



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The World Jewish Congress said it would urge a temporary moratorium on sanctions placed by U.S. state and local governments against Swiss banks. WJC President Edgar Bronfman is expected to make his appeal at a conference in New York City on Monday.

■ France reportedly indicated that it would not contribute its share of Nazi looted gold held by the Tripartite Gold Commission to a newly created international fund for Holocaust survivors. Instead, it may give the estimated \$21 million to the French Jewish community. [Page 1]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed Thursday to resolve a general strike involving 700,000 workers that has paralyzed Israel for two days. Before leaving for meetings in Europe, Netanyahu met with the chairman of the Histadrut labor federation in an effort to end the strike. [Page 2]

■ Israel and Syria nearly went to war in the summer of 1996 because of disinformation received by Israeli intelligence, according to the Israeli media. Israel is establishing a high-level committee to investigate how the information was obtained. [Page 2]

■ A committee investigating the failed assassination attempt on a Hamas leader in Jordan will not recommend legal action against the head of the Mossad. A report by the committee will, however, criticize the actions of Danny Yatom in the attempt.

■ Israeli security forces have arrested members of a Hamas terrorist cell who planned to kidnap Israeli soldiers in order to negotiate for the release of Palestinian prisoners. Israel disclosed that the members of the cell, who were detained 10 days ago near Jerusalem, had planned to disguise themselves as Jewish settlers or fervently Orthodox Jews.

■ The trial of former Vichy official Maurice Papon's resumed. Papon is charged with deporting 1,560 Jews while he was an official in the Bordeaux region during World War II.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### U.S. calls for closure as Nazi gold conference ends

By Daniel Kurtzman

LONDON (JTA) — A historic international conference aimed at bringing justice to Holocaust survivors has ended with an American call for the nations of the world to complete all moral and material restitution by the end of this century.

The search for gold looted by the Nazis and long-lost assets located in dormant Swiss bank accounts — known together as the Nazi gold affair — has been described as the last chapter of the Holocaust.

Now, the head of the United States' delegation to the three-day conference, Stuart Eizenstat, is calling on the world's nations to close that final chapter.

"We have a collective responsibility to leave this century having spared no effort to establish the truth — and to do justice," said Eizenstat, the Clinton administration's point man on the Nazi gold issue.

"We are dealing here with an extraordinarily declining set of people," added Eizenstat, the U.S. undersecretary of state for economic affairs.

"We are dealing with a biological problem, and we must not allow this to degenerate into a biological solution," he said.

Jewish leaders hailed the gathering as a "moral triumph," and most delegates emerged committed to providing full financial and moral accountings of their nations' wartime actions.

But ultimately, the London conference may have been more important for its symbolic value than for its concrete achievements.

Indeed, many of the delegates said an enhanced historical understanding would be the true legacy of the conference. Armed with that understanding and a commitment to full accountability, they said they now hope to move toward timely closure.

The conference, which brought together some 230 delegates from more than 40 countries, culminated what Eizenstat called a "year of discovery" about the wartime dealings of neutral nations such as Switzerland and the fate of Holocaust victims' assets.

Jewish officials stressed that the gathering was not an end in itself, but part of an ongoing process to achieve restitution and justice.

### Calls for a new Web site

Eizenstat called on the various countries that have established fact-finding commissions to disseminate their findings via a new Web site, which he said would facilitate communication and disclosure of historical information.

Held under the auspices of the Tripartite Gold Commission — set up by the United States, Britain and France after the war to distribute looted Nazi gold back to its rightful owners — the conference was geared in part to determining how 5.6 tons of residual gold should be distributed.

During the last 50 years the commission has distributed 337 tons of looted gold — 98.6 percent of the amount in its pool — to European countries whose treasuries were pillaged by the Nazis.

Following revelations last year that Holocaust victims' personal gold may have been mixed into the Tripartite pool, Jewish groups began appealing to have the remaining gold, currently worth between \$55 and \$60 million, returned to survivors or their heirs.

To buttress that claim, the World Jewish Congress, which spearheaded the international search for justice, released a document here this week showing that the Allied commission knowingly distributed between 50 and 60 tons of Holocaust victims' personal gold to European countries after the war, even though its mandate was to return only "monetary gold" belonging to central banks.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJC, said the gold was worth about \$60 million back then and between \$500 to \$600 million today.

In one of the more tangible results of the conference, the United States and Britain announced the creation of a new international fund to benefit Holocaust survivors.

The United States said it would contribute up to \$25 million, pending congressional approval, and Britain pledged \$1.7 million.

Other countries, asked to voluntarily contribute, followed suit.

Luxembourg, Argentina, Croatia, Greece, Brazil, Poland and Austria all said this week that they were ready to pay into the fund.

France reportedly indicated that it would not contribute its share to the fund, but instead give it to its own Jewish population.

Other countries with claims to the Tripartite pool said they were considering donations, and none refused outright.

Jewish delegates praised the fund as a promising means of channeling the residual gold — and possibly additional contributions — to Holocaust victims.

Steinberg said, however, that the WJC would withhold final judgment on the action until each of the countries with claims to the Tripartite gold decides what to do with its share and until procedural issues related to the new fund are worked out.

The Tripartite commission, meanwhile, failed to decide to make public its archives — a move that Jewish officials, together with the United States and Israel, had been advocating.

Britain supports the move, but France opposes it, saying it would be inappropriate for the commission to disclose its files before finishing its work, according to officials.

At the close of the conference, Jewish officials reserved their criticism for Switzerland and the Vatican delegation, which attended as observers rather than participants.

“I thought it very sad that one of the greater moral centers of the world did not tell us what their view was at all,” Lord Greville Janner, a prominent Jewish leader who chairs Britain’s Holocaust Educational Trust, said of the Vatican’s silence at the conference.

WJC said it had obtained new documents containing charges that the Vatican played a significant role in handling looted gold, and Jewish officials, together with the Israeli delegation, called on the Vatican to open its archives.

The Vatican delegation responded to the request, Jewish officials said, by saying that their records were sealed for 100 years.

Steinberg praised a frank report Switzerland presented that said looted Nazi gold made its way to Switzerland.

But he criticized the delegation for failing to acknowledge any additional obligation it might have, saying it was “business as usual” for Switzerland.

Switzerland, for its part, called the conference a success and dismissed the WJC’s criticism as an effort to maintain pressure on the country. □

#### BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### **New Jewish center at Dartmouth imbues community with new spirit**

By Adam J. Siegel

HANOVER, N.H. (JTA) — Members of Dartmouth College’s Jewish community are excited about the recent dedication of a new center for Jewish life.

At the same time, some are questioning college President James Freedman’s use of the dedication ceremony to detail some of the history of anti-Semitism at the school.

The completion of the \$4 million Roth Center for Jewish Life marked the end of a decade-long search for a

permanent facility to be used for a wide range of activities — from religious services to social and cultural events.

And weeks after the dedication, there is a strong belief that the center has renewed the spirit of Judaism within the Dartmouth community.

“It’s incredible to be in a place dedicated to Jewish life on this campus,” said Valerie Hartman-Levy, a Dartmouth graduate and one of seven female alumnae who spoke at the Roth Center as part of a panel discussion titled, “Jewish Women in the Era of Coeducation at Dartmouth.”

In addition to the evening lectures and artistic productions that have been scheduled at the Roth Center, Jewish students at Dartmouth no longer have to hold Shabbat services in the old Hillel house, which could barely accommodate 50 people.

But Freedman’s use of the ceremony to explore anti-Semitism at Dartmouth drew a mixed response.

At the Nov. 7 ceremony, Freedman told a standing-room-only crowd of over 400 alumni, students and faculty that the center was an important step in “the legitimization of the authentication of Judaism” at the college.

At a dinner following the dedication, Freedman detailed the anti-Semitic history of the school.

He read excerpts from several sets of correspondence, including a 1934 letter written to an alumnus by a former director of admissions in which the school official stated, “I am glad to have your comments on the Jewish problem.

“If we go beyond the 5 percent or 6 percent in the Class of 1938, I shall be grieved beyond words.”

Many of the students who were invited to sit with alumni and discuss life at Dartmouth today believed that the dedication should have been a time to celebrate the future of Jewish life on campus rather than dwell on anti-Semitic practices that occurred decades ago.

Aaron Grotas, a senior and active member of Hillel who attended the dinner, said that while he admired Freedman’s candidness about Dartmouth’s past, “this was a celebration to thank donors for their generosity; instead, Freedman chose to qualify the new successes of Jewish life with historical perspective.”

#### **Jews ‘no longer stuck far away’**

At the dedication ceremony, senior Shirley Sperling, a former Dartmouth Hillel president, said Jewish students “are no longer stuck far away from the center of campus.

“We are here at Dartmouth, where we can be seen and heard, and where we will be so much better at sharing ourselves, our heritage and our culture.”

As Daniel Siegel, the rabbi at the college, said, “It is people which sanctify a place, not the building itself.”

While the dedication of the Roth Center came as a huge milestone in the college’s history, Dartmouth is also celebrating 25 years of coeducation.

That commemoration, too, has been marked at the new center.

Although there may be fewer Jewish students at Dartmouth than at other prestigious colleges and universities — some 10 percent of students are Jewish — many students say the intimacy of the Dartmouth Jewish community increases their desire to express their Judaism.

David Levi, president of Dartmouth Hillel and a member of the class of 2000, echoed that sentiment in a speech following Shabbat services, saying had he gone elsewhere, “I know I would not have been as involved with Hillel as I am here.

“Jewish life and culture cannot be taken for granted in a place like Hanover.” □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES**

**Palestinians also worry about Jordan's intent in peace process**

By Gil Sedan

RAMALLAH, West Bank (JTA) — Here in the West Bank town that serves as the seat of the Palestinian legislative council, there is little trust in Israel.

When the Israeli Cabinet approved in principle this week a redeployment but gave no details regarding how much West Bank land would be relinquished, Palestinian officials gave a mixed — and initially cautious — response.

But the initial caution took a different turn by Tuesday. During a joint news conference here with Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul Salam al-Majali, Arafat reacted sharply to a statement made by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a day earlier — that Israel would annex the Jordan Valley and other areas of the West Bank if Arafat unilaterally declared a Palestinian state.

“Let it be clear to all that the state of Palestine exists,” Arafat said, adding that eastern Jerusalem would serve as its capital.

The U.S. State Department called for a timeout Tuesday from this latest exchange, telling both Israel and the Palestinians that there was more to be gained from negotiations than from proclaiming unilateral steps they would take if talks fail.

The heated rhetoric aside, Palestinian independence is no longer a dream in Ramallah, but a daily reality.

Once one passes the Palestinian checkpoint at the entrance to the town, there are only a few markers recalling the once-dominant Israeli presence.

At the entrance to the road leading up to the administrative building of the Palestinian legislative council, there is still a sign in Hebrew saying: “No entrance, except for security vehicles.”

**Reminder that Israelis are nearby**

It is as if the Palestinians have left the sign there on purpose, as a silent reminder that the Israelis are still nearby. And indeed, Israeli settlements surround Ramallah.

But inside the town, the only Israelis to be seen on Tuesday were journalists who came to cover the Arafat-Majali meeting. The session took place in the same building that had served the Israeli governor of Ramallah until Israeli troops completed their withdrawal two years ago this month.

Palestinian security guards stood at the checkpost at the entrance to the compound, visibly enjoying the experience of body-searching Israeli journalists who came to cover the meeting.

The meeting between Arafat and Majali reflected the suspicion with which the Palestinians still eye the Jordanian role in the peace process. The Palestinians are concerned that if negotiations over the final status of the territories indeed take place sooner than originally anticipated, the Jordanians might claim certain privileges.

Of special Palestinian concern is the special status that Jordan's King Hussein claims as the guardian of the Muslim holy sites in eastern Jerusalem.

But for all the tensions that mark relations between the Palestinians and Jordanians, the comments Arafat and Majali made to reporters were mainly aimed at Israel.

Majali described Israel as an obstacle to peace, adding, “All of Jerusalem, not only East Jerusalem, is up for negotiations.” It was a declaration hardly welcome in Israel — but was music to Arafat's ears.

Arafat, beyond his remark about a Palestinian state, refused to delve into the Israeli Cabinet's decision, saying that he had not received any official Israeli proposal. “We

will not give any position in response to media reports,” he said.

Palestinian officials were insisting this week that Israel honor its commitments and proceed with the three phased redeployments spelled out in already signed agreements. But unofficially they have adopted a wait-and-see stance.

They are well aware that strong elements within the Israeli government, such as Foreign Minister David Levy and Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani, will push for a detailed Israeli proposal regarding the final-status talks within two weeks.

They are also aware that there are other strong elements in the Netanyahu coalition, such as the ministers from the National Religious Party and the Tsomet Party, who may foil the entire initiative.

Israeli Cabinet members said Sunday that a redeployment could occur only after Netanyahu presented his plan to them for a permanent-status solution.

The much publicized infighting within the Netanyahu government prompted chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat to comment this week, “Israel should stop negotiating with itself and start negotiating with us.”

Azmi Shuaybi, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, said the Israeli Cabinet decision was “totally designed to keep together the various factions inside the Israeli coalition.”

He, like other Palestinian officials, rejects the Israeli preconditions on the redeployment, particularly Israel's demand that the Palestinian Authority first prove its commitment to fight terror.

“This amounts to a reopening of the negotiations, which is totally unacceptable to us,” said Shuaybi.

Meanwhile, here on the streets of Ramallah there was little hope for the peace process. Next week marks the 10th anniversary of the intifada, or the Palestinian uprising. Some people here felt the current juncture in the peace process could well lead to the start of another intifada.

“Both parties are playing for time,” said Rafik Bishara, a taxi driver. “Both parties are playing versus the Americans, not versus each other. Both have not overcome the main problem in the current crisis, the lack of mutual trust.” □

**Watch out, Hula Hoops:  
Here come egg droppings**

NEW YORK (JTA) — Think of egg drop, and most people think of Chinese soup.

But the students at Haifa's Technion University broadened our minds on the word this week with a unique contest. The contest asked students to devise the quickest way to drop an egg from a nine-story building and have the egg land intact.

Students used everything from Silly Putty to toilet paper, and Styrofoam cups packed with honey to plastic Coke bottles weighted down with water, to send their eggs to the ground. One entrant used a children's water flotation device pasted to a cardboard tray in attempt to float the egg to the ground.

Unfortunately, the tray landed upside down and the egg, although intact, failed to touch the ground.

The winner was Yair Solomon, who packed his raw egg in a jar of apricot jelly, placed it a plastic tube and sealed it with a water balloon. He then shot it to the ground using a homemade rocket engine. Solomon's egg landed on the ground in just 3.2 seconds.

The contest “was no joke,” aeronautics student Nivya Durban, who came up with the idea for the competition, was quoted as saying. “Techniques used to land a space vehicle on the moon were used here.” □

**U.N. delays controversial vote on Palestinian status***By Faygie Levy*

NEW YORK (JTA) — The United Nations General Assembly temporarily halted discussion this week on a controversial resolution that would grant the Palestinians member status without voting privileges.

The decision to postpone the discussion was made Wednesday after the Arab-sponsored proposal caused days of behind-the-scenes wrangling and it became apparent that there wasn't widespread support for it.

The Palestinians currently have observer status at the United Nations and there is fear that any change to that status would further upset the faltering Middle East peace effort.

"We are opposed to any upgrading of the observer status of Palestine," a spokesman for the U.S. mission said, adding that it is "counterproductive to introduce matters that bypass the bilateral peace process here in New York."

The European Union is seeking to amend the resolution by proposing a postponement of the vote until next year.

Israel also staunchly opposes any change in the Palestinians' status.

"At a time when the international community is calling upon Israel to desist from any 'unilateral action' that might prejudice the outcome of negotiations, it is outrageous that the PLO is taking the most important unilateral action of all and establishing for itself a status equivalent to that of state within the United Nations," Dore Gold, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, said in a telephone interview.

"While we are taking real risks for peace, the Palestinians are slapping Israel in the face at the United Nations.

"This is unacceptable," said Gold, who had earlier this week addressed the assembly during its annual debate on the "Question of Palestine."

For their part, the Palestinians oppose the European amendment. They say the status change would facilitate their work by making it easier to participate in general U.N. debates.

Under the proposed resolution, they would not be able to vote and could not offer any candidates for positions in the United Nations.

"Seeing that we have a government on the ground, it makes more sense to have more rights," said an official at the Palestinian mission who asked not to be identified. Discussion on the resolution, which was originally slated for a vote Dec. 3, is expected to resume Tuesday. □

**Labor union head, Netanyahu unable to resolve general strike***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed Thursday to resolve a general strike that has paralyzed Israel.

Before leaving for meetings in Europe, Netanyahu met with the chairman of the Histadrut labor federation, Amir Peretz, and Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman regarding the strike by 700,000 workers, which has nearly shut the country down.

As a result of the strike, there were reports that the body of at least one American who had wanted to be buried in Israel was stuck in Cyprus after the plane carrying the casket was diverted from Ben-Gurion Airport.

The workers are protesting the finance minister's refusal to honor pension and wage agreements signed with

the previous Labor government, as well as plans to privatize government companies.

Netanyahu said he had been unable to convince Peretz to end the strike, but that the sides had agreed to continue discussions.

Peretz "did not say to me, 'I am going back to work,' but he heard my request for the workers to return to work," Netanyahu told reporters.

Peretz said he hoped that "we'll succeed in closing the gaps that remain."

Netanyahu called the talks after overnight discussions Wednesday between the Histadrut and Finance Ministry representatives failed to make progress, and back-to-work orders issued to some workers by a national labor court were ignored. □

**Disinformation nearly created clash between Israel and Syria***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel and Syria nearly went to war last year because of disinformation received by Israeli intelligence, according to the Israeli media.

The episode, which took place late in the summer of 1996, is now being studied by a government committee.

The Israeli army was preparing to redeploy its forces after unusual Syrian troop movements were reported last year in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley and in the area around Mt. Hermon. At the time, Israel received information from a reliable source that the Syrians were planning a surprise attack on the Golan Heights with the goal of forcing Israel back to the negotiating table.

In September 1996, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed concern about a Syrian military action during talks in Washington with President Clinton.

But American officials questioned the concerns, saying their information did not indicate that Syria was preparing an attack. The officials viewed Netanyahu's statements as an exaggeration — and perhaps an excuse to avoid resuming negotiations with Syria, which had been stalled since March 1996.

At the same time, France and Egypt conveyed messages from Syria that their troop movements were defensive and in response to what was viewed as threatening declarations by Israel.

In an effort to diffuse the tensions, Israel asked Egypt to convey to Syria that it was not interested in war.

As a result of observations made in the field, the Israel Defense Force decided that Syria was not mounting an offensive, and the IDF refrained from massing troops on the border.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that it was recently discovered that some of the disinformation received by Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai had been deliberately passed on. It was unclear who was the source of the information.

Foreign Minister David Levy confirmed this week that an examination was underway, but he downplayed the disinformation's impact on policy-making.

Israeli media reports said that other false information had reached previous Israeli governments, and that one question the governmental committee would examine is whether the assessments affected the decision-making process of the Rabin and Peres governments.

Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres said the decisions made by him, as well as his predecessor, Yitzhak Rabin, were based on numerous consultations with defense and military experts.

He added that there were never any signs that Syrian President Hafez Assad was interested in launching a military assault on Israel. □