that would codify Orthodox control over conversions in Israel.

It was exactly a year ago, at last year's G.A. in Seattle, that CJF entered the fray.

Delegates passed a resolution protesting the Orthodox-sponsored conversion legislation, departing from their typical unwillingness to enter the arena of Israeli religious affairs.

Since then, CJF and the United Jewish Appeal have directed enormous effort in an attempt to assuage the anger of the Reform and Conservative movements, which represent some 85 percent of affiliated American Jews.

The fear was that these constituents would be encouraged to divert money from the campaign in protest.

At the same time, campaign officials have tried to ward off attacks by the Orthodox, who believe that the UJA/federation system should stay away from political and religious affairs.

Publicity has been intensified in recent months to get the word out about central campaign support for the three streams in Israel.

Last year, the system funneled about \$17 million toward the streams — and other projects promoting tolerance and democracy — through the Jewish Agency for Israel via the United Israel Appeal.

The latest strategy has been a fund-raising initiative in which the CJF and UJA system has pledged to work with all three streams to try to raise \$10 million each for projects in Israel.

### Annual campaign has taken a blow

While originally designed for top donors, it now appears that this program of supplemental giving will be available at all levels to enable donors to earmark money to the religious movements.

The gifts, officials stress, must be above the donors' regular contributions to the annual campaign.

Despite these efforts, the annual campaign for both local and overseas needs, run by local federations and UJA, has taken a blow, bringing in \$20 million less in 1997 than had been projected.

However, at \$735 million, it is still 2 percent above last year.

But concerns ran beyond money.

Thinkers, teachers, pundits and politicians preached that Jewish peoplehood must not be torn apart by the conflict over pending conversion legislation.

"My prayer is that you won't walk away," pleaded Donniel

Hartman, the Orthodox director of education at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

"You have a lot of allies in Israel. Find them and join them."

Jewish Agency Chairman Avraham Burg passionately echoed the call.

The conversion crisis should be "an invitation for involvement," he said, not a cause for alienation and despair.

Netanyahu and almost all the other speakers pinned enormous hopes on the special commission appointed by the prime minister and charged with finding a solution by the end of January, the latest deadline after a series of extensions.

The head of that commission, Israeli Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, was one of the keynote speakers here who underscored the high stakes involved in the effort to reach a compromise.

"History will judge us all by how we respond to this challenge and responsibility," he said.

But at the same time, speakers warned that whether it failed or succeeded, the divisions between Israeli and Diaspora Jews and among the Jewish streams would continue and would require long-term attention.

"After this crisis, we will be different, whatever the outcome," said Alex Lubotsky, a Knesset member from The Third Way Party who has helped mediate the conversion conflict.

Said Hartman, "This is not a political struggle, it's an educational one and it will take a generation. If Israelis are not invested in Judaism, there will be no religious freedom."

In the meantime, said the president of the UJA, Richard Pearlstone, the Jewish people and the fund-raising campaign, which meets humanitarian needs, should not be held hostage to the outcome.

"Whether we win or lose" on the conversion legislation, "it shouldn't be the defining determination of whether we should have ties to Israel."

In a reference toward growing insularity, he said, "It is making us turn toward the shtetl rather than having a vision of [the Jews] as a bigger people."

On a panel made up of the three streams, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, echoed the call of many when he said, "We must use our combined strength" to "force a consensus among the parties in Israel."

"The crisis is not about religion," Epstein said. "The real problem is *sinat chinam*," he added, using the Hebrew term for baseless hatred among Jews.

And "it will not be resolved by policy or laws but by engagement" and dialogue.

#### **Deep divisions and 'reckless vitriol'**

At the same forum, Reform Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said he was not optimistic about the ability of the Israeli commission to reach a solution.

He said that while he would be satisfied with a short-term technical solution to the conversion impasse, Ne'eman had overreached the committee's original mandate by broadening its agenda to include a host of other complex religious matters.

Yoffie also said he was not open to continued delays.

"Waiting indefinitely is an endorsement of the status quo," he said.

Rabbi Jacob Rubinstein, president of the Orthodox movement's Rabbinical Council of America, lamented what he described as the deep divisions and "reckless vitriol"

prompted by the conflict. "The momentum may drive us to a cataclysm," he said.

"These wounds will not heal easily, the scars remain," he added.

His remarks came a day after his organization and other modern Orthodox groups published a full-page newspaper advertisement in USA Today calling for Jewish unity and support for the Ne'eman Committee.

At the same time, Rubinstein lashed out in anger at the Reform and Conservative streams and the fund-raising establishment for waging the pluralism battle in the philanthropic arena.

"Jewish brothers and sisters are fighting while humanitarian needs are being held hostage," Rubinstein said.

He also attacked the fund-raising establishment for using money to fund trips by Israeli Knesset members to learn about pluralistic American Jewry and not include meetings with Orthodox Jews.

CJF President Dr. Conrad Giles apologized for the exclusion, which occurred when eight Knesset members toured the country during the summer, and promised that it would not happen again as plans unfold to bring more Knesset members.

But, Giles said, his system could not and would not abandon the struggle.

"This is our issue."

While the emphasis on unity at the G.A. pleased many delegates, Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, senior executive of the Orthodox Union, reflected the view of many Orthodox delegates, who were unhappy about it.

"We've always been opposed to UJA becoming involved in religious, movement and political disputes," he said.

"UJA is to serve a united Jewish people and shouldn't be a vehicle for dividing us."

In spite of the obvious differences at the G.A., Ted Zachs of Vancouver, president of CJF of Canada, said he was leaving with "a reaffirmation that this is a positive time in Jewish history."

Amid his anguish over the divisions, he said, "the message I'm taking away is that there is room in Israel for all of Am Yisrael."

#### **'I hear a lot of anger and frustration'**

Zachs, who is married to a non-Orthodox convert, said the conflict hit him particularly hard.

As an activist and ardent Zionist, he said, "The suggestion that somehow my family didn't have a full legitimate place in the state was crushing."

Rachel Stempel, a professional with the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, said the G.A. gave her some answers that she would give to concerned donors back home.

"I hear a lot of anger and frustration from lay-people," she said.

"Donniel Hartman gave a good answer when he said not to walk away. It's going to take educating, and education is never fast."

For his part, Rabbi Irwin Kula, the charismatic president of CLAL, a training center for Jewish communal leaders, said the controversy should be understood and welcomed as an effort by Jews to grapple with who they are and with "redefining Judaism" at the end of the century.

He said the "journey" into the future has "different roadmaps" for different Jews.

What is needed, he said, is "a covenantal commitment to go on the journey together."

And, he added, "unconditional love" must be at the heart of it all. □

## Labor chief tells G.A. delegates he will fight Orthodox legislation

By Matthew Dorf

INDIANAPOLIS (JTA) — Israeli opposition leader Ehud Barak upped the ante in the battle over religious pluralism this week when he said he unequivocally opposes any legislation that would codify the Orthodox control over religious matters in Israel.

"I will never support — and the Labor Party will never support — any legislation that threatens to divide the Jewish people," Barak told cheering delegates Monday at the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations.

Hearing what many had been waiting for at a gathering dominated by this issue, delegates gave an audibly warmer reception to the retired general than the one they gave Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the previous evening.

Barak, in a 30-minute address, pledged to support "a determined effort to compromise," referring to the Ne'eman Committee, which is seeking a solution that would avert legislation on religious issues.

But if the Ne'eman Committee fails, "we will raise our hands against" the religious legislation, the Labor Party leader said to sustained applause.

Observers, especially Reform and Conservative leaders who had sought such a declaration, hailed his remarks as his first unequivocal statement against the legislation.

"It took a degree of courage" to state his position as he did, said Rabbi Uri Regev, head of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center in Israel.

Barak's remarks came one day after Netanyahu skirted specifics on the issue when he came before the assembly. Instead, Netanyahu deferred to his finance minister, Ya'acov Ne'eman, whom the premier asked to address the crowd. Ne'eman pleaded for patience as his committee seeks to find a solution.

But what played well to the delegates was sure to cause Barak political problems at home.

In the world of Israeli politics, Barak, if elected, would likely need the support of the religious parties in a future coalition agreement. In fact, Barak sat down last week to discuss future alliances with the leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party.

As a result some delegates questioned whether Barak would indeed uphold his promise if and when another vote on the controversial conversion legislation comes to the Knesset floor. Others suggested that it was easy for the head of the opposition party to say he would oppose the legislation.

### 'It's not politics'

But Barak, who had absented himself from the bill's first reading, stood firm.

"It's not politics when it comes to dealing with the very unity of the Jewish people," he said in a brief interview after his speech.

And when asked in a news conference if he would oppose the legislation even if the Reform and Conservative movements are blamed for a breakdown in the Ne'eman process, Barak said he couldn't be "clearer" in his opposition.

In addition, Barak said he would "basically" impose party discipline, requiring all the members of his Labor Party to vote against the legislation, except for Orthodox and Arab members of the party if it went against their beliefs.

As Barak was scoring points with delegates, Ne'eman admonished against prejudging the process. "We

have no choice but to find a solution," said the Cabinet minister, who noted that his presence at the G.A. during a time of intense budget negotiations in Israel reflected the importance of the issue.

"The future of the Jewish people depends on the consent and successful conclusion of this committee," he said. "History will judge us all by how we respond to this challenge and responsibility." □

## Federation task force will study plan to boost support for Jewish day schools

By Matthew Dorf

INDIANAPOLIS (JTA) — The Jewish federation movement will consider dramatically increasing support for Jewish day school education in North America.

But it has rejected, for now, a proposal that would have asked federations to work toward providing day school education to anyone who wants it.

Instead, the Council of Jewish Federations launched a one-year task force to study a grass-roots proposal that has asked federations to increase their allocations for day schools. The goal is to make a Jewish education accessible to all Jewish children regardless of their family's finances.

George Hanus, a Chicago-area businessman who heads a new movement, the National Jewish Day School Scholarship Committee, hailed the creation of the task force as a victory.

But he will continue to press individual federations to commit to making day school education available to all Jewish children, he said.

At the urging of the New York, Washington and San Francisco federations, CJF delegates postponed consideration of a resolution written by Hanus and supported by the Chicago federation.

The resolution would have urged federations to make day school education available to "all Jewish children whose families desire it, including those whose families do not have the necessary financial resources."

"The resolution wouldn't have passed without more clarity," said Martin Kraar, CJF executive vice president.

"What does it mean to a federation?" he asked.

In addition to questions surrounding day schools, many delegates said the issue needs to be studied further to assess its impact on public schools, school vouchers and Jewish education programs.

Wayne Feinstein, executive vice president of the San Francisco federation, stressed that the federations, in general, are not opposed to increasing support for day schools.

"If we approved it now without further thought, people in many communities would say that all additional campaign money should go to Jewish day schools," he said. "It's not just a moral exhortation, there was an expectation of financial support." □

## Synagogue attacked in Belgium

BRUSSELS (JTA) — Young rioters have damaged an Orthodox synagogue and injured one person in Brussels.

The rioters tried to set fire to the synagogue's wooden door and threw stones at the building, breaking several windows, according to authorities.

The attack occurred last week after clashes between protesters, mainly Moroccan immigrants, and police.

The son of the synagogue's doorkeeper was injured when he attempted to calm the crowd.

The rabbi of the synagogue, which is located in an area of the city largely populated by North African immigrants, has lodged a complaint with the authorities. □

## Continuation of Papon trial linked to defendant's health

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — Lawyers for Holocaust victims and their families are accusing Maurice Papon of using his health as an excuse to delay his trial for crimes against humanity.

Angry protests were sounded Monday after the judge again suspended the proceedings after the former Vichy official was hospitalized for 10 days with double pneumonia.

The latest delay came as the proceedings were about to focus on Papon's role in organizing convoys that took Jews to internment camps, the last stop before they were sent to death camps.

Lawyers for the civil plaintiffs voiced frustration that after weeks of hearing character witnesses for the defense, historians of the period and lengthy discussions of Papon's administrative power, learning about the very acts he is accused of will be postponed.

"The roundups, the transports, the deportations are the raw material of this trial.

"When will we finally begin to hear the cries of the victims who suffered under his power?" asked Gerard Boulanger, the lawyer who first filed charges against Papon in 1981.

Papon, 87, was admitted Monday to the Haut Leveque Hospital outside the southwest French city of Bordeaux after doctors diagnosed him with pneumonia in both lungs.

Presiding Judge Jean-Louis Castagnede ordered the trial suspended until Nov. 27 and appointed a medical expert to report on Papon's state of health and on when he would be able to return to court.

Under French law, a suspect may only be tried in absentia if his or her absence is voluntary.

Papon stands accused of ordering the arrest and deportation of 1,560 Jews — 223 of them children — when he was secretary-general of the Bordeaux prefect's office and head of its Service for Jewish Questions in 1942-1944, in Nazi-occupied France.

Papon's latest ailment follows a string of delays in the trial because of various illnesses, including a severe bronchial infection that kept him hospitalized for eight days last month.

### Papon seen as a 'poor, old, sick man'

The suspensions, which are likely to make the trial run into February or March instead of ending on Dec. 23 as initially planned, angered lawyers for the prosecution and their clients, most of whom are relatives of Jews deported from Bordeaux.

"Papon presents himself as the victim of some sort of Judeo-Masonic conspiracy. A lot of people are starting to think of him as a poor, old, sick man," said lawyer Dominique Delthel, who is representing families of Holocaust victims.

"But there were also the old sick people he deported to Auschwitz who were gassed, and the children and the mothers and fathers," he said.

Delthel's remarks highlighted the difficulty of holding a trial more than 50 years after the alleged crimes were committed in a country whose collaborationist past was long obscured by the Gaullist myth that all of France resisted the Nazis.

His wartime conduct unknown or ignored, Papon enjoyed an illustrious post-war career — as Paris police chief from 1958-1967 and as budget minister from 1978-1981 — until a newspaper published documents linking him to the deportation of Jews.

Papon now maintains that he used his position in Bordeaux to help the anti-Nazi resistance and save Jewish lives.

Some who were dismayed at the new delay accused him of stalling whenever the trial began to delve into his role in handing over the Jews of Bordeaux to the Nazis.

"Each time Maurice Papon has to confront his responsibilities, we are confronted with a man who has fallen ill," said Jackie Alisvaks, a civil plaintiff.

Alisvaks was arrested by French police during the war, but managed to escape from a Bordeaux detention camp.

His parents, however, were sent to die in Auschwitz.

The court had been due this week to hear a surprise witness who wrote to the judge two weeks ago asking to testify.

Christiane Hipolite worked as a secretary for Bordeaux's Service for Jewish Questions when Papon was in charge of the office.

With most witnesses of the period now dead, Hipolite's testimony could be vital in determining whether Papon indeed delivered the orders that sent Jews to their deaths. □

## Swiss Holocaust fund checks delivered to Latvian survivors

By Lev Krichevsky

RIGA, Latvia (JTA) — Some of the recipients were less than enthusiastic.

"The sum is insulting," said 75-year-old Yevgenia Barowska.

"It should be a monthly pension."

Barowska was among the 82 Latvian Holocaust survivors who received the first checks from a Swiss fund for needy survivors.

While she criticized the checks for \$400 distributed at a ceremony Tuesday in the Latvian capital of Riga, other elderly recipients voiced satisfaction.

Margers Vestermanis, 72, said that although the payments were a symbolic gesture, the "Swiss financial organizations today are recognizing their historical responsibility."

The money "is historical justice," said Alexander Bergman, chairman of the Latvian Jewish Society of Former Prisoners of Ghettos and Concentration Camps.

The ceremony at the Jewish community center building in Riga ended months of speculation and questions over who would receive payments and when they would be disbursed by the Holocaust Memorial Fund.

The fund was established in February by Switzerland's three largest banks amid allegations that the Swiss banks were hoarding the wealth of Holocaust victims.

The fund's board agreed in July to earmark an \$11 million initial distribution to Jewish Holocaust survivors in eastern and central Europe, each of whom is slated to get \$1,000.

The Latvian survivors will get additional checks of \$600, according to fund officials.

Nearly all of the survivors live on monthly pensions of about \$80. Each of them has different plans for the \$400 they received.

Barowska said she would use the money to pay four months rent.

Vestermanis plans to use the money to obtain proper health care for the "first time in my life."

And Riva Shefere, who received the first check at Tuesday's ceremony, said she had intended to buy a washing machine, "but unfortunately this sum is not enough." □