



# Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Community checks blackout

Leaders of Jewish community relations councils planned to survey their communities Monday to gauge how last week's blackout impacted communal services.

Volunteers in several communities pitched in Thursday and Friday to deliver food or water to elderly residents of apartment buildings that lost elevator service. In Cleveland, one congregation was forced to move a celebration of a member's sex change operation from the sanctuary to the parking lot.

But overall, initial reports suggested that the Jewish community was not unduly affected by the largest blackout in the nation's history.

"We're feeling pretty dear" that no serious problems occurred, said Hannah Rosenthal, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella organization for Jewish community relations councils across the country. "People in the community-relations field throughout the United States have my phone number, but I've heard of nothing closing down. It's really quite remarkable."

### IDF continues withdrawals

Israel will withdraw troops on Monday from two more Palestinian cities, officials said.

The Palestinian minister of information, Nabil Amer, said that Israel would withdraw from Kalkilya and Jericho on Monday, to be followed next week by withdrawals from Ramallah and Tulkarm.

Israel had halted the transfer of Palestinian towns since a pair of suicide bombings last week.

### Another Sharon scandal?

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon intervened in a real estate transaction to advance private business, a new report says.

The Israeli financial daily Globes reported Sunday that Sharon personally intervened with the Transportation Ministry on behalf of friends.

Sharon reportedly called the director general of the ministry on behalf of friends from his native moshav of Kfar Malal who had demanded compensation for land expropriated to build a new road. The friends reportedly received \$720,000 in compensation — \$110,000 more than originally allocated. Sharon's office said the prime minister merely had asked the director general to meet with the group, but did not intervene on their behalf.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### As France bakes in the heat, community struggles to bury dead

By Philip Carmel

PARIS (JTA) — With France sizzling under 100-degree temperatures this month, Parisian Jewish organizations have struggled to cope as unburied corpses have had to wait up to four days for Jewish burial.

According to the Paris Consistoire, the principal organization dealing with the religious needs of the community, the Jewish death rate has almost tripled since a record heat wave began in early August.

Jacques B'Chiri, head of the Consistoire burial board, told JTA that the Consistoire was handling around 30 burials a day.

That is considerably higher than the 10 to 15 per day that is the average for this time of year.

"The situation is very difficult indeed," B'Chiri said. "We have bodies waiting days for burial, and there's nothing we can do about it."

At the Pantin cemetery in northern Paris, the largest in the region that has a sizeable Jewish section, Jewish funeral directors said their companies were conducting burials every 15 minutes.

"Usually there's at least an hour gap between funerals. I've never seen anything like this," said Philippe Hay, a funeral organizer from Benhamou burial services. "People call us and we tell them that they have to wait a minimum of three days. Sure, it's not easy for them."

B'Chiri said that hospitals were struggling with the number of bodies in morgues, "which were piled up in such a way that we can't always get to them quick enough."

"The cold storage morgues in the hospitals are full. The government said it's going to bring in special plastic rooms to hold up to 100 bodies, but we're still waiting for that," he said.

B'Chiri said he was particularly perturbed by the fact that, in many cases, nobody was around to comfort Jewish mourners or even to perform ceremonies.

"It's August and the rabbis are all away on holiday, and they haven't left replacements," he said.

"Outside of Paris it's even worse," he said. "There's nobody around in Orleans and Tours, and people are dying."

As for the ritual cleansing of the bodies after death, known as taharah, B'Chiri said that the Consistoire was coping, "but there's nobody around to say Shema Yisrael or light candles."

The Consistoire may have to call rabbis back from holiday, B'Chiri said, adding, "What can you do when the Consistoire itself has practically shut down for the summer?"

Traditionally, Parisians leave the capital in droves during August, heading south or west to the coast.

The Consistoire isn't the only organization that's understaffed: An operator at the United Jewish Social Funds, the umbrella welfare and educational organization of French Jews, said, "There's virtually no one here."

At L'Ose Medical, one of the oldest Jewish medical institutions in Paris, a recorded message said the building was closed until Aug. 22.

At CASIP, Paris' Jewish social services group, a spokeswoman said the organization had adopted special measures in its old-age homes in Paris and in the

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israel rejects 'return' comments

Israel reacted angrily to a speech by the Palestinian Authority foreign minister advocating the "right of return."

The minister, Nabil Sha'ath, said in Beirut that Palestinian refugees from Israel's 1948 War of Independence, and their descendants, have the right to return to their former homes, "whether in Haifa or Nablus."

Israeli officials said in response that "there is no such thing as the right of return in international law," and that Israel will not agree to a Palestinian return.

P.A. Information Minister Nabil Amer later qualified Sha'ath's statement, saying that any return would be negotiated with Israel and would be exercised in a "pragmatic" way that would not disturb Israel's character as a Jewish state.

### Arafat gives green light to terror?

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat has given a green light for further terrorist attacks, Israeli officials said.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz gave the assessment of Arafat's intentions to Israel's Cabinet on Sunday. Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash, head of military intelligence, told the Cabinet that Arafat was trying to ignite the intifada anew. Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said Arafat has said "in private conversations" that it was a mistake to appoint Mahmoud Abbas as prime minister of the Palestinian Authority.

### Israeli jets buzz Assad

Israeli fighter jets buzzed the palace of Syrian President Bashar Assad, Israeli television reported last Friday.

The flyover followed last week's shelling of northern Israel by Hezbollah militants in Lebanon and was intended to warn Assad to rein in Hezbollah, the report said.



## Daily News Bulletin

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southern suburb of Creteil due to the stifling heat.

Esther Freiberg, director of the CASIP-run Amaragi Home in Paris' 19th district, said that after the heat wave started, all outside trips for residents were cancelled and around-the-clock medical supervision was implemented for the 80 residents.

"We made sure that everyone drank mineral water or sodas every 20 minutes or so, to make sure that body liquids and salts were kept up, and thank God there were no mortalities," Freiberg said.

In general, the Jewish community in the capital was better off than the majority of the population, never getting to the point that they couldn't transport bodies from homes to hospital morgues.

The community has enough vehicles to cope with the extra demand, Consistoire officials said.

The figures for the 350,000-strong Jewish community in the Paris region mirrored the situation across the capital and in much of France, with reports suggesting that as many as 3,000 people had died during the heat wave.

Hardest hit were old people and those with serious medical conditions exacerbated by the scorching temperatures.

While government statistics showed that many had died at home, the situation in Paris hospitals and centers for the aged also was poor.

With little experience in dealing with such a heat wave — the hottest and most prolonged in France in over 100 years — many institutions lacked the necessary cooling facilities.

A good deal of criticism was leveled at the government, with a number of doctors' unions saying that ministers had done too little, too late.

Some of the major Jewish institutions, however, did not wait for government guidelines to arrive.

With over 500 residents, the Rothschild Foundation Home for the Aged and Geriatric Center in central Paris, one of the largest non-profit institutions of its kind in France, began implementing emergency procedures on Aug. 4, a week before Ministry of Health guidelines arrived.

According to the center's director, Jean-Marie Descamps, these procedures pushed off a large increase in mortalities until Aug. 11 and 12 — the hottest two days, when temperatures reached 107 in the shade and close to 120 in the sun.

Just as problematic, the heat wave intensified as it continued, and certain areas of the building never truly cooled down.

Descamps said he was not permitted to divulge exact mortality figures for the center, but he said there had been "a very high rise, with many more deaths than is usual for this time of the year."

"Even if there are no more deaths from now until the end of the month, there will have still been more than in the whole month of August 2001," Descamps said, adding that the choice of 2001 was indicative since that, too, had been a particularly warm summer.

"Here, where we also have a medical center with around 80 beds, the average age is about 85 and many people have serious medical problems, which means they find it hard to reduce their body temperatures," he said.

"We have, though, been able to combat problems of dehydration, and we go around the building all the time insisting that people drink. Thankfully, no one has died of dehydration."

The Rothschild center is not air-conditioned because it could be dangerous for such an institution, Descamps said.

Staff had been told to apply wet towels and increase showers for residents during the heat wave.

Yet that also presented problems, Descamps said: Being forced to take more frequent showers during the heat wave "was not easy for those who came through the Shoah."

With temperatures falling to more comfortable levels by the end of the second week of August, Descamps said that mortality rates had steadied.

Temperatures in France and elsewhere in Europe are expected to be milder this week, providing a respite to those suffering from the heat. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Germany builds Shoah memorial

Germany has begun erecting a memorial in Berlin to the 6 million Jews killed by the Nazis.

The first 10 of a planned 2,700-concrete-pillar memorial that will rise up in the shadow of the German Reichstag Parliament building, went up on Saturday near the Brandenburg Gate, news agencies reported.

Construction of the memorial, designed by U.S. architect Peter Eisenman, follows years of agonizing in Germany about how best to commemorate the Holocaust.

### Karaoke Nazi

Israeli officials are incensed over a Hong Kong karaoke bar that displays Nazi photographs and images of Hitler.

Israel's consul general in Hong Kong, Eli Avidar, slammed the popular watering hole, Bar Pacific, for the display, which included a photograph that shows a Nazi shooting a man on the edge of a pit already piled high with executed victims.

"It is way beyond my understanding how people can enjoy a drink and sing karaoke while viewing pictures of executions carried out by Nazi soldiers," Avidar said, according to The Associated Press.

Earlier this month, Avidar criticized a local fashion company for a plan to use swastikas and Nazi symbols to decorate its clothing and stores. The plan has been scrapped.

Avidar said he planned to meet with Hong Kong officials later in the week to discuss education about World War II.

### In Canada: 'Jews control media'

Lebanon's ambassador to Canada and a Canadian native leader were criticized for saying Jews control the media.

The Lebanese ambassador, Raymond Baaklini, told an Arabic-language weekly that the news media is "controlled by certain parties" that "seek to exaggerate every news item pertaining to Israel."

Baaklini made similar comments in December, prompting a reprimand from Canada's foreign minister, Bill Graham.

Also in a recent press interview, David Ahenakew, former leader of the Assembly of First Nations in Canada, a group representing Canadian native peoples, said that "one race of people" controls the world media.

Ahenakew was charged in June with inciting hatred after making anti-Semitic remarks at a Saskatchewan conference in December 2002.

The Canadian Jewish Congress, B'nai Brith Canada and the Canadian Lebanese Human Rights Federation all condemned Baaklini's remarks.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### A year after floods, Prague Jews look back on that costly disaster

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA)—Leo Pavlat was a worried man: Persistent rain had been lashing the Czech Republic and water levels on the Vltava River were beginning to rise alarmingly.

The threat of flooding last summer was so real that, on Aug. 12, city authorities warned the public to prepare for evacuation.

Pavlat, director of the Jewish Museum in Prague, ordered all collections of Jewish treasures to be moved out of harm's way. Two days later, on Aug. 14, tens of thousands of Prague citizens were ordered to evacuate their homes as the river came within inches of bursting its banks.

Finally, the waters miraculously began to recede, and it seemed that Prague's Jewish community could breathe a sigh of relief.

But there was a shock in store for everyone.

"I was sitting at home watching TV to see what was going on," Pavlat recalled this week, a year after the disaster. "Finally it said that the level of the Vltava had reached its top, and I wanted to go back to the Jewish Museum to check whether something had happened. To tell you the truth, I was mostly worried about the security, because no one was there."

Pavlat approached the district police chief, who agreed to let him into the area. A quick check of the Pinkas Synagogue showed limited damage. But when he went to the Jewish Museum, he was shocked to see water in the basement.

"It was only then I realized that the water came from underground," he said.

Pavlat found the same scenario in the Maisel and Klausen synagogues.

"Nevertheless, I thought it was not too bad," he said. "Unfortunately, the next day it continued to get higher and higher."

Firefighters began pumping water from the Pinkas and Old-New synagogues, but the damage already had been done.

"Nobody even mentioned that water could come from below," Pavlat said.

The museum's collections were untouched, but the water destroyed the new air-conditioning and heating systems.

The Old Jewish Cemetery also had to be closed for some time as damage was assessed. Several trees there had to be cut down to keep them from falling on graves.

The Pinkas Synagogue, which has the names of 80,000 Czech Holocaust victims inscribed on its walls, was seriously damaged.

In all, the repair bill for synagogues and buildings administered by the Jewish Museum — including the Klausen, Maisel, Pinkas and Spanish synagogues and the museum itself — reached \$635,000. Luckily, insurance companies and donations from around the world covered the losses.

A number of buildings owned and operated by Prague's Jewish community also fell victim to the flooding, including the Old-New Synagogue and the neighboring Jewish community headquarters in Maiselova Street.

Fifteen buildings administered by the Prague Jewish Community were damaged, with costs estimated at more than \$700,000.

The disaster made headlines in the Jewish press around the world and drew sympathy from a host of world leaders. Israel delivered a \$50,000 check to the community.

The Czech Republic's then-president, Vaclav Havel, toured some of the affected Jewish sites. Both the Jewish Museum and the Prague Jewish Community received hundreds of thousands of dollars from Jewish and non-Jewish sources worldwide.

A year later, Jelinek sees a silver lining to the disaster.

"I think of it as a test that helped us to grow," he said. "It showed that the Prague Jewish Community was capable of fighting such a horrible thing and that there are so many people around the world, Jewish and non-Jewish individuals and organizations, who are willing to help us." □

## To escape city's notorious past, some in Dachau want camp closed

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — Nearly 60 years after the end of the Holocaust, residents of the city of Dachau want to close the town's notorious Nazi concentration camp.

There doesn't seem to be much danger of that.

But the brouhaha over the concentration camp at Dachau, which today houses a memorial to the camp's victims, erupted when a right-wing politician told a group of visiting Israeli journalists that he thought the memorial should be closed because city residents are tired of having to bear the burden of Dachau's guilt.

The uproar sparked by Robert Konopka's comments is indicative of the high sensitivity among Germans — and among Jews around the world — to the memory of the Holocaust.

It also raises the question of whether extremists should be given a platform in respectable media — especially since there is virtually no danger of the memorial closing, according to the memorial's director, Barbara Distel.

The comments by Konopka, a Bavarian Parliamentarian, caused a public outcry when they were reported on Israeli television and in *Yediot Achronot*, an Israeli daily.

Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust museum, dashed off a letter to the German government. Israelis launched a letter-writing campaign aimed at halting the memorial's closure, oblivious to the fact that no closure plans were being considered. The memorial actually inaugurated an updated exhibition in 2002.

"We regret that the reports by the Israeli journalists about their visit to Dachau raised a baseless impression among the Israeli and American public," Distel said.

"My colleagues at the Dachau memorial and the survivors," she said, "would prefer a more critical evaluation of the challenges associated with this work."

Despite the current opposition to closing the camp, Konopka said he expects to push for the camp's closure after the last survivors die, when it will be "much easier" to do it, Israeli television reporter Liran Dan told JTA.

In his meeting with the reporters, Konopka, who represents the far-right Republikaner party, suggested there was broad public support for closing the camp.

"He said, 'Listen, 50 years have passed and the people from my town have suffered enough because of our name,'" said Nurit Felter, a freelance journalist who was at the meeting with Konopka.

"He told us he once went to Holland when he was about 12, and they didn't let him in because the car's license plates were from Dachau," Felter recounted. "He said they told him, 'You are from this horrible city so you are not welcome.'"

Felter was one of several Israelis participating in an exchange program organized by the Journalists Network.

The program started eight years ago with an exchange between Israeli and German reporters, and today several other countries participate in the program.

The Israeli journalists interviewed several people on the streets of central Dachau who expressed sentiments similar to Konopka's.

"Lots of them agreed they are quite sick of the reputation they

have and really think they want to shut the place down," Felter said.

Resentment against Jews still occasionally surfaces in Dachau. A local politician has said that Lufthansa, the German airline, should name a plane after Dachau to help the town's reputation.

Others have complained about having to pay reparations to Holocaust survivors even though they did not persecute Jews.

In an ironic twist, homes located near the former Nazi concentration camp now are considered prime residential real estate because they are adjacent to the camp's quiet, green grounds, Holocaust survivor Max Mannheimer said.

Konopka suggested building apartment houses on the site of the concentration camp, Dan said.

Distel, who has worked at the site for more than 25 years, said there are absolutely "no plans to close or destroy the camp memorial."

"That does not mean there are no idiots around," she said, alluding to opponents of the memorials.

The encounter that sparked the controversy was organized at the behest of the Israelis, who asked to meet with Konopka.

Several years ago, during another visit to Germany by Israeli journalists, a meeting planned by the hosts between right-wing youths and the Israelis turned out to be a flop. Instead of meeting with extremists, the group met with a priest who worked with both right- and left-wing youth. A few left-wing youths showed up, but the right-wing neo-Nazis instead chose to shout slogans at the Israelis from outside the meeting place.

This time, after the exchange group watched a film exploring the dark side of Dachau's political landscape, in which Konopka was featured, they asked to talk with him.

Konopka was eager to meet the Israelis, Michael Anthony, the founder and organizer of the exchange program, said in a telephone interview.

"I very simply called him and said, 'Listen. Some Israeli journalists are talking about how Dachau is dealing with its past. We will have a view of the people who work at the memorial and we want to hear another view,'" Anthony said. "He gladly agreed."

Konopka told the reporters he has never taken his 15-year-old child to visit the memorial because "there is nothing he can learn from this place," Felter recalled. "He said what the Jews are doing to the Palestinians is the same as what the Nazis did to the Jews."

Such comparisons have become commonplace in Germany today. There is an ongoing debate in the country about where legitimate criticism of Israeli policy ends and anti-Semitism begins.

As far as the Israelis were concerned, Konopka clearly crossed the line. "Part of our group began to attack him," Felter said. "But I told them, 'Let's listen to him, let's hear what he has to say.' And I don't think most of the things he said even demand a comment. There is no way in the world we can change what he thinks."

Anthony said, "Obviously, Konopka is someone who is pronouncing his opposition, but there are people who hold similar views but just don't say it."

Nevertheless, he said, "obviously the whole frame of the program was to put into perspective that Mr. Konopka is a small voice in Dachau."

This fall, a group of German journalists will travel to Israel, where "they will learn with their eyes and not only by what they read and see on TV," Felter said. □