



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 221

Thursday, December 10, 1998

81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Intifada anniversary marked

Palestinians in the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem staged violent protests and a general strike to mark the 11th anniversary of the 1987-1993 intifada.

The demonstrators, continuing days of clashes with Israeli troops, demanded the release of Palestinian activists held in Israeli jails. A 17-year-old Palestinian was reported killed by Israeli gunfire and scores of others were injured in Wednesday's clashes. Meanwhile, Palestinian officials said some 2,000 prisoners are participating in a hunger strike that began more than a week ago to press their demand for freedom.

### Court rules on army deferments

Israel's Supreme Court declared illegal a decades-old agreement under which fervently Orthodox yeshiva students are exempt from military service. The court ordered the Knesset to draft legislation regarding the deferments, which are currently given to tens of thousands of haredi students. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would seek legislation that would "prevent a rift" between secular and Orthodox interests. [Page 3]

### Clinton to lobby Israelis

President Clinton plans to deliver an address to the Israeli people Sunday night urging them to support implementation of the Wye accord, Clinton's deputy chief of staff said in a conference call with Jewish officials. Clinton's message will conflict with the stance of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has suspended implementation, citing Palestinian violations of the pact. During his trip to Israel and the self-rule areas, Clinton plans to light a menorah with Israeli President Ezer Weizman and light a Christmas tree in Bethlehem.

### Army to discipline soldier

The Israeli army decided to discipline a soldier whose beating by a Palestinian mob last week near Ramallah prompted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to threaten to freeze the implementation of the Wye accord.

Cpl. Assaf Miara, 19, is being charged with carrying an unloaded weapon and with leaving his base without permission. But the army is not charging him with failing to fire upon his assailants. [Page 4]

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### Proposed new Reform platform sparks debate over observance

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — A proposed new document that endorses studying Torah, keeping the Sabbath and other ritual practices has touched off a passionate debate among Reform rabbis and congregants about just how focused on traditional Jewish observance their movement should be.

The document, a draft for a new platform that is titled "Ten Principles for Reform Judaism," urges observance of mitzvot, or commandments, and devotion to Hebrew and Israel. This stands in stark contrast to decades of practice in the Reform movement that placed a higher priority on ethical practice than on ritual observance.

The debate highlights the divide between those who consider themselves "classical Reform" Jews and those who are more traditional in their religious practices.

The platform was originally slated to come up for a vote by Reform rabbis at their annual convention next May in Pittsburgh. That is the city where, in 1885, the movement adopted its first platform, which discarded all of Judaism's rules about keeping kosher and customs of dress as "altogether foreign to our mental and spiritual state."

But the controversy that the proposed new platform has ignited makes it unlikely that the issue will be resolved before the May convention gets under way.

The proposed platform was discussed extensively last weekend in Memphis, where the 250-member national board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was meeting. Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the congregational body's president, urged further discussion throughout the movement in an effort to reach some sort of consensus.

Meanwhile, the executive committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Reform movement's rabbinical association, decided last week to form a task force with representatives of the UAHC and Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary, to further study and redraft the proposed platform.

People in the Reform movement are at this point about evenly split, say those who have been most involved in the debate.

Those who keep kosher and observe other mitzvot say this is the direction in which the Reform movement is heading. But many who believe that authentic Reform Judaism is based on ethics, not commandments, say they worry that there will be no room in the denomination left for them.

Reform Judaism is a movement in transition between an era in which organ music and operatic solos were the norm during worship services — while wearing yarmulkas and prayer shawls was universally eschewed — and one increasingly described as "warm Reform," in which congregants join in folk-style Jewish singing and many elect to cover their heads and wrap themselves in tallitot during prayer.

The transition has been under way for a long time. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president emeritus of the UAHC, said in an interview that there has been tension over these issues since the 1930s.

Never before, however, has anyone made a move to make the more traditionalist orientation an official part of Reform policy. And now that Rabbi Richard Levy, president of the CCAR, has attempted to do so, the outcry is enormous.

In the outcry is audible the Reform movement's struggles with the tensions between universalism and particularism, between inclusion and standards, and between autonomy and cohesion.

Levy began circulating a first draft of his "Ten Principles" statement last March at

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Tougher divorce law planned

A Knesset committee authorized rabbinical courts in the Jewish state to impose sanctions on men who refuse to grant a get, or a religious divorce, to their wives.

The sanctions authorized by the committee include barring such husbands' exit from the country, suspending their driver's licenses and freezing their bank and credit card accounts.

### Poland cancels military deal

Poland canceled a billion-dollar deal with Israel to upgrade military helicopters because it said an Israeli firm had failed to meet deadlines.

Israel's Defense Ministry was considering appealing the move to an international court as a breach of contract.

### Court rules on Goldstein grave

Israel's Supreme Court stopped the army from removing the words "holy" and "martyr" from the tombstone of Baruch Goldstein, an American-born Jewish settler who massacred 29 Muslim worshipers in 1994.

The Israeli army wants to remove the words as a step in dismantling a shrine to Goldstein that was set up by fellow settlers.

### Mall cancels performance

The managers of a Jerusalem mall canceled a performance organized by the Reform movement, fearing it would trigger an angry response from the fervently Orthodox community.

The performance was intended to raise public awareness about alternatives to Orthodox marriage ceremonies and was organized as part of Israel's Human Rights Week.

The mall's general manager denied reports that he stopped the show under pressure from the Orthodox community.

the Reform rabbis' annual conference, where it prompted a stir. But rabbis in every movement tend to be more observant and traditionalist in orientation than most of their lay people.

So it wasn't until the proposed platform reached the 300,000 households in which there are Reform congregants — through the cover story in the Winter 1998 issue of Reform Judaism magazine — that the rumpus began in earnest.

In the version published in the magazine, which has been replaced by another draft in the weeks since, Levy used Hebrew terminology and focused his 10 principles on concepts like kedushah, or holiness; mitzvot, or commandments; and a sense of being commanded by the Torah.

For those Reform Jews who regard their movement as rooted in ethical choices rather than commanded obligations, these principles have been hard to embrace.

The impact was exacerbated, some say, by the magazine's cover, which shows the bearded Levy in a pose of prayerful contemplation, wearing a yarmulka and wrapped in the traditional prayer shawl as he reverentially kisses the fringes, or tzitzit, on the end.

Together, the platform and the picture caused some to wonder what was happening to their movement and whether they could remain Reform Jews. It is clear that some in the movement equate observance of traditional practices with Orthodox Judaism — and view the traditionalist camp as moving in that direction.

"I could not even finish reading this in the magazine because it was so repulsive," Laurie Livingston, a member at Peninsula Temple Beth El in San Mateo, Calif., wrote in the Reform Judaism magazine's Web site discussion forum.

If the platform is adopted as policy by the movement, "my children and I will join swelling ranks of the unaffiliated," she vowed.

"I have gone to great lengths to give my kids a strong Jewish education and Jewish identity. They love going to temple," she wrote. But the proposed platform "is too regressive and orthodox for me."

In an article in the same issue of the magazine, Rabbi Robert Seltzer, a professor of Jewish history at Hunter College, warned that Levy's platform is "turning Reform Judaism into Conservative Judaism Lite."

At the same time, those who are more inclined to be observant feel the proposed platform gives them a voice in a movement in which they currently feel marginalized.

Mark Levy of Santa Monica, Calif., has been wearing a kippah and tallit, and keeping kosher both at home and while eating out, for about 25 years. As a result, he has been asked many times by others in the movement why he is Reform rather than Conservative or Orthodox.

When he was president of his congregation, the Leo Baeck Temple, his wearing a kippah and tallit while he sat on the bimah during services prompted such fury that it was taken up for discussion by the board of directors.

Levy, who is no relation to the rabbi who drafted the platform, said in an interview that adopting the platform "would be valuable for the movement, as long as it doesn't say, 'You must' " do anything.

"Even if these things never get adopted, there are people talking about it, and we're hearing people's voices that we never heard before," he said.

For Barbara Shuman, a member of Temple David in Monroeville, Pa., the proposed platform has affirmed her place within the movement.

"I've been on a spiritual journey informed by ongoing learning. Now I'm one of the few in my community to personally wear a tallit and to have more Shabbat in our home," she said in an interview.

"For me being a Reform Jew means understanding that I have a covenant with God, and I think there are responsibilities incumbent with that," she said.

"I'm hopeful that whatever form these principles eventually take they will not just say it's up to every individual, but that there's something that applies for all of us," she added.

Rabbi Richard Levy, who started the whole process, is pleased by the debate.

"I hoped this effort would produce serious discussion of what God and Torah and mitzvot mean to us," he said in an interview from his offices at the Los Angeles Hillel Council, where he works as executive director.

"Wherever we go from here, I know there is a commitment to continuing the discussion and moving beyond it to action." □



## Daily News Bulletin

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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).

## JEWISH WORLD

### Russia to build Iranian reactor

Russia announced that it will build a nuclear reactor in Iran over strong American and Israeli protests.

Opponents of the \$800 million deal argue that Iran will use the reactor to develop nuclear weapons. Earlier this week, *The New York Times* reported that Iran recruited five scientists from Russia's germ warfare program.

### Sharansky takes symbolic walk

Israel's trade minister led a symbolic walk outside U.N. headquarters in New York to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Natan Sharansky, who was a human rights activist in the former Soviet Union, spent nine years incarcerated there as a Prisoner of Zion.

The founder of Israel's Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party was joined at the event by supporters who had pressured Moscow for his release. After he was released in 1986, Sharansky emigrated to Israel.

### Britain to help claimants

Britain established an Internet site to help Holocaust victims or their heirs determine if they are eligible for moneys from a newly established \$40 million fund.

Britain seized the money and property of foreign nationals, including Jews and other innocent victims, after the assets were classified as enemy property. Some 25,000 records of those people whose property was seized are listed at [www.enemyproperty.gov.uk](http://www.enemyproperty.gov.uk)

### U.N. Holocaust memorial sought

A B'nai B'rith official called on the United Nations to establish a Holocaust memorial to educate people visiting the U.N.'s New York headquarters.

Noting that the U.N. has displayed an educational exhibit on the atomic bomb explosion at Hiroshima for decades, Harris Schoenberg, the group's director of U.N. affairs, made the remarks at a meeting marking the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was inspired by the Holocaust.

This year saw the first international genocide trial under that convention, a move sparked by the 1994 mass slaughter in Rwanda.

### AJCommittee visits Bonn

A delegation from the American Jewish Committee is visiting Bonn for two days of meetings with German leaders. The delegation met with Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping to discuss issues such as international terrorism, cooperation with Israel and recent incidents of right-wing extremism in the German army.

## Draft reprieve for Orthodox struck down by Israeli court

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli court decision striking down the current system of granting army deferrals to yeshiva students could exacerbate the religious-secular divide here and put further strain on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's already-tottering coalition.

Israel's High Court of Justice ruled Wednesday that a Defense Ministry deferral program which currently has approximately 30,000 yeshiva students in it is illegal, and it gave the Knesset a year to pass a new law on the matter.

Ruling on petitions by two legislators from the secularist Meretz Party and the Israeli University Students Association, which sought to put a ceiling on the number of deferrals granted, the 11-justice panel said that if the Knesset failed to pass legislation in the next 12 months, the arrangement would be null and void. The justices said the issue had created a growing sense of inequality in Israeli society.

The deferrals, which date from the status-quo agreement that helped to usher in the founding of the State of Israel, has become a lightning rod in recent years.

In a bid to head off the petitions, Netanyahu established a panel in May headed by a retired Supreme Court judge that would examine the issue and try to come up with a solution acceptable to all parties. But the prime minister abandoned the idea after members of the haredi, or fervently Orthodox, Agudat Yisrael Party threatened to bring down the government if the panel were formed.

Commenting on Wednesday's ruling, Netanyahu pledged that legislation agreeable to all Israelis, ranging from the secular to the haredim, would be passed within the one-year deadline.

"This must be done to prevent a rift in the people. It won't be easy, but it can be done," the prime minister said.

Knesset member Avraham Ravitz of the United Torah Judaism bloc, who has been involved in an effort to resolve the issue, also welcomed the ruling.

"I think that the Knesset will discuss the matter, and that [legislators] will be receptive to each other. We are aware of what everyone's red lines are and are trying very hard not to cross them," he said.

Labor Party leader Ehud Barak, who drew the ire of some Orthodox lawmakers earlier this year when he authored a bill that would limit the number of deferrals, said there had already been contacts with haredi representatives on the issue.

Israel's chief rabbis also welcomed the ruling, as did President Ezer Weizman, who has spoken out in the past against the deferrals.

But in reactions that signaled the tough battle that may lie ahead, some haredi rabbis warned that they would not agree to a decision to draft any yeshiva students and would direct them either to go to jail or to leave Israel, rather than serve in the army.

Knesset member Rabbi Avraham Leizerov of UTJ called the ruling an "inquisition" and said yeshiva students would overcome the latest attempt by the State of Israel to draft them.

In their petition, Chaim Oron and Amnon Rubinstein of Meretz had argued that the arrangement implemented 50 years ago by Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, to exempt "a few thousand" yeshiva students from military service had evolved into a rubber stamp, exploited by tens of thousands of yeshiva students.

The two Knesset members demanded that a ceiling be set on the number of deferrals issued yearly and that those individuals be closely monitored to ensure they continue their studies and do not go to work.

In 1954, the year the status-quo agreement was signed, some 400 yeshiva students were granted deferrals. Today, roughly 2,800 students receive them each year.

Oron said he soon planned to introduce into the Knesset a law, based on the petition, that says there must be a ceiling on deferrals and that the deferrals must be closely monitored. According to the army, some 55 percent of 18-year-olds in Israel are currently drafted. Of the remaining 45 percent, some 21 percent are Israeli Arabs, who do not serve, and 8 percent are yeshiva students. □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****Opening of Gaza industrial zone heralds economic opportunities***By Julia Goldman*

AL-MUNTAR, Gaza Strip (JTA) — The slick brochure for the Gaza Industrial Estate calls it a "Gateway to Regional and International Markets," but leaders on both sides of the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip hope the Palestinian project will also open a doorway to peace.

Just over 15 miles from the new Gaza International Airport and a few minutes drive from the Israeli border, an octagonal water tower rises over the 123.5-acre site, which is known to Israelis as the Karni Industrial Zone.

Coca-Cola is reportedly one of four companies to have contracted space in the industrial park — five more are expected to sign shortly — which may eventually accommodate Palestinian and joint Israeli-Palestinian ventures.

Operations are slated to begin in January 1999.

Bashir Rayes, the marketing manager for the private enterprise in charge of the industrial zone, said his company, the Palestine Industrial Estate Development and Management Company, hopes to attract labor-intensive industries. Textiles and food processing companies are likely possibilities.

The industrial zone is intended to create 20,000 jobs, mostly for women, and perhaps more than twice that many jobs indirectly. The unemployment rate in Gaza ranges from about 30 percent to about 50 percent, depending on border closings.

In early December, President Clinton told a gathering of international donors in Washington that Palestinian terrorism occurs in part because, as a result of depressed economic conditions, young Palestinians have "nothing better to do."

Those involved in the zone believe that the new employment opportunities and commercial activity will contribute to a substantial future for Palestinians and therefore to a lasting peace.

"Where there is money passing, there is no shooting," said Shai Chermesh, the head of the southern Israeli regional council of Sha'ar Hanegev, to a group of 30 North American Jewish leaders he led into the industrial zone last month.

The British-educated Rayes echoed these sentiments.

"When it comes to business, we like each other a lot," he told the visitors, all delegates to the UJA Federations of North America General Assembly, which was held in Jerusalem.

Companies would reap the benefits of low rents and an inexpensive skilled labor force that, Rayes pointed out, has experience from working in Israeli industries.

Products going in and out of the industrial zone would enjoy direct access to Arab markets, as all goods would be stamped "Made in Palestine."

Dov Lautman, an Israeli industrialist who was the Israeli chair of the General Assembly, said he saw the zone as a "win-win" situation. He said he saw no problem with the "Palestine" label.

"Let them have pride if that's what helps," he said in an interview.

The Gaza Industrial Estate was developed as a prototype for a series of industrial zones that could provide investment incentives and employment opportunities in the Palestinian autonomous areas — and also promote Israeli-Palestinian economic cooperation.

But the zone's viability for investors hinges on the area's

exemption from periodic border closures, which Israel has implemented after terrorist attacks.

To satisfy its security concerns, Israel has granted the industrial zone a special, "somewhat sterilized" status, treating it as a separate entity from Gaza, according to Rayes. There is a border crossing point at Karni. Goods produced at the industrial estate would enjoy special duty-free access to foreign markets, with expedited security clearance — part of what Rayes calls a "one-stop shop."

Israel has insisted on performing its own security inspections, but a spokesman for the Israeli government said these procedures would not interfere with business at the site.

Rayes said he understands — and even shares — anti-terrorist concerns, but views the industrial zone first and foremost as an economic opportunity.

"Everybody is against bombing," he said. "We feel sorry, but also it touches our interest."

The \$90 million project is financed by grants and loans from Israel, the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development and other development agencies — as well as from PIEDCO's parent company, the Palestine Development and Investment Company, the largest private company in the Palestinian Authority.

With that kind of financial backing and international interest, Rayes asked the visiting North Americans, "Do you think I would let a guy come in and destroy this place?"

"We're totally against terrorism," he added, "as Palestinians, as businessmen, as investors."

As Rayes answered questions and described the project's potential, Chermesh moved among the PIEDCO representatives and plainclothes Palestinian Authority policemen, shaking hands and exchanging warm greetings.

"Not every area is Karni," Chermesh told the North Americans after they boarded the bus to Jerusalem.

But "if everything is progressing as it is here," he said, "there is hope for the peace agreement." □

**Israeli army to discipline soldier**

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli army has decided to discipline a soldier whose beating by a Palestinian mob last week was caught on film and televised around the world.

The incident, which occurred near the West Bank town of Ramallah, prompted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to threaten to freeze the implementation of the Wye accord.

The premier is charging that the Palestinian Authority had created the climate that led to the incident, in which Palestinian demonstrators demanding the release of activists held in Israeli jails threw stones at the car carrying the soldier, then dragged him from the car, hit him in the head repeatedly with a rock and took his army-issue rifle.

Cpl. Assaf Miara, 19, is charged with carrying an unloaded weapon and leaving his base without permission. But the army is not charging him with failing to fire upon his assailants.

Television footage of the incident was broadcast repeatedly in Israel, touching off debate on how he should have responded.

The army concluded that Miara should have opened fire instead of running from his assailants. But he has stated that when the stone-throwing began, he was hit in the head with a rock and was incapacitated. □