



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Settlers vow to fight Barak plan

Jewish settlers are pledging to fight Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's plan to dismantle 15 illegal West Bank enclaves. Cabinet minister Haim Ramon said Wednesday the outposts would be removed in a few days. [Page 1]

### Senate may vote on religion bill

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) told Jewish activists that he would try to bring up for a vote legislation aimed at providing greater protections for religious practice by the end of the year.

Speaking Wednesday to members of the Orthodox Union in Washington for their annual leadership mission, Lott voiced support for the Religious Liberty Protection Act, which passed the House of Representatives earlier this year. Some Jewish groups and lawmakers have dropped their support for the measure amid concerns over how the bill would be reconciled with civil rights laws.

### Iran may budge on 13 Jews

Tehran may be looking for a face-saving way to resolve the issue of 13 Iranian Jews being held on charges of spying for Israel, France's foreign minister was quoted as saying. Hubert Vedrine said he came to this conclusion in recent talks with his Iranian counterpart.

France is expected to warn Iranian President Mohammad Khatami during a scheduled visit later this month that the issue could hinder Iran's attempts to improve its relations with other countries.

### Berlin cemetery targeted again

German police discovered two unexploded Molotov cocktails at a Jewish cemetery in Berlin that was vandalized for the second time in a month.

Police are investigating the discovery at the Weissensee cemetery in the eastern part of the city, where 100 headstones were toppled less than two weeks ago.

### Israel to free prisoners

Israel plans to free 151 Palestinian prisoners by the weekend. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's office made the announcement Wednesday after Israeli and Palestinian negotiators agreed on the criteria for the releases.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Dismantlement of settlements will test Barak and peace process

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The painful process of dismembering Israel's West Bank settlements began this week — and it will provide a crucial test of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's domestic strength and future ability to move ahead with the peace process.

In a politically significant step, Barak launched discussions with settlement leaders Tuesday night about the government's intention to remove a number of hilltop outposts set up by the settlers in recent months in an attempt to create new facts on the disputed ground.

"A number" was the key phrase.

The Cabinet on Sunday empowered Barak to decide how many of the 42 outposts will be dismantled.

Some of the outposts were approved by the previous, Likud-led government. Others were hastily erected by the settlers and won partial after-the-fact approval. Some — at least seven — have no approval at all.

In Tuesday's meeting, Barak told the settler leaders he would tear down 15 outposts, but agreed to legalize 11 others. The remaining 16 disputed outposts would be allowed to stay temporarily, but building there would be banned.

Ideally, as the premier told his Cabinet ministers Sunday, Barak would like to reach an understanding with the settlers under which they themselves remove the outposts, without any intervention by the army. Failing that, Barak would like to reach an understanding that would prevent, or at least minimize, settler-troop confrontations.

If that, too, is unobtainable and the dismantlement goes ahead without any prior agreement, the test for Barak will be both at the hilltop sites and on the streets of the main cities.

Will Gush Emunim, the main settlement movement, be able to bring out large numbers of activists and supporters to resist the army bulldozers and mount headline-making protests as they did back in 1979, when Menachem Begin's government dismembered settlements in northern Sinai? Or has the momentum for large-scale protests largely dissipated?

The signs within the settler camp are mixed.

On the one hand, settlers pledged Wednesday to fight Barak's plan to dismantle the 15 enclaves. On the other, central figures like Aharon Domb of Kiryat Arba have recently been saying that the dream of Greater Israel needs to be tempered by realism and that compromise is therefore the best policy.

Some of these utterances are tinged by a bitter, almost fatalistic, realization that the political battle for the soul of the nation has been lost.

This feeling was crystallized by the poor showing of the settler-based National Unity Party in the May elections. It won just four seats and its leader, Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, promptly resigned from the Knesset and from politics on the grounds that he found himself "a general without an army."

Ironically, in the eyes of many rightists, it was former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rather than the political left that sapped the political strength of the Greater Israel forces.

He, as Likud leader and prime minister, signed agreements with the Palestinians providing for West Bank withdrawals. They were small-scale withdrawals, but the

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israel, E.U. to upgrade relations

The level of relations between Israel and the European Union will be upgraded after France and Belgium agreed to ratify an association agreement, according to the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

As a result, Israeli-E.U. political dialogue — and economic and cultural cooperation — will deepen.

### Israel OKs Nazareth mosque

Israel confirmed that a mosque will be built near the main Christian shrine in Nazareth, despite objections from the Vatican.

Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami said Wednesday the mosque would be screened from the Basilica of the Annunciation.

### Hamas leaflet considered a fake

Israeli security officials doubted the authenticity of a leaflet purportedly issued Wednesday that said Hamas' military wing would halt suicide attacks on Israeli civilians in return for a Jewish settlement freeze.

Some Hamas officials have said the military wing no longer wants to carry out suicide attacks because they are being criticized the Palestinian public.

### New Bethlehem crossing planned

Palestinian officials criticized Wednesday an Israeli plan to build a permanent border crossing between the Jewish state and the West Bank town of Bethlehem.

Israeli officials say the planned four-lane crossing is needed to deal with a surge in Christian tourists heading to Bethlehem for the turn of the millennium.

### Palestinians get new Net suffix

Palestinian addresses on the Internet will end with the suffix ".ps" to signify a Palestinian state.

Palestinians had previously been using ".wg" to signify the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Likud, traditionally opposed to handing over any of Greater Israel, had agreed to them.

At any rate, according to observers across the Israeli political spectrum, there is not much fight left on the far right — and the removal of the outposts, traumatic though it is bound to be for some settlers, will pass off relatively quietly.

That seems to be the prognosis of the right-of-center politicians who are partners in Barak's Labor-led government.

Housing Minister Yitzhak Levy of the National Religious Party, Interior Minister Natan Sharansky of Yisrael Ba'Aliyah and the leaders of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party all trod delicately this week around the issue of the outposts.

Levy cited Barak's desire to seek dialogue with the settlers. Labor Minister Eli Yishai of Shas asked for detailed briefings from the army in order to better understand the security considerations involved.

None of them threatened a coalition crisis over dismantling the outposts.

Even an opposition motion of no-confidence, debated in the Knesset on Monday, failed to produce cracks — even rhetorical ones — in the coalition veneer of unity.

Labor and Likud officials traded barbs, but the junior coalition partners stayed comfortably apathetic.

If the evacuation is accomplished without too much strife on the streets, there will be no coalition crisis, and Barak will have notched up a significant domestic success.

The Labor Party's secretary-general, Ra'an Cohen, announced this week that his party, like the Likud, had set up a team of experts to help plan tactics for the referendum that Barak pledged would be held if and when peace agreements are reached with either Syria or the Palestinian Authority.

While the Syrian track is still blocked without signs of early movement, the removal of Israeli mini-settlements from West Bank hilltops will certainly be interpreted in the region and around the world as a dramatic illustration of Barak's determination to press ahead on the Palestinian track. □

## Greek Jews angered by request not to hold religious services in shul

By Jean Cohen

ATHENS (JTA) — Destroyed during World War II, the historic Etz Hayim Synagogue on the Greek island of Crete was rededicated over the weekend.

But the festive series of ceremonies were marred when a local Greek official asked that Jews refrain from worshipping at the synagogue.

The request came in a letter from the head of the prefecture of the port city of Hania, G. Katsanevakis, asking Greece's Central Board of Jewish Communities to "do away with the religious ceremonies" at the synagogue because no Jews currently live in the city.

In 1944, the 300 Jews living in Hania were deported to Auschwitz, but died when an Allied bomb sunk the transport ship. Their deaths ended a more-than-2,000-year Jewish presence on Crete.

The president of the central board, Moses Constantinis, reacted angrily to the letter from Katsanevakis and said the religious portion of the dedication ceremonies would not be canceled.

In his letter, Katsanevakis said that although he does not object to the restoration of the synagogue, no religious services should be held there. He cited a 1938 law that a house of worship cannot operate unless there are 50 worshipers. Katsanevakis wrote the letter in response to an invitation from the central board to attend the ceremonies.

In an interview with a local television station, Constantinis described the law as "fascist," noting that it was created during the reign of dictator John Metaxa.

Hania's Bishop Irineos, who sided with Katsanevakis in opposing the services, contacted the Ministry of Religion and Education to enlist its support in their cause.

But Religion Minister Gerassimos Arsenis backed the Jewish community and sent a warm message that he asked be read during the dedication ceremonies, which went ahead with the participation of Greek officials and Jewish communal leaders from Greece, the United States, Europe and Israel. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Jewish museums slam Giuliani

Some 20 members of an umbrella group of American Jewish museums criticized New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani for threatening to cut off funding for a Brooklyn museum displaying a painting of the Virgin Mary incorporating elephant dung.

In a letter to the mayor, the members of the Council of American Jewish Museums, while sympathizing with the "religious and social sensitivities" in the debate, said "we fervently believe in artistic expression" and museums as "vehicles to enhance the public's understanding" of diversity.

### Torah project comes to Canada

A New York rabbi brought to Canada a project aimed at increasing the use of Torah ethics in today's world. Rabbi Jacob Schacter on Sunday urged the audience at the Orthodox Beth Jacob Synagogue in Toronto to show increased respect and sensitivity toward Jews and non-Jews alike.

Making available such materials as a curriculum for Jewish schools and a discussion guide, the project was launched three years ago and involves communities in New York, New Jersey, Boston and Florida.

One factor that sparked the project, said Schacter, was the "concern in the Orthodox community that the level of rhetoric and language has reached inappropriate levels and needs to be carefully examined."

### L.A. Jewish school completed

A ceremony in Los Angeles on Sunday marked the end of construction at what is believed to be the United States' largest Jewish high school.

Some 700 students of all denominations attend the Milken Community High School, a school affiliated with the Reform movement that is partially paid for by former junk-bond king Michael Milken.

In addition to having each classroom wired for the Internet and videoconferencing, campus facilities include fiber optic hookups in science classrooms, broadcast and art studios, a 600-seat gymnasium, terraces for students and faculty, and a cafeteria serving kosher food.

### Shoah-assets Web site debuts

The Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center recently unveiled a new Internet site to help heirs of Holocaust victims or wartime refugees recover assets confiscated by the Nazis.

As its first project, the new site carries detailed records of some 50,000 Austrian Jews who were forced in 1938 to fill out questionnaires listing insurance policies, stocks, real estate, bank accounts, business assets, foreign holdings and some personal belongings. The site is located at [www.LivingHeirs.com](http://www.LivingHeirs.com).

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### Mission and memory accompany Argentine Jews to rebuilt center

By Nicolas Penchaszadeh

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — The AMIA Jewish community center, long the heart of Jewish life here, now stands — rebuilt — as a reminder of one of the most horrendous tragedies this city has endured.

Five years ago, it was bombed and turned into rubble, killing 86 people and injuring hundreds.

Today, the 250-odd workers of AMIA are relocating their offices to their new building in the old location.

It has been less than two weeks since the new AMIA — a modern six-story building with the antiseptic feel of any new house — opened its doors. Most of the walls are still bare; some are still in need of a final coat of fresh paint. Boxes still crowd the rooms. Faces, old and new, wander in and out; the memories of other faces killed in the bombing are there as well.

Impromptu therapy sessions constantly take place in the hallways and offices.

"Coming back carries a double feeling," says Moshe Korin, director of cultural affairs at AMIA, which offers cultural events, education, worker training, rabbinical services, social assistance for the elderly and people with disabilities, a printing press, offices and a meeting place for different Jewish organizations. "On the one hand, it's the reminder of that horrible attack; on the other, it's the sentiment of survival, of maintaining our idiosyncrasies, our way of life."

The bombing was the second major anti-Semitic attack to occur in Buenos Aires in the 1990s. A 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy left 29 dead and more than 200 injured. Both bombings remain unsolved.

Reminders of the AMIA bombing begin two blocks away from the building.

There are 86 trees planted — one for every fatality — evenly spaced on a four-block-long strip. A little plaque stands on the side of each tree with a name and the date: 1994 — July 18 — 1999. They were placed there by the city government to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the bombing. Half a block away, on the intersection, there's a message atop the street sign dedicated to the victims.

These subtle reminders pale in comparison with the emotions evoked by the approach to the building itself.

The street has a speed bump just in front of the community center that forces traffic to slow. The pavement is painted black, with writings in white, demanding justice.

Somber black signs with handwritten names of the victims on the facade, on top of candles, stand as a memorial. A little door to the side leads to a security room where a guard checks visitors' identification as they go through a metal detector.

The building was designed with security as the main priority. As with every other Jewish institution in the city — synagogues, schools, social clubs — there's a barricade on the street in front of the building.

"It's like carrying the Star of David, only we are doing this voluntarily," Korin says.

Until the state can offer the necessary protection and assurances that limit the possibilities of another attack, community leaders say, the barricades will stay in place.

The heavy doors of the security room lead to an open plaza with a sculpture by the Israeli artist Ya'acov Agam and a sign with the names of the victims and an inscription that evokes memories of the bombing.

Anita Wainstein runs the AMIA's Mark Turkov archives. It is her job to maintain materials to ensure that people remember.

Her new office overlooks the shaft where she escaped on July 18, 1994, when the old AMIA, built in 1945, was destroyed. She says she's not happy to return to the old site, but accepts it.

"There's a lot of work to be done, which keeps our minds occupied," Wainstein says. "There are a lot of new people eager to rebuild. If our neighbors, whose lives were also destroyed, were able to move on, so can we, but it's very hard." □

## Poll finding Jews less religious than others elicits mixed reaction

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — A recent Gallup Poll finding that Jews are half as likely as other Americans to say that religion is “very important in their daily lives” is eliciting mixed reaction in the Jewish world.

Jewish demographers note that polling techniques and a tendency of Jews to define religion differently than Christians make the contrast seem more dramatic than it really is.

However, some Jewish religious leaders — many of whom report a renaissance of Jewish religious interest — find the data troubling.

The Gallup analysis, based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 20,000 adults between 1992 and 1999, found that 60 percent of Americans say that religion is very important in their daily lives, with Mormons, Southern Baptists and Pentecostals topping the list in self-reported religiosity.

By contrast, the analysis describes Jews as one of “the least religious groups,” noting that only 30 percent of Jewish respondents say their religion is very important.

The only group with a lower percentage, the poll found, were “those who declare no formal religious affiliation.” In that group, only 22 percent say religion is very important to them.

In addition to religious affiliation, the analysis found significant differences among various socioeconomic groups, with low-income people, political conservatives and Southerners — demographic groups in which Jews are fewer in number — identifying religion as important far more than those who are affluent, liberal and from other regions of the country.

Sociologist Gary Tobin, the president of the Institute for Jewish and Community Research, said he was not concerned by the new analysis, noting that in national polls over the years Jews have consistently identified as less religious than those of other faiths.

“It’s somewhat misleading,” said Tobin, who is part of the research team for the 2000 National Jewish Population Study, which will amass its own findings about the American Jewish community. “Jews tend to say I’m not very religious, which means I’m not very observant. It doesn’t mean they don’t care about being Jewish,” he said.

“If you ask the question in another way: how important is it that your children or grandchildren are Jewish, they rank very high. We’ve got apples and oranges here.”

Jack Wertheimer, the provost at the Conservative movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary and the editor of a 1997 demographic study of Conservative Jews, agreed with Tobin, but said there was a cause for concern by the Gallup findings.

“We know that when it comes to religious participation, Jews do participate at lower rates than non-Jews,” he said. “When similar questions are asked about attendance at religious services the previous weekend, the Jewish response tends to be half that of the general population, and that does point to significant problems of allegiance and of commitment to Judaism.”

However, Wertheimer noted, the situation is not completely bleak.

“Anecdotal information suggests that there has been an

upsurge of interest in Jewish study and religion,” he said, citing a boom in adult education programs and Jewish book publishing.

The president of the Orthodox Union, Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, expressed skepticism that the poll included a representative sampling of Orthodox Jews, noting that pollsters often call people on Saturdays, a time when observant Jews do not answer the phone.

He also questioned the survey’s wording.

“What’s missing is what is the definition of important,” he said. “In Catholicism it’s a question of feeling, and if you go to church once a week or to confession regularly you can consider yourself a very good Christian.

“In Judaism, there are actions, both positive and negative, that are required to become a devout Jew, and it’s very difficult to quantify what that means.”

Even so, Ganchrow conceded it is true that for a large number of Jews religion is not important, and “that’s the tragedy of America.”

Mark Seal, the executive vice president of the synagogue arm of the Reconstructionist movement, said the Gallup findings contrast with both anecdotal observations and a 1997 survey of his movement, in which a large number of respondents reported that they were interested in learning and observance and were “more Jewishly literate” than their parents.

However, Seal said that “people are looking for community and values and may not define it as religion.”

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement’s Union of American Hebrew Congregations, agreed with others that Jews tend to define themselves as a people rather than a religion.

Nonetheless, although he has observed a resurgence of Jewish interest in religion, he said synagogues need to do more to “move it along.”

“In the final analysis, while we’re a people, with the absence of commitment to religious life, the Jewish people does not survive,” he said. “You can’t have one without the other and we need a renewed emphasis on the religious dimensions.”

For Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, part of the problem may be that Jewish leaders have not been “as forthright” as leaders of other faiths in addressing the importance of God.

“We don’t talk about God enough,” he said. “People often don’t find God without someone to help them find God, and that’s part of our challenge.

“In the Conservative movement, we’re finding there is an interest, that people are looking for something beyond material success, and it’s our responsibility to use that opening to begin to engage people,” he said. □

## Israel, U.S. to fight ‘cyber-terror’

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel and the United States are joining forces to fight “cyber-terror” on essential computer networks and databases, the Israeli daily Ha’aretz reported Tuesday.

The paper said the matter would come up when the first working meeting of the committee on counterterrorism takes place in November.

The Israeli-American committee will also address the threat of biological and chemical warfare, the paper said. □