



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Next round of talks postponed

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### Pipe bomb explodes in Hadera

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Police said a pipe bomb had been planted by Palestinian terrorists inside a trash can near the market in the town's business district.

In a separate development, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak decided to delay a withdrawal from an additional 6.1 percent of the West Bank.

He called for a postponement of Thursday's scheduled redeployment until some issues are cleared up in the ongoing negotiations with the Palestinians. [Page 3]

### Debate touches on religion

Nearly all the Republican presidential candidates said during a debate in Iowa on Saturday that they support the idea of posting the 10 Commandments in public schools.

Backing the idea, front-runner Gov. George W. Bush said, "No matter what a person's religion is, there's some inherent values in those great commandments."

Conservative activist Gary Bauer pledged that if he wins, they would be posted not only in schools, but also in the Oval Office.

Arizona Sen. John McCain sidestepped the issue, speaking instead about how the Senate begins its proceedings every day with a prayer.

### Berlin's chief cantor dies at 81

Estrongo Nachama, the Berlin Jewish community's chief cantor for more than 50 years, died Jan. 13 of heart failure.

Nachama, 81, a Greek-born Jew and Auschwitz survivor, settled in Berlin after World War II. [Page 4]

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Rising poverty levels among Israelis spur debate over government policies

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Sometimes a rainstorm is more than just a rainstorm.

When torrential rains swept through Israel earlier this month, flooding out residents of poor neighborhoods in southern Tel Aviv and Jaffa, upscale districts just a short walk away were unaffected.

As disadvantaged families abandoned their homes for shelter, some observers could not help but draw a parallel between Mother Nature's unusual discriminatory behavior and recent reports of rampant poverty in the Jewish state.

"How much longer can we close our eyes to the immense poverty around us," wondered Iris Mizrahi, a social commentator in Yediot Achronot, Israel's most popular daily.

"These rains may be a blessing for the farmers, but for the poor people they are a cursed rain, and for all of us, as a society, they are rains of embarrassment."

Similarly, a tough poverty report released last month by Israel's National Insurance Institute was embarrassing for many Israeli policymakers.

The report raised serious questions about whether Israel's socioeconomic gaps are destined to grow wider as the country undergoes a painful transition from a labor-intensive economy to a knowledge-intensive one, while simultaneously implementing free-market policies to integrate Israel's economy into the global marketplace.

The questions come as a public argument erupted after Prime Minister Ehud Barak nominated David Klein, senior director at the Bank of Israel, as the central bank's next governor.

Like Jacob Frenkel, the outgoing governor of the Bank of Israel, Klein is known to favor reduced government spending and tough interest rate policies to combat inflation and create a solid environment for the free market to generate economic growth.

This is why he was nominated by Barak.

But critics — including several Cabinet ministers — say that Israel needs to implement an expansionary economic policy by lowering interest rates to break loose from a three-year slowdown and conquer unemployment.

The data in the National Insurance Institute report, which referred to 1998, showed that 16.6 percent of all Israeli families — more than 1 million people, including 440,000 children — lived below the poverty line.

About 34 percent of Israeli families would be below the poverty line had they not received any government support.

Topping the poverty list were Israeli Arabs and families with many children, indicating that large fervently Orthodox families are among the poorest in Israel.

The report provided ammunition for Barak's critics, who say he has failed to deliver on his campaign promises to improve the economic lot of poorer people.

Even though the report referred to the period before his election, unemployment has since climbed to about 9 percent from 8.5 percent in 1998, so it is assumed that the poverty situation has not improved.

Despite the public ruckus, the report actually showed very little change in poverty data from the previous year.

The real issue, says Momi Dahan, senior adviser to the Finance Ministry's director-

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Bank governor sworn in

David Klein was sworn in as governor of the Bank of Israel after his appointment was narrowly approved by the Cabinet. To secure the approval, Prime Minister Ehud Barak lobbied government ministers from his own One Israel bloc, who initially opposed Klein because they believed his anti-inflationary policies would keep interest rates high.

At Monday's swearing-in ceremony at the president's residence in Jerusalem, Klein said the government had achieved its objective of bringing inflation under control, and now must work at maintaining the low levels.

### Barak, Arafat to meet in D.C.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister David Levy plan to meet with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat in Washington on Thursday.

Arafat is slated to be in Washington for a meeting with President Clinton. Israel and the Palestinians are trying to reach a framework for a peace deal by Feb. 15.

### PLO may proclaim statehood

A PLO official said his group is preparing to declare statehood as early as next month. Salim Zanoun, chairman of the PLO's Central Council, said Sunday the group will convene Feb. 2 to discuss the idea.

### Weizman to be questioned

Israeli President Ezer Weizman is expected to be questioned by police regarding an estimated \$450,000 in cash gifts he accepted from a French millionaire friend.

The state attorney's office and attorney general asked police to examine the issue after concluding it lacked sufficient information to determine the legality of the gifts.

general, is the widening gulf between rich and poor in Israel.

"If measured before the government intervenes and takes taxes or provides welfare payments, Israel is one of the most economically unequal societies in the world," says Dahan, an expert on social affairs and economics.

"But in terms of net disposable income, after the government intervenes, the inequalities are not so terrible. What this means is that a significant slice of Israeli society is living off the government."

It also explains why despite the poverty level, virtually nobody in Israel is starving. Shlomo Swirski, a sociologist who heads the Adva Center, a social research think-tank, says education plays a big role in creating economic disparities.

"There is a widening gap between those who have academic education and those who do not," he says. "In addition, one-third of Israelis who are working and bringing home wages are living below the poverty line."

The differences can also be drawn along ethnic lines. A new report by the Adva Center points out huge disparities among Ashkenazi Jews, Sephardi Jews and Israeli Arabs. According to 1997 data, Ashkenazi salaried workers earned 1.6 times more than the average Sephardi workers and 1.9 times more than the average Israeli Arab workers.

In the 1990s, as Israel's economy climbed to near Western European levels of income, not everyone reaped the benefits.

The report shows that wealthier Israelis have benefited most, while the economic positions of the middle and lower classes have not dramatically changed.

The report argues that Israel's policy of reducing government spending is problematic because those who earn lower incomes cannot afford to pay for services if the government withdraws its support, further exacerbating the gulf between the haves and the have-nots.

But laissez-faire economic policymakers and market players say that reducing government spending and relying more on the private sector for economic growth is exactly what Israel needs. Only these policies, they say, will help Israel integrate into the global economy, attract foreign investment and create jobs.

"It is obvious that we are moving towards a more Western and free-market economy, and we are getting there," says Eli Nahum, head trader at Nessuah Zannex Securities, a Tel Aviv brokerage.

"Of course the price you almost always have to pay when an economy grows so fast is a widening gap between lower and higher socioeconomic groups," he says, adding that the question is whether Israel is allocating enough for social welfare purposes.

The debate is playing itself out over the head of the Bank of Israel. It is also, in many ways, a product of the dramatic changes taking place in Israel as it shifts from a traditional socialist economy to a modern free market one that is driven by a dynamic high-tech sector.

But this shift is also partially responsible for the divide. Many traditional industries such as agriculture and textiles have been in decline. At the same time, technology industries have jobs to offer but many poorer Israelis do not have the skills to fill them.

The issue did not escape proponents of Israel's high-tech industry as they descended upon the Knesset earlier this month to mark "Internet day" with a gala celebration of the World Wide Web.

As the rain washed out southern Tel Aviv residents, leading high-tech companies exhibited their wares in the Knesset foyer.

But meanwhile, the Knesset Labor and Social Affairs Committee debated whether the Internet revolution would help close the gaps in Israeli society or just make things worse.

Sheizaf Rafaeli, head of the Center for the Study of the Information Society at the University of Haifa, told the committee that Israel must do more to make sure that the benefits of the Internet are available to everyone.

This includes reducing access costs to give all Israelis equal opportunity to access the Internet and providing more Hebrew-language content. He also urged the government to take a more active role in promoting the Internet as a technology that can be used to bridge gaps.

"There is something in this technology that can give great opportunities to various sectors," said Rafaeli. "But there is reason to believe that what we will see is a widening of the gaps." □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Group to lobby against pact

An American Jewish group plans to be in Washington on Feb. 8 to lobby Congress against supporting a peace deal between Syria and Israel.

Americans For a Safe Israel said it will urge legislators not to give "billions of dollars of American taxpayer money for the Golan giveaway." The group also said it would ask lawmakers to oppose the stationing of U.S. troops on the Golan Heights.

### Abu Nidal member arrested

Austrian police arrested a suspected member of the Abu Nidal Palestinian terrorist group. A police official said last Friday that the suspect is named Nimer Halime, but declined to disclose her age, nationality or the circumstances of the arrest.

The Abu Nidal group, which carried out a series of attacks in European capitals during the 1970s and 1980s, is blamed for killing or wounding some 900 people in at least 20 countries.

### Rabbi plans lawsuit over crash

The director of the Mid-Atlantic Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, who was seriously injured in an accident last year, has filed a \$75 million lawsuit against the District of Columbia.

The lawsuit alleges that city officials failed to respond to complaints of a broken water main and icy conditions, which caused Rabbi Lynne Landsberg to crash. Landsberg, who suffered permanent brain damage, will never be able to return to her job, her attorney told the Washington Post.

### Papon returns to prison

Convicted Nazi collaborator Maurice Papon returned to prison Saturday after undergoing surgery days earlier to implant a heart pacemaker. Papon, 89, who has a history of cardiac problems, is serving a 10-year sentence for his role in the arrest and deportation of Jews from France during World War II.

Papon's lawyer argued against his return to prison during his convalescence, saying it would endanger his life. Papon has requested a presidential pardon on medical grounds.

### California expands Mideast trade

California established a task force to expand its trade and expertise throughout the Middle East. Israel last week signed a memorandum supporting the creation of the task force.

California officials expect that Jordan, Egypt and other Arab nations will soon follow Israel's lead. While Israel and California have signed numerous trade agreements, the latest aims to achieve broad-based regional cooperation in the Middle East.

## Barak insists peace negotiations are going forward, despite setbacks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak appeared determined to press ahead with the peace process despite two potential setbacks — a terrorist bombing and the postponement of the next round of negotiations with Syria.

In an attack that Israeli police said was the work of Palestinian terrorists, at least 20 people were wounded Monday by a bomb explosion in the city of Hadera.

No one was seriously hurt, although one person suffered moderate injuries.

Police said a pipe bomb had been planted inside a trash can near the market in the town's crowded business district. There was no immediate claim of responsibility and police were investigating whether the attack was linked to another pipe bomb attack several months ago in the coastal city of Netanya.

The bombing came as Israeli security officials were on heightened alert for possible attacks by Islamic militants opposed to the peace process.

In a separate development Monday, the office of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak announced, without giving a reason, that the next round of Israeli-Syrian negotiations has been postponed indefinitely.

Syrian officials threatened over the weekend not to attend the next round of talks, originally slated to resume later in the week in the United States, citing a lack of progress in the previous round of discussions.

In Washington, President Clinton said before the announcement that he remained optimistic about the negotiations. "They're not as far apart as they might be," he said. "They're not as far apart as they have been."

Speaking to reporters in the Knesset, Barak appeared confident about the state of the peace process. Discussing the Hadera bombing, Barak said it was clear opponents of the peace talks might try to derail the process through terrorist actions. He added that his government would use every means at its disposal to combat terrorism.

"I am convinced that sooner or later we will seize with a forceful and painful hand those responsible," Barak said. But at the same time, reiterating his commitment to the peace process, he added, "No type of terror will break our spirit."

Barak also appeared unperturbed about the state of negotiations with Syria.

"We highly respect President (Hafez) Assad, and if he needs some time before the negotiations are to be resumed, we respect it and we will wait. We will be there when they will be there," Barak said before his office announced the talks' postponement.

Meanwhile, Israeli officials warned against believing the negotiations with Syria have reached a crisis. Tourism Minister Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, who as army chief of staff was involved in the talks with the Syrians nearly four years ago, termed the delay a part of the negotiating process.

Barak has launched a campaign to try to sway public opinion in favor of a future peace accord with Syria. He faces domestic opposition by Jewish residents of the Golan Heights, who oppose an Israeli withdrawal from the strategic plateau as part of an accord with Syria.

On Monday, the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate issued a ruling that the Golan is part of the biblical Land of Israel. While the rabbinate did not say Jewish law forbids Israel from trading the Golan for peace, the ruling could sway Israel's Orthodox population to vote in a referendum against returning it.

In addition to the talks with Syria, Israel is in the midst of permanent-status negotiations with the Palestinians. The two sides face a mid-February deadline for concluding a framework agreement on the final status issues.

On Monday, Barak decided to delay a withdrawal from an additional 6.1 percent of the West Bank. He called for a postponement of Thursday's scheduled redeployment until some issues are cleared up in negotiations with the Palestinians.

The two sides disagree over Palestinian demands to assume control over land outside Jerusalem. Palestinian officials reacted angrily to the postponement, but their Israeli counterparts maintain they have the right, under the latest interim peace accord, to delay the pullback by three weeks. □

OBITUARY**Berlin says farewell to cantor who was powerful link to past***By Toby Axelrod*

BERLIN (JTA) — They stood with bowed heads under a gray sky, listening to prayers of mourning at Berlin's Heerstrasse Jewish cemetery.

Old and young, Jews and Christians, hundreds gathered Monday for a final farewell to Cantor Estrongo Nachama, who had graced the community with his voice since 1947.

Nachama died Jan. 13 of a heart attack at the age of 81.

His passing marks not only a loss for his family and congregation. It also deprives the community of a powerful link to the past and a force that kept Berlin's postwar Jews going at a time when it might have seemed pointless to do so.

Nachama, whose son, Andreas, is head of the Berlin Jewish Community, was born in Greece to a religious family. He studied Talmud and learned to be a cantor. In 1940, he was drafted to fight against Italy.

After the Nazis invaded Greece in 1941, Nachama's entire community was deported to Auschwitz. He survived there for 18 months and then was moved to Sachsenhausen, a camp near Berlin.

Nachama was liberated during a death march from Sachsenhausen.

Nachama had said his voice had saved him. He would relate how a guard at Auschwitz used to ask him to sing. He was known as "the singer from Auschwitz."

Arriving in Berlin after the war, Nachama was asked by the city's tiny post-war Jewish community in 1947 to stay and be their cantor.

Before the war, there were some 160,000 Jews in Berlin. After, there were about 7,000 — some who had survived in hiding, and others, like Nachama, who had survived the camps and ended up as displaced persons in Germany.

Nachama had wanted to return to his native Greece. But his two sisters and his parents — in all, 35 family members — had been murdered at Auschwitz. Only he had survived. In Berlin there was a new "family," fellow survivors who needed him. So he stayed.

He served as a religious link for the community until his very last day.

"God gave him a rare voice," Rabbi Yitzhak Ehrenberg said at Monday's funeral service, where Berlin Mayor Eberhard Diepgen and Interior Minister Eckart Wetebach were among those who had come to pay their last respects.

He said the cantor had told him that he had dedicated his voice to the service of God in thanks for having been "saved from the catastrophe."

Each time Nachama said the prayer of mourning, whether at a funeral or during Yom Kippur, he would refer to the 6 million who perished in the Holocaust and add the names of his mother and father and sisters, Ehrenberg said.

Nachama was a man of medium height, with strong features dominated by expressive eyebrows that gave him a look of wisdom and humor.

Though he came from a Sephardi background, he adopted the Ashkenazi liturgy for his Berlin congregation.

Though in recent years he did not lead every service, he could be heard on many a Sabbath or holiday at Berlin's liberal Pestalozzistrasse Synagogue; chanting prayers of mourning at Holocaust memorial events; and singing joyful tunes at Berlin's annual week of Jewish culture, held each November for more than a decade.

Over the years the cantor recorded many records and CDs. He could even claim a piece of an Oscar, appearing briefly as a cantor in the Academy Award-winning film "Cabaret" with Liza Minnelli and Joel Grey.

His performance at an event in the summer of 1997 marking his 50th anniversary of service to the community was, say observers, unforgettable.

At the time, he said, "I will sing as long as God wants me to sing."

Today, what was a tiny post-war Jewish community in Berlin has grown to about 12,000.

But most of those who originally took Nachama into their hearts at the war's end have themselves passed away. In recent years, the cantor had to perform at increasing numbers of funerals for those who had survived the Holocaust.

Indeed, it was shortly after presiding over a funeral last week that the cantor died, most likely of a heart attack.

According to a family friend, Nachama had just remarked to his wife, Lily, on how lovely the afternoon was.

At the conclusion of Monday's funeral service, several men carried the simple wood coffin, draped in a black cloth embroidered with a Star of David, from the chapel to the grave site.

Lily followed, flanked by Andreas and his wife, Sarah.

Visitors placed flowers at the site and threw handfuls of earth into the grave, which was surrounded by tall birch trees.

A freezing rain fell.

The elderly, some in wheelchairs, some leaning on the arms of younger family members, shared private tears with each other.

"I have known him for 49 years," said one woman, unable to hold back her emotion. He was always there for someone in need — and I am not even Jewish."

Today, "Berlin is silent, the Jewish community is silent, the synagogue is silent," Rabbi Ernst Stein said in his eulogy. □

**Shuls to join in song on Shabbat**

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — An innovative musical service will premiere simultaneously at 40 synagogues in the United States and Canada on Shabbat Shirah, the Sabbath of Song, on Jan. 21.

Children's choirs and cantors at Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist temples from Beverly Hills to Boston and from Toronto to New Orleans will perform composer Michael Isaacson's "L'maaseih V'reicheet — To Recreate the World."

The transcontinental collaborative effort in creating and performing the one-hour musical work "represents the largest Jewish musical co-commissioning in American history," according to Cantor Jay Frailich of University Synagogue in West Los Angeles, coordinator of the project.

Frailich started the venture more than two years ago, convinced that "North American Jewry needed an innovative Jewish musical response in praise and gratitude to God as we begin a new secular era." □