



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli police arrested four Palestinian security officials during the attempted kidnapping of two Arab land dealers in the West Bank. The action came after the killing of a third Arab who allegedly sold land to Jews. [Page 3]

■ Israeli forces arrested three Hezbollah members in southern Lebanon after Israeli planes rocketed terrorist targets in the security zone. The actions came after a 22-year-old IDF officer, Lt. Yuval Nir, was killed in a mortar attack over the weekend.

■ Israel said progress was made in consultations with a senior Egyptian official in an effort to find a formula to revive stalled negotiations with the Palestinians. But a Palestinian official said the Egyptian effort was not encouraging, and that the gaps between the sides were still wide. [Page 3]

■ Canada's Justice Department is launching denaturalization and deportation proceedings against a British Columbia resident who is accused of being a former SS guard at a concentration camp in Latvia. The action comes amid the Jewish community's growing impatience with the government's slowness in acting against suspected war criminals. [Page 4]

■ The Berlin Opera, currently performing in Israel, dismissed one of its horn players, who signed a hotel bar bill "Adolf Hitler." The company director issued an apology and announced that the musician was sent back to Germany.

■ Protestors used anti-Semitic remarks in criticizing a decision by a Russian television station to air a controversial film about Jesus. NTV, which is owned by the head of the Russian Jewish Congress, planned to broadcast "The Last Temptation of Christ." [Page 4]

■ Two Austrian members of U.N. peacekeeping forces were found dead near their position in the demilitarized zone between Israel and Syria. Israeli officials said it appeared the two may have been shot by Syrian smugglers who were taken by surprise by the patrol.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Confronting wartime past consumes Swiss daily life

By Mitchell Danow

BERN (JTA) — The tidy Swiss people are trying to cope with a decidedly untidy situation.

Months of mounting accusations about how their government and banks conducted business with the Nazis during World War II — and how the banks refused to return the assets of Holocaust victims after the war — have taken a toll on the Swiss.

On the one hand, they are stung by the accusations and revelations based on a growing stack of recently declassified wartime documents, and they are searching for a way to protect their country's reputation.

But along with what they perceive as an external attack, they are facing an "internal front" as well.

The governmental responses to those accusations are forcing the Swiss to re-evaluate what they had long considered the truths of their wartime history.

For many, it has been a wrenching process to realize that much of that history was little more than a myth.

Swiss newspapers are filled almost daily with accusations about the active trade in gold between the central banks of Switzerland and Nazi Germany, or about how Swiss governmental and business leaders blithely overlooked questions of morality as they maintained close links to the Nazis under the cloak of neutrality.

The papers also devote page after page to letters from readers, who use the opportunity to vent their anger at their accusers — or to express embarrassment that their country had collaborated with the Nazis and had profited handsomely from those ties.

In a reflection of how all-consuming the issue has become for the country at large, Swiss Television devoted three hours of air time on a recent night for a debate of the issues.

Filled with angry outbursts, charges and countercharges, the debate was not the sort of gentlemanly airing of views the fastidious Swiss are used to.

In interviews after the debate, several of the participants described it as a difficult night before the cameras.

They stopped short of admitting that they were sorry they had subjected themselves to it, but they clearly were.

Rolf Bloch, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Switzerland, explained the Swiss reaction to the torrent of accusations and revelations by comparing them to another people — the Jews.

"Jews are very sensitive when they feel under attack. The Swiss now feel very much the same way," Bloch said.

The Swiss, proud for so long of their wartime past, "still have to learn that they are not better than other people," he added.

Shouts of 'Nazi, Nazi'

Parliamentarian Verena Grendelmeier spoke in an interview about the pain of the Swiss people as they witness the tarnishing of their country's reputation.

As an example of the new way the Swiss are being perceived, she spoke of a recent international soccer match at which a Swiss player was taunted by calls of "Nazi, Nazi" from the stands.

"This was particularly shameful for us," she said.

"We have never had to contend with this sort of thing before," she added.

Linus von Castelmur, a historian who serves as secretary general of the Independent Commission of Experts — the international panel of historians created by federal decree last December to study Switzerland's dealings with the Nazis — spoke of a traditional Swiss tendency to recoil from an outside threat.

"Very often, the prompting to confront one's history comes from outside" one's native country, he said.

"The Swiss frustration is very understandable," he said, given the

Swiss people's long history of withdrawing to their alpine redoubts when under attack.

Castelmur divided the Swiss response into three categories.

"Some 15 percent actively refuse to accept the revelations about their past.

"Another 15 percent are now embarrassed to be Swiss," he added.

"The rest are genuinely concerned and are seeking answers."

No matter who voices the accusations or produces documentary evidence to back up the charges, many Swiss view them as emanating from Jewish groups.

As a case in point, U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, one of Switzerland's leading critics and arguably the least popular individual among the Swiss at this time, is widely believed to be a Jewish pawn.

In a recent poll published by the Swiss magazine *L'Illustre*, an overwhelming number of respondents to the question of why Jewish groups were targeting Switzerland chose the answer: "Because they are only interested in the money."

A far smaller number chose the response, "Because they want to get to the truth."

Doris Angst Yilmaz, secretary general of the Federal Commission Against Racism, was particularly disturbed by the phrasing of the response "only interested in the money" used by the pollsters.

She described it as a reflection of the anti-Semitism "that lurks beneath the surface" among many of the Swiss people.

She found this latent anti-Semitism more disturbing — because she sees it as far more widespread — than the few overt racist acts against Jews that surface from time to time.

Jews, Yilmaz said, "are the traditional targets of racism" in Switzerland.

Anti-Semitism 'boiling to the surface'

She described how Switzerland was the last European country to allow Jewish immigration — in the 17th century — and how Jews were only granted full civil rights in 1866.

Anti-Semitic attitudes were certain to be found among some members of the country's wartime government, she added.

An example of this latent anti-Semitism "boiling to the surface," she said, were the comments of former Swiss President Jean-Pascal Delamuraz who, in late December, dismissed Jewish calls for compensation to Holocaust victims as "extortion and blackmail."

The Federal Commission Against Racism, which was created in 1995 and operates under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry, is planning to issue a report in September about the extent and nature of Swiss racism, Yilmaz said.

After the report is issued, she hopes to obtain government funds for a project to combat racism, which she described as extending not only to the country's Jews, but also toward Muslims and other ethnic minorities now living in Switzerland.

Meanwhile, Swiss government officials, reacting to the steady weight of accusations about Switzerland's role during the war, have gradually begun to admit that their predecessors approved a policy of close financial links with Nazi Germany in order to prevent their country from being overrun.

"We know that neutrality alone would not have saved Switzerland," Vice President and Foreign Minister Flavio Cotti said in an interview.

He added that it was Switzerland's business and financial links with the Nazis — which he admitted were too extensive — that spared his country the ravages of World War II.

But when they hear such explanations, the Swiss people are bewildered.

They had always believed that it was their 400,000-member army, mobilized at the borders throughout the war — rather than Swiss financial dealings with the Germans — that had made the prospect of an invasion too costly for the Nazis.

This is not only true for surviving members of the wartime generation, who left hearth and home to serve at the borders and who heard as much from their government during the war years.

Younger people, who learned this version of Swiss history from their school textbooks, also came to believe the myth.

Cotti spoke of the difficulty of "modifying Swiss attitudes" toward what really happened during the war, a process he said that would be "especially hard among older people."

Bloch, the leader of Swiss Jewry, saw the difficulty in similar terms.

"The more we prove that the army was not responsible for the protection of Switzerland, the more we tell the people that the result of the war would have been the same without the army's efforts, the more they feel frustrated.

"We have to address that frustration," Bloch added.

Indeed, the Swiss government is being very careful not to get out ahead of the people on the issue, since the electorate has the right under Swiss law to hold a referendum on most any legislative initiative.

Machiavellian vs. moral approach

One such referendum is expected to be held next year over a proposed Swiss Foundation for Solidarity, whose investment income from its \$5 billion in reserves would provide help to victims of catastrophes, and could include some support for needy Holocaust survivors.

A recent poll shows the Swiss people evenly split over whether to support the foundation.

Many of those against the foundation oppose it on the grounds that it may devote some of its estimated \$230 million in annual income to Holocaust survivors.

This has prompted some people — including Jewish leaders — to predict that it will not be approved by the Swiss people if survivors are among the foundation's beneficiaries.

But government officials say they are optimistic that they can use the coming year to get popular approval for the foundation — provided outside pressures abate.

The foundation is only one of many hurdles that the Swiss must deal with as they confront their wartime past.

For Bloch, the task facing Swiss leaders will be to reconcile the "Machiavellian approach" of the country's wartime officialdom with the "moral issues" surrounding a war in which genocide was the state policy of one of Switzerland's leading trade partners.

Cotti maintained that Switzerland operated under the terms of international law governing neutral nations. But at the same time, he, too, admitted that it is "difficult to reconcile matters of international law with matters of one's conscience."

Achieving this reconciliation is likely to occupy the Swiss for years to come. □

(JTA foreign editor Mitchell Danow recently visited Switzerland as a guest of the Swiss government.)

Israeli-Palestinian tensions rise in wake of land dealer murders

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli police have arrested six Palestinians, four of them self-rule security officials, during the attempted kidnapping of two Arab land dealers from a village near Jerusalem.

Jerusalem police chief Yair Yitzhaki announced the arrests Sunday, a day after the slain body of an Arab land dealer was found near the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Ali Mohammad Jumhour was the third Arab land broker to be killed since Palestinian Justice Minister Freih Abu Medein announced last month that Arabs selling land to Jews were committing a crime punishable by death.

Medein said his directive was based on an old Jordanian military law.

The law was canceled by Jordan after it signed a 1994 peace treaty with Israel.

Jumhour, who had an Israeli identity card, was killed in the same fashion as the two previous victims, by shots to the head at close range.

Yitzhaki said Palestinian officials — including a security chief for the self-rule government — were involved in the killings, as well as in the attempted kidnapping of a land dealer who was known to have worked with Jumhour.

“We have first-hand evidence of the involvement of a head of security in the Palestinian Authority,” said Yitzhaki, who refused to give the official’s name.

But Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani later denied that the official was Jibril Rajoub, who is in charge of all Palestinian security forces in the West Bank.

Medein flatly denied Yitzhaki’s charges.

“This is nonsense, the [Palestinian] Authority is not involved in the killings of those dealers, brokers, traitors,” Medein told reporters Sunday, adding that he believed Israel was behind the killings.

Israel holds Palestinian Authority responsible

Israel Radio reported that a group calling itself the “Guardians of the Holy Lands” had claimed responsibility for the murders.

In an anonymous phone call to an Arabic-language newspaper, a member of the group said that it would soon issue a statement on the killings.

Israeli officials have held the Palestinian Authority responsible for the murders and have demanded an end to the policy.

Yitzhaki said the matter should be taken up by the Israeli government because of evidence found linking Palestinian security officials with the murders.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu raised the matter in contacts with the United States and Egypt, Israel Radio reported.

The issue has increased tensions between Israel and the Palestinians.

Their relations were already shaky after a more than two-month impasse in peace negotiations.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s top political aide, Osama Al-Baz, resumed consultations with the two sides on Sunday in an effort to find a formula to renew Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, which have been frozen since mid-March.

Baz’s shuttle effort comes in the wake of last week’s summit between Netanyahu and Mubarak.

After Netanyahu met Sunday with Baz, the Prime Minister’s Office said in a statement that some progress had been made toward resolving the problems between the sides.

But Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat, who

was scheduled to meet this week with Baz, was less optimistic. Erekat said that talks he held in Cairo over the weekend were not encouraging, and that the gaps between the Israeli and Palestinian sides were still wide.

Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and security cooperation were suspended after Israel began constructing Jewish housing at Har Homa in southeastern Jerusalem, and after a Palestinian suicide bomber killed three Israelis at a Tel Aviv cafe.

The Palestinians have demanded a halt to settlement activity as a condition for renewing talks.

Israel has demanded the resumption of intelligence sharing as a precondition.

Israel has welcomed the mediation effort from Egypt, whose relations with Israel have sometimes become frayed during the past year over repeated delays in the Israeli-Palestinian peace track.

In a related development, the Israel Defense Force intelligence chief this week denied a newspaper report that quoted him as saying that Egyptian leaders were in need of a psychiatrist.

The Israeli daily Yediot Achronot said that in a closed discussion with senior officials, Maj. Gen. Moshe Ya’alon said that Egypt could not decide whether to take a conciliatory or hostile approach toward Israel.

Ya’alon categorically denied the report, saying the newspaper had inaccurately reported his remarks. □

Russian Orthodox Church condemns cemetery attack

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Russian Orthodox Church has condemned a recent act of vandalism at a Jewish cemetery in Smolensk, a city of 280,000 located in western Russia.

The statement by the church came after the Russian Jewish Congress urged the Russian Patriarch to condemn the cemetery desecration and other anti-Semitic and ultranationalistic incidents.

In its statement, the church did not describe the incident as an anti-Semitic act, but it condemned “any manifestations of extremism and vandalism.”

At the end of April, on Russian Orthodox Easter, vandals destroyed 52 headstones at the Jewish cemetery.

The desecrated headstones were turned over and broken. Dozens of metal name-plates were ripped off the stones, some of which were daubed with swastikas.

Viktor Vaksman, who serves as head of the Smolensk Jewish community, said at the time that anti-Semitic incidents have become “a sort of Easter tradition” in Smolensk.

Last year, the Jewish community’s office was burglarized on Easter Day, and its door was daubed with a swastika and anti-Semitic slogans.

Two years ago, a few dozen headstones were damaged at the same Jewish cemetery.

Although Smolensk officials have launched an investigation of the latest desecration, local Jews have been outraged by some of the officials’ comments about the incident.

According to Dmitri Levant, a leader of Smolensk’s 5,000-strong Jewish community, local security officials said that Jewish activists may have committed the crime in order to spur Jews to emigrate.

Jewish leaders previously charged that the local authorities did not want to attract public attention to the incident.

To back up the charge, community leaders pointed to a request by the police that a Smolensk television station not show the damaged tombstones on its newscast. □

Alleged war criminal faces Canadian court proceedings*By Bill Gladstone*

TORONTO (JTA) — Canada's federal Justice Department has accused Eduards Podins, a 78-year-old resident of British Columbia, of being a former SS guard at the Valmiera concentration camp in Latvia.

As a result of its charges, the Justice Department is preparing denaturalization and deportation proceedings against Podins that are scheduled to be heard in court this week.

Podins allegedly lied to Canadian immigration officials about his activities in the Latvian auxiliary police from 1941 to 1943.

He has been known to Canadian federal Nazi hunters at least since 1990, when he attempted to enter the United States.

At that time, he was turned back at the border because his name appeared on a computerized "watch list" of about 50,000 suspected war criminals maintained by the U.S. Office of Special Investigations.

OSI is a branch of the U.S. Justice Department that investigates suspected war criminals.

However, despite letters in 1993 from the Canadian branch of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Toronto, federal officials waited nearly seven years to act against him.

Podins is the 11th alleged Nazi war criminal against whom Canadian federal officials have launched denaturalization or deportation proceedings during the past two years.

They have indicated that they intend to name a 12th suspect this month.

Growing impatience over foot-dragging

The action comes amid growing impatience within the Jewish community at the government's long-standing foot-dragging on the issue.

Simon Zuroff, head of the Wiesenthal Center's Jerusalem office, recently spoke at a community rally in Toronto at which some 300 people protested the presence of alleged Nazi war criminals in Canada.

Zuroff noted that one suspect, Antanas Kenstavičius, died before he could be brought to justice.

Kenstavičius was allegedly a member of the 12th Lithuanian Police Battalion, which killed more than 50,000 Jews during World War II.

He died in January at 90.

A second suspect on the government's list of suspected war criminals also died before his case could be heard.

Josef Nemsila died in April at 83 without facing justice for having been an officer in the Hlinka Guard, which slaughtered thousands of Jews and other civilians during the war.

Highlighting the government's recent resolve to bring alleged war criminals in Canada to justice, a federal court in which denaturalization and deportation arguments were being heard against Wasily Bogutin, 88, recessed in Toronto and later reconvened in Donetsk, Ukraine, in late May.

Donetsk is a large southeastern Ukrainian city located near Selidovka, where Bogutin allegedly served in the Selidovka police from 1941 to 1943.

During that period, Bogutin allegedly participated in the execution of a Jewish family and other brutal wartime acts.

The court is expected to hear testimony from 13 Ukrainian witnesses before reconvening in Toronto in September.

As Canadian officials go to greater lengths to

gather evidence against alleged Nazi war criminals residing in Canada, some Jewish officials are probing foreign archives to find out how so many people with such dubious reputations managed to slip into Canada with relative ease after the war.

Sol Littman, head of the Canadian branch of the Wiesenthal Center, recently charged that members of the British government willfully deceived Canadian immigration officials in order to get Canada to accept almost 2,000 suspected war criminals in the late 1940s.

Documents that Littman claims to have found in British archives show that officials there were well aware of the reputation for brutality of about 12,000 members of the 14th SS Volunteer Grenadier Division then being held in British internment camps.

Although Britain assured Canada that all of them had been investigated for war crimes, no thorough investigation was ever conducted, Littman said.

"They were desperate to get them out of Britain," said Littman.

"There was no real investigation at all." □

Jewish-owned television station chided for plan to air Christ film*By Lev Krichevsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — A privately owned Russian television station's plans to air a controversial film about Jesus has prompted outrage laced with anti-Semitism among conservative Orthodox Christians and Russian ultranationalists.

The showing of a 1988 film, "The Last Temptation of Christ," was canceled last Friday, a day before it was scheduled to be aired, after the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church denounced the movie as blasphemous and offensive to Russian Christians.

Last week, about 200 supporters of the outspoken nationalist wing of the Russian Orthodox Church protested outside the offices of NTV, the station that planned to air the film.

When the Russian Orthodox Church is "annihilated, which is the dream of NTV and all the Jewish clique that rules it, there will be no Russia," actor Vladimir Zamansky told the rally.

NTV is owned by Russian media magnate Vladimir Goussinsky, who is also president of the Russian Jewish Congress.

Some of the protesters were carrying anti-Semitic posters.

Many of the banners carried at the rally, which was not sanctioned by the Moscow city government, described the owners of NTV as enemies of the Russian people and of the Orthodox Church.

The film by American director Martin Scorsese is based on a 1955 novel by Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis that depicts Jesus in unconventional terms.

The controversial film, which includes a fantasy sequence depicting Jesus having sex with Mary Magdalene, was praised by critics upon its release, which was marked by numerous demonstrations at theaters across the United States.

The film has been condemned by many Christian denominations and is banned in a number of countries.

NTV had originally planned to show the movie in April, on Russian Easter, but postponed the airing after members of the clergy and conservative politicians criticized the move.

Before the airing was canceled over the weekend, the radical right-wing group Pamyat issued a statement saying it not could guarantee "the safe existence of NTV staff" if the film were shown. □