



# Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Barak said ready to OK accord

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is believed to be ready to accept President Clinton's proposals for a final Israeli-Palestinian peace accord, on condition that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat also agrees.

Reports said Barak may meet with Egypt's and Jordan's leaders, asking them to pressure Arafat to be more flexible. Barak and Arafat are expected to give their response to Clinton this week.

Under Clinton's proposals, Israel would cede sovereignty over Jerusalem's Temple Mount, and the Palestinians would give up the right of refugees to return to Israel, The New York Times reported Tuesday.

According to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, settlements that would be evacuated as part of a final peace agreement would be transferred intact to the Palestinians.

The paper said the homes, fields and public buildings in the settlements would be sold to the Palestinians.

### Report criticizes O.U. policies

The Orthodox Union released a report criticizing the organization for failing to discipline a high-ranking staff member who allegedly sexually harassed and molested teenagers in its youth group.

The O.U.-commissioned report, posted at [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org), is the result of a lengthy investigation spurred by newspaper reports this summer chronicling Rabbi Baruch Lanner's years of alleged misconduct.

The O.U. says it plans to make significant changes in its management and governance policies. [Page 4]

### Schoolbus stoned near Paris

Residents of a mainly Arab suburb of Paris stoned a Jewish schoolbus after it was stopped at gunpoint by two men of North African origin, according to Jewish community officials.

No one in the bus, which was transporting 50 children aged 8 to 10, was hurt in last Friday's incident.

The gunmen reportedly told the passengers, "you're not in Tel Aviv," but French officials said they did not think the incident was racially or politically motivated.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### American Jews launch offensive to halt Temple Mount 'surrender'

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Sovereignty over the Temple Mount is apparently so explosive to the Arab world that the question may have torpedoed the Camp David summit in July and helped spark the Palestinian violence of the past three months.

Now it's becoming clear just how explosive it is for Jews as well.

Amid new indications that the Israeli government is ready to cede sovereignty over the holy site in exchange for Palestinian renunciation of the "right of return" for refugees, American Jews are going on the offensive. Israel knows best when it comes to borders and security arrangements, say some American Jewish activists, but Jerusalem — and the Temple Mount — is a different story.

"Israel Must Not Surrender Judaism's Holiest Site" reads a new advertisement initiated by the Zionist Organization of America and signed by some 30 prominent American Jews. The ad portends a potential confrontation between the Israeli government and important segments of American Jewry at a time when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak may need international as well as internal Israeli backing for any peace deal with the Palestinians.

The signatories to the ad include hard-liners and moderates, including six past chairpeople of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The ad is aimed at influencing both American Jewish and Israeli audiences, and will run in U.S. Jewish and Israeli media this week, said Morton Klein, president of the ZOA.

"The Muslims wouldn't dream of giving away part of Mecca or Medina; the Christians wouldn't dream of giving away part of the Vatican," Klein said.

"And no Israeli leader has the right to give away the essence of the Jewish people that is embedded in the Temple Mount."

New U.S. proposals presented to Israel and the Palestinians over the weekend call for Israel to cede sovereignty over the Temple Mount and for the Palestinians to give up the right of refugees displaced during Israel's creation to return to the Jewish state.

The Clinton administration is seeking a quick response from both sides to determine if a peace deal can be sealed before he leaves office on Jan. 20.

The Temple Mount's upper level houses the third holiest shrine in Islam, while sitting atop the remains of the First and Second Temples, the holiest site in Judaism. Some rabbis in Israel forbid Jews from treading on the Mount, for fear of defiling its sacred ground. Israeli officials, including Barak, have in recent statements indicated willingness to recognize the Palestinians' de facto control over the upper level of the Temple Mount, while steering clear of the term "sovereignty."

At the same time, Israeli officials stress an agreement would ensure Jewish links to the site and access to the subterranean levels where the remains of the Temple are believed to be located. "We will do nothing to impair the affinity of the Jewish people to the site," said Barak, who has also come under intense pressure from Israeli political and religious leaders who oppose yielding control of the site.

U.S. Jews opposed to concessions on the Temple Mount are citing those leaders in making their case.

The National Council of Young Israel this week cited Israel's Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, who was quoted in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz saying that to abandon the Temple Mount "means abandoning the tradition of thousands of years."

"The situation, de facto, is unfortunately that the Palestinians and the Muslims

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Hamas says it was behind attack

Hamas claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing near a roadside restaurant in the Jordan Valley last Friday in which three Israeli soldiers were wounded, two of them seriously.

Hamas said the suicide bomber was a 22-year-old student from Hebron.

### Hamas official freed

Palestinian police released a leading Hamas official on Tuesday. Abdel Aziz Rantissi was jailed in the Gaza Strip in July for criticizing Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's willingness to negotiate at the Camp David summit.

### Battle rages near Nablus

Palestinian gunmen opened fire on a Jewish settlement near the West Bank city of Nablus. Israeli troops responded with machine gun fire in Tuesday's firefight, which began during the night and lasted into the afternoon. No deaths from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been reported in nearly three days.

### Deputy minister backs fence plan

Israel's deputy defense minister says he is backing a plan to erect a 45-mile fence to separate Israel from West Bank Palestinians. Ephraim Sneh said the \$25 million fence would prevent the entry of car bombs into the Jewish state.

In another development, Sneh confirmed he had met with Austrian officials as part of an effort to secure the release of four Israelis held by Hezbollah in Lebanon.

### Web collection of ketubot debuts

Hebrew University's collection of illustrated ketubot, or Jewish marriage contracts, can be viewed online at <http://jnl.huji.ac.il>. The collection includes more than 1,200 original ketubot from 60 different countries, covering a period of more than 900 years.



## Daily News Bulletin

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control the Mount, but to grant this reality a de jure authorization would violate the public's trust," Lau was quoted saying. U.S. Jews also cite Israeli hard-liners Natan Sharansky and Ariel Sharon, who is challenging Barak in the upcoming Israeli elections.

The pair contend that Diaspora Jews must have a say over the fate of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. In the Arab world, too, leaders have warned Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat that Jerusalem is a matter for the entire Muslim world.

On the other side of the spectrum, meanwhile, American Jews in the peace camp are reiterating that they trust the Israeli leadership and electorate to decide for themselves what is in Israel's best interests.

When the Conference of Presidents recently issued a clarion call to American Jews to visit Israel to boost its sagging tourism industry, it rankled several in the peace camp by including the mantra of Jerusalem as "the eternal and undivided capital."

Avram Lyon, executive director of the Jewish Labor Committee, sent a letter to Ronald Lauder, chairman of the Conference of Presidents, to complain. "It's clear that Jerusalem or parts of Jerusalem are in fact in play and being discussed," Lyon said.

"It would be rash and careless to imply that the Jewish community of the United States stands in opposition to the government of Israel."

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference, denied there was any political intent to the statement, and said "it does not preclude Israel from doing anything" during the negotiations.

As for the ZOA-initiated ad, it was launched in response to comments Israeli Absorption Minister Yuli Tamir reportedly made last week in New York.

Tamir was quoted as saying that Israel "must make painful concessions, renouncing one way or another our sovereignty over the Temple Mount if necessary."

But, she added, "on the ground, things wouldn't really change."

A few days later, Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami reportedly made similar comments in a conference call with American Jewish leaders.

Signatories of the ad said they hoped to send a strong message to Barak.

"I don't think Israel has to have sole sovereignty of the Temple Mount, but I think it's a strategic error to say it's not important, not vital to the Jews," said Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

"I understand that I'm not a factor in this decision. I don't live in Israel and I don't have a vote. The prime minister can ignore me, but I can still use my voice and whatever influence my voice has."

The ad also quotes Hoenlein and a controversial statement he made three months ago. At that time, Hoenlein said, "In future years, all of us will have to answer our children and grandchildren when they ask us why we did not do more to protect their heritage and safeguard Har HaBayit" — the Temple Mount.

Hoenlein, who made his remarks before a Jewish group, was accused by some as attempting to derail Barak's effort to negotiate control of the Mount. Hoenlein said in an interview last week that his comments "are just as valid today as they were then."

"Israel has a right to make decisions that affect its security. All Jews have a right to discuss it, but it's up to the government of Israel," he said.

The "Temple Mount is a different issue. It belongs to all Jews, it is the inheritance of all Jews, and all Jews have a vested interest in it."

Klein of the ZOA threatened that if Barak deals away sovereignty over the Mount, he and others will launch a campaign to undermine its implementation.

"I can tell you that almost every major Jewish leader I've spoken with will do virtually everything in their power to ensure that any attempt to give away the spiritual soul of the Jewish people does not succeed," he said.

But some think that in the end, American Jewry will defer to the Israeli people — and its government.

"There has been a bedrock principle that the American Jewish community gives great deference to the Israeli government's decisions on matters of war and peace," said Martin Raffel, associate executive vice chairman of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. "I expect that will continue, including on issues affecting the Temple Mount."

Epstein and others concede that if Israelis approve by referendum a deal on the Mount, they, too, would ultimately accept it.

"If the prime minister comes back with something the Israelis are willing to buy, then I would also buy it. I would — reluctantly, unhappily," Epstein said. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### U.N. pressed on religious sites

Six U.S. religious leaders called on the U.N. General Assembly to declare its support for protecting religious sites around the world.

"If you really want to hurt a faith community," an attack on its holy sites "seems to be the most sensitive, most vulnerable focus," said Rabbi Arthur Schneier, who led the delegation to the United Nations on behalf of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

### Museum gets wartime documents

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum received documents detailing World War II mass executions of Jews in Russia.

The files, which include the names of the victims and eyewitness testimonials of the 1942 massacres, had been held in the Kalmuk State Archives.

### Denier's thesis prompts apologies

A New Zealand university apologized to the Jewish community for awarding a master's degree to a student who had written a thesis denying the Holocaust. The 1993 thesis by Joel Hayward is cited regularly by neo-Nazis and other Holocaust deniers as evidence that they have academic support for their positions. Earlier this year, Hayward apologized to the Jewish community, saying that he now disagrees strongly with the paper.

### Liechtenstein to probe its past

Liechtenstein will establish a commission to investigate its Holocaust-era dealings, according to the World Jewish Congress. The commission of historians looking into the tiny European principality's alleged complicity with the Nazis, including gold laundering, is expected to begin work this spring.

### Camp group seeks Russian staff

An organization that promotes Jewish summer camps is considering hiring Jewish college students from the former Soviet Union to staff North American camps. The National Foundation for Jewish Camping, which is also stepping up efforts to recruit American Jewish college students, is hoping such steps will help remedy the staff shortages Jewish summer camps face.

### Group claims dreidel record

Members of Noam, the youth movement of Israel's Conservative movement, say they broke the world record for dreidel-spinning.

According to a spokesman for Noam, 104 young people got 589 dreidels spinning simultaneously Sunday at Kibbutz Hanaton, beating the previous record of 535 set by Hillel students in Maryland two weeks ago. The record has yet to be confirmed by the Guinness Book of World Records.

## Mikvah attack in Moscow highlights splits in community

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A Jewish leader may well have saved his life by doing the "dead man's float" in a local mikvah.

In a bizarre incident possibly linked to rivalries within the local Jewish community, Avrohom Berkowitz had put on his winter coat and was about to leave Moscow's Choral Synagogue last Saturday when he was approached by three large men.

The three, who he thought were wearing security badges, said something to Berkowitz in Russian, but he did not understand them.

An American who serves as executive director of the Federation of Jewish Communities of the former Soviet Union, Berkowitz, 26, got his job in Moscow earlier this year after several years as a Lubavitch emissary in Brazil. He does not speak Russian.

What followed, however, did not need any verbal explanation.

Two of the men dragged Berkowitz downstairs while the third watched the stairs.

The two threw Berkowitz into the mikvah and held his head underwater. They left after Berkowitz went limp in the water, pretending he was dead.

Synagogue guards were only a few feet away, but they later said they had noticed nothing unusual — although Berkowitz said he had screamed for help as he fought with his attackers.

Joel Golovensky, head of the Moscow office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, was among the first to meet Berkowitz when he climbed upstairs, shocked and wet.

Golovensky said he, too, was deeply shocked, because "only an hour before that we sat together in the synagogue discussing setting up a committee to settle inter-Jewish controversies."

He was referring to an ongoing rivalry between the Lubavitch-dominated Federation of Jewish Communities and the Russian Jewish Congress for control of the Jewish community.

Golovensky brought Berkowitz to the American Medical Center and then home. Except for some respiratory problems and a mild case of shock, Berkowitz is now in satisfactory condition.

Sources in the Choral Synagogue say the attackers could be congregation members angered by what they allege are attempts by Lubavitch officials to take over the synagogue.

While the Lubavitch movement has always had a room of its own in the Choral Synagogue, its main stronghold in Moscow is the Marina Roscha synagogue.

Russian President Vladimir Putin recently paid two visits to the Marina Roscha Synagogue in what many saw as a gesture of support for the Lubavitch movement — and which might have angered some members of the Choral Synagogue's congregation.

Sources at the Choral Synagogue have recently reported clashes between some congregation members and members of the Lubavitch movement, whom they viewed as intruders. Berel Lazar, the chief Lubavitch rabbi of Russia, did not deny that there had been some incidents of the sort, but said he couldn't imagine they would lead to an attack on Berkowitz. "We are in deep shock," he said.

Pinchas Goldschmidt, the chief rabbi of Moscow, issued a statement Monday condemning the attack and saying he "will do everything possible to stop further acts of this sort."

Goldschmidt also called on Jewish leaders to set up a meeting "to discuss how to stop the vicious cycle of conflict which engulfs the Russian Jewish Community."

Sources in the American Embassy and other observers in Moscow are not excluding the possibility that the attack on Berkowitz was the result of a provocation manipulated by the Kremlin. Kremlin officials, say these observers, want to use the communal conflict as part of a larger political strategy aimed at undercutting the power of Vladimir Goussinsky, Boris Berezovsky and other leading Jewish businessmen.

Moscow police are investigating the incident. □

## O.U. pledges change as report faults handling of abuse charges

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — The umbrella organization for nearly 1,000 American Orthodox synagogues is promising change in the wake of a long-awaited report highly critical of the movement's handling of complaints about the sexual abuse of teen-agers.

The talk of change — along with an apology for past mistakes — came in response to the report, released this week, criticizing the Orthodox Union's failure to discipline a high-ranking staff member who for years allegedly sexually harassed and molested teen-agers in its youth group.

The group says it is beginning a "review of its leadership" and will revamp its management and governance.

The O.U.-commissioned report, and the response, are expected to dominate the organization's biennial convention this weekend in Rye, N.Y., a suburb of New York City.

But it is unclear at this point whether the response will include disciplining or firing specific individuals, what the timetable is for changes and whether the organization will be able to restore its tarnished credibility in the Jewish world.

The 54-page public report is a summary of a much longer document resulting from a four-month investigation by a special commission appointed by the O.U. The O.U. is keeping under wraps that document, which includes names of victims and details of the alleged misconduct, as well as what O.U. officials "knew or should have known" about Rabbi Baruch Lanner.

The commission, headed by Richard Joel, the president of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, was appointed this summer following a series of articles that appeared in the New York Jewish Week about Lanner, a longtime professional with the Orthodox movement's youth group, the National Conference of Synagogue Youth.

The Jewish Week articles, based on interviews with more than 12 former NCSY members, told of Lanner kissing and fondling scores of teen-age girls, repeatedly kicking boys in the groin, wielding a knife against a young man and propositioning girls.

Lanner, a charismatic figure with a reputation for being able to spark enthusiasm for traditional Jewish observance, resigned the day after the article was published and refused to be interviewed by the special commission.

However, his lawyer sent the commission a 10-page document stating in part that, while Lanner denies having committed any crime, he "acknowledges that in the past his conduct, on occasion, was inappropriate." Approximately 40,000 teens and children participate in NCSY activities.

The commission report, based on interviews with 175 people, finds Lanner guilty of several kinds of abuse and asserts that "certain members of the O.U. and NCSY leadership share responsibility for Lanner's misconduct," which occurred over a period of 30 years.

Although focusing on the O.U.'s response to Lanner, the report also notes a larger problem of "poor management practices," a lack of accountability by professionals to volunteer leadership, lack of involvement by lay leaders in matters of governance, lack of financial controls and a "total absence of any policies regarding basic ethical issues" in both the O.U. and

NCSY. It also urges the O.U. to "hold individuals who failed to take action against Lanner responsible for their conduct," but does not specify how.

Among the report's key findings:

- Lanner sexually abused women and teen-age girls, physically abused boys and girls, "attempted to control the lives of NCSY students" and "initiated sexual discussions with girls." He also behaved in a generally "crude and vulgar" fashion and engaged in various forms of financial misconduct, including possible theft of funds solicited as NCSY contributions.

- The O.U. and NCSY had direct knowledge of Lanner's sexual abuse of girls, yet the professional leadership failed to communicate critical information to the lay, or voluntary, leadership.

- The O.U. and NCSY's management and structure have not kept up with growth — both lack effective management structures, lines of reporting, accountability and evaluation, effective training programs, financial controls and policies and procedures governing critical issues.

The report offers a number of specific recommendations for both the O.U. and NCSY, mainly in strengthening the management structure to allow greater accountability, drafting a code of conduct and implementing formal policies for addressing complaints about staff members.

It is unclear the extent to which the recommendations will be implemented and how soon.

The O.U. has appointed a 13-member committee of board members to review the report and recommend how to implement it, said the O.U.'s president of six years, Dr. Mandell Ganchrow.

Asked whether any O.U. employees will be disciplined or fired as a result of the report, Ganchrow said in an interview Tuesday that is "part of the area we're considering."

Ganchrow expressed confidence that the O.U. would restore its credibility and noted that participation rates in NCSY — and even attendance at the group's annual fund-raising dinner — have not declined this year, despite the exposure of Lanner.

The O.U. is posting the public report on its Web site ([www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)), and issued a news release quoting Ganchrow as saying that the report "provides a thorough road map of ways we can improve the management and operations of our organization" and that it will take the O.U. "several months to consider and implement the changes that are necessary to improve our operations."

"We sincerely apologize for the pain and suffering these young people experienced as a result of Rabbi Lanner's actions," Ganchrow said.

"We also wish to apologize to the families of these young people who entrusted their children to us."

The O.U. release announced an upcoming "review of its leadership in order to implement any changes that may be necessary" and plans to develop "new policies and procedures for all O.U. programs and staff."

It also noted that in the months preceding the report, NCSY has already instituted a number of new programs.

These include: a comprehensive sexual harassment policy for staff, sensitivity training program for staff, stricter hiring policies and training programs for youth group advisers and plans to appoint an ombudsman to investigate any allegations brought to his or her attention. □