



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 170

Thursday, September 12, 2002

85th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Peres marks 9/11 with U.S. Jews

Shimon Peres told American Jewish leaders marking the one-year anniversary of Sept. 11 that Israel and the United States are "fighting for the same purpose."

The Israeli foreign minister said, "Let's pray together, let's fight together, let's win together," adding, "Israel is on the side of a great nation trying to save humankind" from terrorism. Peres made his comments Wednesday at a Jewish communal commemoration in New York.

Some 200 people attended the event, including Mortimer Zuckerman and Malcolm Hoenlein, the chairman and executive vice chairman, respectively, of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; Israeli Cabinet minister Dalia Itzik; Israel's consul general in New York, Alon Pinkas; and Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.).

### Bush to reaffirm Mideast efforts

President Bush is expected to mention Israeli-Palestinian efforts to end their conflict when he addresses the U.N. General Assembly on Thursday.

In a speech that will be dominated by the Iraq issue, Bush will acknowledge those efforts as well as the work of officials from the United States, United Nations, Russia and the European Union to seek an end to the violence, an administration official familiar with the speech said.

But Bush will not outline any new efforts in the Middle East, the official added.

### P.A. mocks U.S. about Sept. 11

The official daily newspaper of the Palestinian Authority ran two cartoons ridiculing the United States on the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, according to the Palestinian Media Watch.

One cartoon appearing in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida depicts Uncle Sam running away from the words "Sept. 11." The second shows the World Trade Center towers standing over a mass of dead bodies that are described as the victims of American imperialism.

Because of the Yom Kippur holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Tuesday, Sept. 17.

## SEPT. 11: ONE YEAR LATER

### As nation marks 9/11 attacks, Jews remember their loved ones

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — A hot morning wind blew across the razed dirt floor of Ground Zero as New York Police Department Chaplain Rabbi Alvin Kass clutched a long-stemmed yellow rose and wiped away a tear.

Standing amid thousands of people who lost loved ones on Sept. 11, a year ago almost to the minute, Kass said he would recite a special El Malei Rachamim, part of the traditional Yom Kippur Yizkor, or remembrance service, for them this year.

"I always say El Malei Rachamim in memory of the victims of the Holocaust," Kass said, "and this is our own American Holocaust."

Kass was standing several stories below street level, in the vast open construction pit that is now Ground Zero. In his blue dress uniform, white gloves and blue Torah lapel pins, he was swept up in a sea of thousands of blue uniforms streaming into the site for Wednesday's ceremonies marking the first anniversary of the terror attacks that felled the World Trade Center's Twin Towers — and killed more than 2,800 people.

Across the country, cities and towns marked the first anniversary of the attacks that shocked a nation and defined an era. Like other families of victims, Jews who lost loved ones revisited the enormity of the tragedy Wednesday, realizing that those hijacked airplanes that came out of a clear blue sky a year ago had changed their lives irrevocably. Though Kass had been to Ground Zero many times over the past year, he preferred not to dwell there Wednesday.

In the days immediately after the attacks — when Ground Zero was a seven-story-high, smoldering mountain of twisted steel and glass — Kass had been there, ministering to police and other rescue workers digging for victims.

He was there dozens of times during the cleanup, as police and victims' families accompanied him and asked him to "pray for the souls" of the missing.

On Wednesday, though he spent nearly an hour in a long procession to reach the site, Kass stayed at Ground Zero only for a few minutes, stopping near an impromptu memorial circle of red, yellow and purple roses.

The site "never looked this good," he said.

But he quickly added, "Let's go. Sometimes it just gets to you."

As Kass spoke, the names of the World Trade Center victims echoed across the 16-acre site. Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, chaplain of the New York Fire Department, joined other officials in reciting the names of the victims.

Before he spoke, Potasnik said relatives and friends of the 14 victims on his list had asked him to make sure to pronounce the names correctly.

It was, he said, his most important mission of the day. In all, it took two hours and 20 minutes to read all the names.

In a high-tech world, where it often seems that people are reduced to bar codes or personal identification numbers, "names mean less now than they once did," he said.

But reading people's names, and meeting the people who loved them, underscores the importance of remembering each victim, Potasnik said.

Especially on Sept. 11, 2002, "we have to be sensitive to what a name really is," he added. "No one can fathom 6 million," he said, referring to the Jews who died in the Holocaust. "No one can fathom 2,800. But if you focus on one name, it has much more meaning."

In Jewish tradition, he added, names are everything. Potasnik said he was reminded

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Arafat's Cabinet resigns

Yasser Arafat's 21-member Cabinet was forced to resign to avoid being ousted by legislators in a no-confidence vote. Just moments before lawmakers were to hold the vote Wednesday, Cabinet ministers submitted their resignations to Arafat.

Protesting corruption and incompetence among Cabinet members, a majority of lawmakers speaking at Wednesday's session of the Palestinian legislative council in Ramallah said they would vote against Arafat's Cabinet. Also on Wednesday, Arafat set Jan. 20 as the date for Palestinian elections.

### Rachel's Tomb to be inside fence

Israel's Security Cabinet voted to include Rachel's Tomb, near Bethlehem, on the Israeli side of a security fence. The Security Cabinet on Wednesday adopted Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's recommendation that Israeli civilians have access to Rachel's Tomb.

The army and Jerusalem municipality are planning to review Sharon's proposal to pave a new road to the site.

### Netanyahu: I got Iraqi assurance

Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Saddam Hussein secretly communicated with him in 1998 to stave off worries about a possible Iraqi attack on Israel.

Netanyahu said Wednesday it was thought at the time that Saddam might launch a missile attack on Israel, as he had done during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, because of tensions over U.N. weapons inspections.

Netanyahu said the Iraqi president sent a secret message assuring Israel that he had no such intention. "I sent him a message and told him that this was a very wise decision on his part, so that he could understand what the significance would be if he acted against us," Netanyahu told Army Radio.



## 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).  
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of that at the Ground Zero event, when he was flanked by Secretary of Defense Colin Powell on one side and Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) on the other, and "rank didn't mean one thing."

In Jewish tradition, "Moses was referred to as 'Moshe Rabeinu' — Moses our teacher," he said. "The title is secondary and the decency is first."

Just a few blocks away, Holocaust survivor Fred Gompertz, 78, watched the ceremonies from a rooftop garden in the upscale building where he lives.

A year ago, Gompertz was in his 34th-floor apartment in the development between New York Harbor and the World Trade Center when he saw people running and the Twin Towers burning.

A black cloud enveloped his window, the electricity went dead and Gompertz lost consciousness. Two days later, his son discovered him and he evacuated the empty, dust-filled building, returning only three months ago.

He was in his family's apartment in the German town of Gelsenkirchen in 1938 when Nazis smashed his father's clothing store below on Kristallnacht — the night of broken glass.

"Nine-eleven was the second time I was damaged in my life," he said.

Two days before the anniversary, Gompertz, a fashion designer, ventured downstairs to attend the unveiling of a police memorial.

"I head the Scottish bagpipes and I decided I must go down, to be with them," he said.

He also walked around Ground Zero on Wednesday, and felt shaken.

"It put me in a dire mood," he said.

For Faina Saltsman of Brooklyn, there is not much hope. Her voice shows only weariness and pain.

As a child, Saltsman lost 60 relatives in the Holocaust.

She, her husband, Alexander, and their son, Arkady, lived much of their adult lives in the Soviet Union.

They immigrated to the United States from Moldova in 1990, soon after Arkady graduated from architecture school.

Arkady became a leading architect with the Wall Street firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, which designed the Sears Tower. He was on the 105th floor of the north tower on Sept. 11, sent to show clients a plan for the Toronto airport.

He died in the catastrophe.

"The Holocaust reached us here," Saltsman said. "My only child was taken from us. We have nothing left of him."

Arkady, 45, did manage to leave a message for his wife, Zhanna, in the minutes after the attack, saying he was trapped and would call her again. Zhanna kept trying to call back, but never heard from Arkady again.

For Saltsman, Wednesday's secular *yahrzeit* was "worse than any other day." She could not venture over the Brooklyn Bridge to Ground Zero, she said, in part because she suffers from kidney problems and other ailments.

"If I went, I would not come back," she said.

Instead, she volunteered for a nighttime candlelight ceremony at the Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst.

On the Jewish anniversary of her son's death, which fell on Sept. 1, she joined a march through Brighton Beach organized by the Friends of Refugees of Eastern Europe, and helped call out the names of 16 Russian Jewish victims of Sept. 11.

She returned from that ceremony "destroyed," she said.

The mood at Ground Zero was no less intense Wednesday. People everywhere displayed the names of their dead.

One family wore T-shirts emblazoned with "Our Hero: Ronald P. Kloepfer." A young mother, her two daughters and a son wore matching NYFD T-shirts saying, "Billy Burke, Engine. Co. 21."

As for Kass, his daughter, Sarah, a graduate student in existential psychotherapy at London's Regents College, stood by her father's side. She, too, struggled to understand the past year.

She, too, gladly took the roses, water and packages of tissues volunteers handed out.

"It's hard to believe that this isn't a construction site," she said — "that it's a burial ground." □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Survivors read victims' names

Holocaust survivors read names of Sept. 11 victims in a ceremony at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Survivors who volunteer at the museum led Wednesday's reading of the names of the thousands killed. The list of names also scrolled across the museum's Web site.

### McKinney's father voted out

The father of a well-known anti-Israel legislator lost his own re-election bid. Just three weeks after Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) was upset, Billy McKinney lost his chance to keep his seat as a Georgia state representative to John Noel.

The Atlanta Jewish community, which had been angered by McKinney's anti-Semitic remarks, supported Noel. Before his daughter lost her congressional race last month, McKinney spelled out the reason for his daughter's tough fight: "J-E-W-S," he said on television.

### Court says no to prayer

A California appeals court said a city council may not begin its meetings with prayer.

A three-judge panel agreed Monday with a lower court ruling that the Burbank City Council must not say a prayer before its meetings, such as one that invoked the name of Jesus and sparked a lawsuit. The lawsuit was originally brought by Irv Rubin, the former head of the Jewish Defense League who was arrested last year for allegedly plotting to blow up a mosque and congressman's office.

### Haider to become party head

Austrian far-right leader Jorg Haider was nominated to serve again as leader of the nation's Freedom Party. The party's executive committee took the move Wednesday following a party feud that led to the resignations of party members serving in the government and the collapse of the governing coalition.

Haider is widely expected to be confirmed as party leader at a special convention slated for Sept. 19. In 2000, Haider stepped down as party leader as part of a deal that enabled the party to join the government along with the centrist People's Party.

### Execs blackmailed to fund jihad

A group threatened to harm several French business executives if they did not pay \$500,000 to support a Muslim holy war. France's Interior Ministry issued an announcement Wednesday that police are investigating the threats.

According to Le Figaro newspaper, the threats were mailed from an east Paris neighborhood and signed by the leader in France of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

## Dead man suing: Relatives' case against Israel heard in a U.S. court

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Did the Israeli government con Simon Lechtuz, an apparently penniless recluse, out of \$5 million by reneging on a deal to bury him in the Jewish state?

Or are greedy relatives of Lechtuz, a lifelong bachelor, trying to divvy up the unexpected fortune of a man they ignored while he was alive?

The question is currently under debate in a U.S. Superior Court in California.

There is agreement on some basic points. Lechtuz was born in 1912 in Warsaw, immigrated to Palestine in 1924 and served with the British army during World War II.

He came to California in 1950, settled in the city of San Pedro and made a living bartering and trading leftover flour sacks and steel drums.

About 15 years ago, Lechtuz moved to the Leisure World retirement community in Laguna Hills, Calif. To neighbors there he appeared destitute, disheveled and eccentric, frequently rummaging through trash containers.

"I felt sorry for him. People avoided him because of his dirty appearance, his difficult foreign accent, his lack of personal hygiene and his odd, even weird, behavior," Leisure World resident Jonel Konstantin said of Lechtuz in court papers. "He looked like he didn't have a dime and he would wear the same clothes day after day."

On Oct. 9, 2000, Lechtuz was found slumped over a garbage can in front of a supermarket. He died three weeks later at age 88.

Unable to locate Lechtuz's relatives, Orange County officials arranged to have him buried in a local secular cemetery. Nobody suspected that Lechtuz had invested the profits from his second-hand bartering and peddling in real estate and municipal bonds, amassing a fortune of \$5 million.

Nobody, that is, but the Israeli Consulate in Los Angeles, which Lechtuz contacted in 1994 to discuss a bequest. In his will's final version, he arranged to leave roughly \$1 million each to the Israeli army, navy, air force, Technion — Israel Institute of Technology and the Hadassah Medical Organization. In return, Lechtuz asked that after his death, his body be flown to Israel for a military, or at least a Jewish, burial.

For the next four years, negotiations continued between Lechtuz and lawyers Susan Greenberg and Marc Stern, representing the Israeli government, according to court documents filed by relatives contesting the bequest to Israel.

According to a will drafted in 1997, Lechtuz stated, "It is my wish that I be buried in a military cemetery in the State of Israel. If, however, only active members of the military can be buried in such a cemetery (as I have been advised is the current policy), then I wish to be buried" — or "MUST be buried" according to another version — "in accordance with Jewish law in a cemetery in Haifa, Israel."

Lechtuz's numerous nieces and nephews in Haifa and Los Angeles were unaware of his death until informed by lawyers for the Israeli government adjudicating the will.

When the relatives learned that he had been buried in California, they raised \$15,000 to have his body exhumed and reburied in a Haifa cemetery, according to their attorney, Dan Maccabee. In the present lawsuit, Maccabee says Israel spent \$5,000 to process Lechtuz's will and trust, but then reneged on its promise to bury Lechtuz in Israel.

Maccabee also maintains that six months after signing the will benefiting Israel, Lechtuz contacted his own lawyer and drew up a different will leaving his estate to his nieces and nephews. However, before the will reached Lechtuz for his signature, he collapsed and then died, Maccabee said.

Attorney Michael Greene, now representing the Israeli government, said his client accepted the bequest but never formally promised to bury Lechtuz in Haifa.

He also countered a charge by Yoseffa Teitel of Woodland Hills, Calif., a niece of Lechtuz, that the Israeli government hounded Lechtuz to sign the will while his mental and physical condition was deteriorating.

On the contrary, "Mr. Lechtuz was a strongly independent guy," Greene said. "He knew what he wanted" and purposely cut his relatives out of his will. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**As U.N. General Assembly opens, Israel's position appears improved**

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — As the United Nations begins its three-month General Assembly this week, observers describe an improved climate for Israel.

With much of the world focused on the possibility of a U.S.-led war against Iraq, attention has shifted away from the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. In addition, the groundbreaking stipulations by U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte in July — who said America would veto any Security Council resolution on the Middle East that doesn't mention Palestinian terror — have thwarted many such efforts.

Finally, Jewish leaders contend that countries simply are tired of anti-Israel antics that distract attention from other pressing issues.

"I really think things have changed," said Dina Siegel Vann, U.N. and Latin American affairs director for B'nai B'rith International. "I think there's a better understanding of the conflict in many camps," along with a "sense of fatigue" with the Palestinian agenda.

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis is simply a "lower priority" at this General Assembly than it has been in "a long, long time," agreed Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

President Bush's June 24 speech, demanding substantial reform of the Palestinian Authority and the ouster of its president, Yasser Arafat, "put the P.A. and Arafat in the terror camp" and dealt a blow to their "celebrity status," Foxman said.

Yet new and old threats against Israel persist.

The 19 anti-Israel resolutions that pass each year in the General Assembly — more than are devoted to any other country — are likely to pass again.

A U.N.-sponsored conference with an "End the Occupation" theme, slated for later this month, is sure to be a forum for anti-Israel rhetoric.

Enemies of the Jewish state also may exploit the International Criminal Court, established recently under U.N. auspices, to try Israeli officials or settlers for war crimes.

Yet Israel has enjoyed some successes in recent months, beginning with a report on the April battle in the Jenin refugee camp that rejected charges Israeli troops carried out a massacre there.

Then, the U.N. World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, which ended last week, featured little of the anti-Israel rhetoric that marred the World Conference Against Racism in Durban last year. In addition, an unprecedented number of Jewish organizations helped to plan this year's conference of nongovernmental organizations that accompanies the launch of each General Assembly — without anti-Israel activity.

For the past year, the United Nations also has been seeking a greater role in the Middle East, joining the European Union, the United States and Russia in the diplomatic "Quartet" seeking to broker an Israeli-Palestinian peace.

But critics say the United Nations is shooting itself in the foot by hosting a Sept. 23-24 conference organized by the U.N.

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The United Nations is trying to "regain the credibility of Israel and the Jewish world," but "from the outset they are disqualifying themselves" by sponsoring such a biased event, Siegel Vann said.

Siegel Vann said B'nai B'rith and other Jewish organizations would make their concerns known to the United Nations, but were still discussing how to do so.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, agreed that it is especially impolitic for the United Nations to host the pro-Palestinian conference if it wants to be perceived as an impartial broker in the Middle East.

The Conference of Presidents, Anti-Defamation League and Israel's U.N. delegation all sent letters to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressing their concern about the conference.

Still, most Jewish leaders weren't too rattled by the conference, which is held periodically.

"I don't think anyone takes this committee seriously," said Andrew Srulevitch, executive director of U.N. Watch, which is affiliated with the American Jewish Committee. "This is a body that was set up in order to bash Israel. That's its *raison d'etre*."

Jewish leaders insist that countries are sick of the Palestinians trying to dominate every forum with their agenda.

"Privately, more and more countries will express to us their frustration, their sense of exasperation, bordering on anger, that too much U.N. time, too many U.N. meetings, too much funding is being taken up by this one highly politicized issue," said David Harris, executive director of the AJCommittee.

The AJCommittee is meeting with some 60 diplomats over the course of the next two weeks to discuss, among other things, rising anti-Semitism, Israel's quest for peace and the unfair treatment it receives at the United Nations.

One European diplomat told him that the sober handling of the recent Johannesburg conference showed that the world had learned the lessons of Durban, Harris said.

However, another European diplomat rejected the notion of "Palestinian fatigue."

"I think there is actually a degree of understanding that the U.N. at times ends up being a body where people take out their frustrations," the diplomat said.

Corridor conversation and bilateral meetings have focused on how to resume U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq and how to proceed if Iraqi President Saddam Hussein balks, the diplomat said. Some Arab countries try to draw links between Iraq's noncompliance with U.N. resolutions and Israel's noncompliance. But such behavior won't carry much weight, Hoenlein said.

Hoenlein said the Jewish state clearly is in a "better situation than last year" — when the General Assembly opened on the heels of the Durban conference. Still, according to an official at Israel's U.N. mission, the Palestinians are expected once again to try to push their anti-Israel initiatives in the General Assembly.

"We mapped the possible scenarios and prepared contingencies," the official said, though he refused to elaborate. "We're prepared for everything."

While sympathy for Israel hasn't increased much, the Palestinians' resort to terrorism has hurt their cause, the official said — especially with the General Assembly opening just a day before the anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks. □