



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ President Clinton is slated to light the first Chanukah candle in an Oval Office ceremony Tuesday evening. Clinton is one of several world leaders whose participation in menorah-lighting ceremonies will kick off a yearlong celebration of Israel's 50th anniversary.

■ Five people were indicted for homicide in an Israeli court in connection with July's bridge collapse at the Macabiah Games. The collapse led to the deaths of four people and injured dozens. [Page 3]

■ A leader of the Reform movement reiterated his doubts that the committee trying to devise a solution to the controversy over religious pluralism in Israel would succeed. Rabbi Eric Yoffie's comments came two days before the opening of the World Zionist Congress and a few days after Reform leaders met with the head of the committee to express their displeasure over the refusal of some officials from Israel's Chief Rabbinate to participate in the committee.

■ A Chasidic rabbi from Brooklyn and his brother pled guilty to charges of laundering drug money from Colombia and the Dominican Republic through two Jewish institutions. Rabbi Mahir Reiss faces a possible four years in jail; his brother, Abraham, faces three years. Another man charged in the case pleaded guilty to similar charges last week.

■ A high school choir director in New Mexico was suspended after leading a concert that administrators said contained too many Christian references. Guidelines for the school district established in May say that schools should be "religion neutral."

■ A former Israeli ambassador to the United States was chosen as the chairman of World Likud after a stormy session that was suspended after fights broke out near polling booths. Zalman Shoval was chosen under a compromise in which the two leading contenders — the former director general of the Prime Minister's Office, Avigdor Lieberman, and Communications Minister Limor Livnat — agreed to step aside.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Jewish settlers face prospect of further West Bank pullback

By Gil Sedan

BEIT EL, West Bank (JTA) — Political realities have left the residents of this Jewish settlement feeling grim.

"The people have no power whatsoever," Yehudit Meir, a woman in her 40s, said during an interview in her spacious villa here. "Once a politician comes to power, he no longer listens to the voice of the people," she added, referring in the same breath to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the late Yitzhak Rabin.

Beit El, located near the Palestinian town of Ramallah, is one of the oldest West Bank settlements.

Once it was a center of religious fervor symbolizing the Gush Emunim, or Bloc of the Faithful — the people who gave the ideological underpinnings to the West Bank settler movement.

But the mobile homes of old have now become villas.

The young, passionate settlers who founded Beit El 20 years ago have become middle-aged, bourgeois parents.

Located next to an Israeli military camp, Beit El itself seems like a military installation — an armed civilian stands guard at the settlement's entrance, eyeing visitors suspiciously, but allowing in anyone he does not suspect is an Arab.

Once inside, a visitor notices that little attention has been paid by the 3,500 residents to the appearance of areas surrounding the homes and community buildings.

There is very little greenery, and a large youth center has shattered windows and a dirty entrance.

Beit El residents have other things to worry about.

Despite much-publicized differences within the Israeli Cabinet over how much West Bank land should be transferred to the Palestinians in the next redeployment, it is clear to some settlers that concessions will be made.

A recent survey conducted for the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot showed that some 59 percent of Israelis condone the removal of settlements "for the sake of genuine peace with the Palestinians."

More surprising, some 22 percent of the settlers polled held the same view.

Beit El residents have a special reason to be concerned.

In a map sponsored by Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, Beit El is one of 42 West Bank settlements that would either have to be disbanded or become an island of Israeli sovereignty surrounded by Palestinian-controlled territory.

The map — which is competing with a more hawkish plan outlined by National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon that would keep all the settlements within Israeli controlled areas — was prepared to outline Israeli interests in a final-status agreement.

### 'It may be a matter of over-complacency'

The Cabinet recently agreed in principle to a further redeployment, but only after a final-status map is drawn up.

Many Beit El residents may be concerned about their future, but fewer than half of the settlement's 600 families showed up last week to an emergency meeting called by their mayor.

"People are dormant," said Dvora Dahan, the settlement's community coordinator, who has lived here for 10 years.

"But it is not a matter of despair," she added. "It may be a matter of over-complacency."

Beit El residents believe more strongly than ever that the Oslo accords were a fundamental mistake, but they show little defeatism.

Next week, when the last Chanukah candle is lit, settlers here plan to lay the cornerstone for a new neighborhood, which comes as something of a blow to American calls for a timeout in settlement construction while U.S. officials attempt to put the peace process back on track.

In a further blow to those calls — but a breath of fresh air for the settlers — Netanyahu said last Friday that he has no intention of putting a

temporary freeze on settlement construction. "There is nothing in the Oslo accords that prohibits Israel from building settlements," Netanyahu told journalists from around the world attending the International Conference on the Jewish Media in Jerusalem.

Declaring that Israel has a right to a presence in the West Bank, he said, "We should be there. This is our land, our homeland. We have differences of opinion over the territory."

Netanyahu also maintained last week that Israel does not intend to give up any settlements as part of an agreement with the Palestinians.

But within the settler movement there are doubts that the premier intends to live up to his word.

Settler leaders like Menahem Felix of Elon Moreh and Benny Katzover of Karnei Shomron — people who 24 years ago led the settlement campaign in the West Bank — are spearheading protests against Netanyahu, warning that they will seek to bring down his government if he concedes West Bank lands to the Palestinians.

But many Beit El residents are no longer manning the barricades.

Meir, for one, is not joining the protests.

Working for a physical therapist in Jerusalem, she drives into the capital each day along the road known as the Ramallah Bypass.

Built by the Rabin government, the road spares her from driving through Ramallah or nearby Arab villages.

"This is one of the reasons why we may seem indifferent. Daily security has improved," she said.

"Presently, the Arabs have no interest in heightening the tension along the roads," she added. "But we have no illusion that one day the Arabs will no longer have such interests. They will also attack us also on the bypasses."

While she admits that some of her generation have either grown complacent or gotten too caught up with life's daily demands, she looks to the next generation "to fight for our cause."

More and more youths from the second generation of the settlements are joining combat units in the army, Meir points out hopefully.

With the eldest of her seven children enrolling in an officers training course next week, Meir hopes that her son and other religious army officers will be able to affect the settlement policies of future governments.

"The real barometer is the youth," said Meir. "They are idealists. They are willing to fight for the cause. They are angry at us for being too bourgeois. We are proud of them. They will materialize the dreams that we have dreamed." □

## Kiev Jews regain synagogue, proving that money does talk

By Lev Krichevsky

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — The story of a successful seven-year struggle to regain a synagogue in Ukraine appears to prove the adage that money talks.

A Chasidic congregation in Kiev this month reclaimed possession of the Brodsky Synagogue, the largest synagogue in the Ukrainian capital.

The move came as uncertainty surrounded the future of a 1991 decree ensuring the restitution of communal religious property. The decree is scheduled to expire at the end of this year. Soon after then-President Leonid Kravchuk signed the decree in 1991, Jews moved into the Brodsky Synagogue, which was confiscated by the Communists in 1926 and turned into a workers' club.

But the Culture Ministry and Kiev's city administration did not want to give up the building, which since 1955 had housed a popular puppet theater.

As a compromise, the congregation received three rooms in the building, which served as the community's central synagogue.

The Jewish community eventually filed suit against the theater and the city administration, and earlier this year, Ukraine's High Court of Arbitration ruled that the theater should move out of the synagogue by Dec. 1.

But Jewish leaders say the theater would not have moved out if it were not for the efforts of Vadim Rabinovich, one of the country's richest men and the president of the newly formed All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress.

Rabinovich donated \$100,000 to refurbish a club to serve as a temporary home for the theater.

Since the 1991 decree was issued, more than 30 synagogues have been returned to local Jewish communities.

But some communities have found it difficult to regain their properties because local authorities, influenced by anti-Semitic and extreme nationalist elements, have been lax to implement it.

The small central Ukrainian Jewish community of Khmelnik, for example, has encountered fierce resistance in its attempt to reclaim its former synagogue.

Two years ago, the region's administration agreed to return the building to the Jewish community. But the decision was appealed to a higher court, which overruled the earlier decision.

"We still have no place that we can call our own," said Semyon Berenstein, leader of the 200-member Khmelnik community.

The international director of human rights for the Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry, Leonid Stonov, said he believed that a new law calling for the return of communal religious property would be put into place early next year. □

## Hungarian survivors to receive next round of Swiss payments

By Fredy Rom

BERN (JTA) — Some 20,000 Hungarian Holocaust survivors will soon receive checks from a Swiss fund for needy survivors.

The checks, which come in the wake of a similar payment last month to Latvian survivors, will total \$400 each, according to officials involved with the payments.

The payments will be distributed in January, they said.

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

Hungarian survivors are now receiving only \$400 of the \$1,000 they are slated to get because only \$11 million of the fund's total of nearly \$200 million has been allocated so far.

Officials with the World Jewish Restitution Organization, which has been overseeing the distribution of checks, approved a blueprint last month for allocating the remaining portion of the Swiss fund — over and above the \$11 million already approved — to be distributed to Jewish survivors.

The fund's executive board is expected to ratify those allocations at a Jan. 20 board meeting, after which the additional \$600 will be distributed.

Not all of the fund's assets will be given to Jewish survivors. About 10 percent of the fund is being set aside to help non-Jewish victims of the war, such as Catholics, Gypsies and homosexuals.

Earlier this month, 23 Albanians became the first non-Jewish recipients of the fund. □

# NEWS ANALYSIS

## El Al chooses Boeing amid intense pressure from U.S.

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Clinton administration often pulls out all the stops to help U.S. companies compete for large contracts overseas.

Boeing is no exception — and this time it was Israel that felt the heat.

When Boeing faced off against its archrival Airbus for a multimillion dollar contract with El Al, top Clinton administration officials leaned on Israel's national airlines to buy American. At the end of the day, El Al's board of directors voted unanimously to buy five commercial 737 jets from the Seattle-based manufacturer for \$180 million.

By choosing Boeing, Israel avoided a confrontation with the Clinton administration at a time of strained relations between Jerusalem and Washington.

It also revived the question of whether Israel is obligated to buy American because of the U.S. foreign aid it receives. The purchase, relatively small by industry standards, took on greater importance because El Al has flown an all-Boeing fleet since Israel's founding.

The contract, meanwhile, dealt a stinging defeat to the French Airbus, which also lost out to Boeing in recent deals with Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Senior French officials had weighed in on behalf of Airbus, but with less success than their American counterparts. At the end of a marathon two-day board meeting last week, El Al officials denied that there was U.S. pressure.

The officials said the decision, issued one day later than expected, came after Boeing lowered its offer a reported 6 percent to come closer to the Airbus price.

Despite claims to the contrary, there was little doubt there had been significant U.S. pressure — from Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on down.

Albright had raised the issue with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a meeting in Europe last week, according to sources. Netanyahu, in turn, dispatched his finance minister, Ya'acov Ne'eman, to address the El Al board.

### Eizenstat pleads Boeing's case

Meanwhile, Stuart Eizenstat, the U.S. undersecretary of state for economics, was dispatched to Israel to plead Boeing's case.

"We lost no opportunity with everybody from the prime minister to the bell cap to mention the importance we attach to Boeing's continued participation with El Al," Eizenstat told a group of Israeli government officials and business leaders in Israel.

Although the United States never threatened the \$3 billion it provides Israel annually in foreign aid, Eizenstat recalled a 1992 agreement under which the United States provided \$10 billion in loan guarantees to assist Israel's resettlement of Jewish refugees. He said that as part of that program, Israel had made a commitment to "enhance in a substantial way its purchase of U.S. goods."

"That doesn't mean we're supposed to win every tender," he added, "but this would be an excellent way of underscoring Israel's commitment."

Zalman Shoval, who was Israel's ambassador to the United States at that time and helped negotiate the deal, supported Eizenstat's interpretation of the agreement.

Israel has "no formal obligation to buy American," Shoval said during a visit here last week. "But the spirit certainly was that we would try to give preference to American goods."

On the Israeli side, Defense Minister Yitzhak

Mordechai also entered the debate. He warned El Al — whose largest shareholder is the Israeli government — that rejecting Boeing could affect Israeli-U.S. defense relations.

Mordechai reportedly told El Al that Israel could be hurt in the U.S. Congress at a time he is seeking funding for defense projects. He also said it could jeopardize deals with McDonnell Douglas, a Boeing partner that supplies jets to the Israeli air force.

American Jewish organizational officials also weighed in on behalf of Boeing.

El Al should "take into account" that Israel's relationship with the United States is different from its relationship with France, Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said he told El Al officials.

For its part, Boeing had launched its own campaign to win over the Israeli flying public.

The company created an Internet site that hailed 50 years of El Al-Boeing cooperation.

From the first transport plane sold to the new state to the airlift of Ethiopian Jews, Israel has used Boeing, the Web site boasted. And just in case Israelis forgot that Boeing acquired McDonnell Douglas last year, the company's site said the arms manufacturer is under contract to build 25 F-15I military aircraft for Israel.

Meanwhile, the next battle between Boeing and Airbus for El Al's business is already brewing. El Al is scheduled to purchase another batch of commercial planes next year. □

## 5 Israelis indicted for role in Maccabiah bridge tragedy

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Five Israelis have been charged with negligent homicide in connection with a fatal bridge collapse at July's Maccabiah Games.

The indictments came after the relatives of the Australian athletes who either died or were injured in the tragedy spent months demanding that those responsible be brought to justice.

The five who were indicted Monday in a Tel Aviv court were Baruch Karagula and Yehoshua Ben-Ezra, the contractors; Micha Bar-Ilan, the bridge's engineer; Adam Mishori, the head of Irgunit, the firm that subcontracted to Baruch and Karagula; and Yoram Eyal, the head of the organizing committee for the international games. If convicted, each could face up to three years in jail.

After learning of the indictment Sunday, Eyal stepped down from his position with the organizing committee. Itamar Herman, who chaired the organizing committee for the opening ceremonies, also resigned.

Two Australian athletes were immediately killed July 14 and hundreds of other participants at the Games injured when a pedestrian bridge collapsed, plunging scores of people into the Yarkon River.

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

One Australian athlete injured in the incident, Sasha Elterman, 15, has been hospitalized with a brain abscess that may have been caused by the polluted water.

Officials from Maccabi Australia have repeatedly complained about Israel's handling of the inquiry into the disaster and have demanded the speedy payment of compensation to the victims' families.

At a news conference in Tel Aviv on Monday, Tom Goldman, chairman of Maccabi Australia, said his organization was considering pulling out of the Maccabi World Union because it had not acknowledged its responsibility for the collapse. □

## Court hears gripping testimony of French child survivors of Nazis

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — Testimony in the trial of Maurice Papon has shifted from a historical review of Nazi-occupied France to personal accounts of suffering during the Holocaust.

For several days, the courtroom in the southwestern French city of Bordeaux has been absorbed by emotional accounts of children snatched from their mothers' arms, of others spending months hiding in an attic or waiting in vain for the return of loved ones.

Among the latest witnesses — the children of Jews deported from Bordeaux — was Georges Gheldmann, who recounted how in July 1942, he returned from school one day and found a hurried note from his mother reading, "My dear, I'm at the police station. Come and join me quickly."

The 10-year-old spent the night in prison with his mother, Berthe, and a dozen other Jews who had been arrested by French police.

"The next morning, we left the prison. I was released and shooed away. That's the last time I saw my mother," said Gheldmann, the first direct witness to the crimes for which Papon stands accused.

Papon, 87, is charged with ordering the arrest for deportation of 1,560 Jews in 1942-1944, when he was the second-highest ranking official of the Bordeaux region.

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

He has repeatedly denied the charges, claiming he used his position to work for the resistance and save Jews.

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

In testimony this week, some of the children of Jews deported from Bordeaux recalled events from more than five decades ago.

Eliane Dommange, 63, remembered the evening of July 15, 1942, when her family was having a last quick meal at home before fleeing Bordeaux for the free French zone.

There was a knock on the door.

"We thought it was our guide, but it was the French police," she said, nervously tapping on the microphone.

Along with her parents and two brothers aged 10 and 4, Dommange, who was then 8, was taken to the notorious, centuries-old Fort du Ha prison.

After two days, the Dommange children, like Georges Gheldmann, were released and taken in by their grandparents.

At the time, the Nazi occupiers were only demanding the roundup of Jews between the ages of 16 and 45.

### 'He took the lives of my parents'

Like Berthe Gheldmann, Dommange's parents were sent to the Drancy detainment camp outside Paris on July 18, 1942.

The following day, they were sent to Auschwitz.

Dommange recalled waiting after the liberation for her parents to return home.

She then said, fighting back tears, "I want to tell Mr. Papon that he took the lives of my parents, and he took a part of my life."

Papon, whose repeated bouts of illness have caused the trial to be suspended several times since it began in October, listened attentively from inside his bulletproof glass box.

When Dommange had concluded, he said in a

grainy voice: "With all the humility that is proper, and without underestimating the emotion that can only be felt, I see the illustration of a symbol, the illustration of a scapegoat who is in the dock."

His wartime conduct unknown or ignored, Papon enjoyed an illustrious postwar 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.

Legal action against Papon began in 1981 after the 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.

Papon will be the second and, in all likelihood, the last Frenchman to face trial for crimes against humanity.

A lower-ranking collaborationist, Lyon militia chief Paul Touvier, was jailed for life in 1994. He died in prison in July 1996 at the age of 81.

Rene Bousquet, Vichy's national police chief and Papon's superior, was killed by a deranged gunman in 1993 on the eve of his war crimes trial.

The proceedings, expected to run through March, are due next week to begin examining how the children left behind were taken out of hiding, allegedly on Papon's demand, and deported in a new wave of transports.

Wartime documents examined by the court suggest Papon behaved with unwarranted zeal in carrying out the Nazi deportation orders, even when his superior, Bordeaux Prefect Maurice Sabatier, told him to stall for time.

The papers included a list of measures he had drawn up, including his instructions to French police to barricade train stations and main arteries to avoid a mass exodus of Jews once the roundups began.

They also explained what to do with the children left behind when their parents were deported.

Perhaps the most disturbing testimony so far came from Esther Fogiel, a slim 63-year-old woman with the voice of a young girl.

### 'I often think of those close to me'

"My parents planned to flee to the free zone. One Saturday, my mother picked me up at school and took me to the home of a young couple.

"She looked at me with a sad smile — it's something that struck me.

"The next day, I left with a woman who worked on the black market," Fogiel said, clenching a white handkerchief. She was 8 at the time.

"After 3 days, the people with whom I was staying became brutal. They must have learned that my parents were sent away and felt cheated financially. They started to mistreat me, and I was raped shortly after my arrival," she added.

Unaware at the time that her parents, grandmother and little brother had been deported to Auschwitz, Fogiel thought they had abandoned her and attempted suicide.

After repeated episodes of sexual abuse, she was able to leave when the war ended.

The couple she stayed with was arrested and imprisoned.

A photograph of her parents, taken by French police the day of their arrest, was projected in the courtroom.

Her father, who had served in the French army in its brief war with Germany in 1939-1940, stared proudly at the camera, wearing his uniform.

"I often think of those close to me who died in distress, in absolute solitude," Fogiel said. "I keep reliving that trip to Auschwitz." □