



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat agreed to meet with President Clinton next month.**

The invitations came as little progress was reported in meetings U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright held with each leader in Europe. [Page 3]

■ **El Al postponed a decision on whether to purchase five new planes from the American firm Boeing or the European consortium Airbus.** The United States was urging Israel's national airline to give the deal to Boeing even though the Airbus price was \$10 million cheaper.

■ **A group of 23 Albanians became the first non-Jews to receive money from a \$190 million Swiss fund set up to help Holocaust survivors.** Each survivor received approximately \$700.

■ **A lawsuit was filed in a U.S. federal court against French banks for seizing and hoarding Holocaust-era bank accounts.** The suit, which is similar to a suit filed against Swiss financial institutions, seeks an accounting from French banks that facilitated the expropriation of Jewish-owned bank accounts and other assets during World War II.

■ **Israel's health minister approved a lawsuit to be filed against U.S. tobacco companies to regain money Israel spends on tobacco-related illnesses.** The suit, similar to one won by U.S. states, has to be approved by Israel's state attorney and attorney general.

■ **Uzi Narkiss, a retired general who commanded the Israeli troops that unified Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War, died at the age of 72.** After retiring from the army in 1968, Narkiss worked for several organizations, including the World Zionist Organization.

■ **The Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs is calling on synagogues throughout the country to dedicate this Shabbat to four Israelis who are missing in action after being shot down over Lebanon.** The group has distributed materials that include the Jewish commandment of redeeming captives.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Hadassah opens up its doors to a younger, hipper generation

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — Diva Barbra Streisand has lent her name to its new institute dedicated to research on Jewish women.

And Donna Shalala, secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, predicted at its national convention in Chicago in July that a U.S. president would emerge from its ranks.

What is it? Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America. And if you're surprised, you're not keeping up.

Contrary to popular conception, it "is not your mother's coffee klatch," as a high-powered public relations firm put it in a recent media advisory. Indeed, guided by a national commission of prominent Jewish women, focus groups, marketing consultants and long-range strategic plans, Hadassah is reinventing itself.

As the organization takes a prominent place at this month's 33rd Zionist Congress in Jerusalem, it is determined to capture a younger constituency less attached to Zionism than the older guard.

And it has achieved a measure of success. New Hadassah groups for young women are springing up nationwide, even as the membership of other Zionist women's organizations has aged and flagged.

These new groups have reinvigorated the largest women's organization in the United States, which boasts more than 300,000 members.

In interviews, many women under 45 say they have rediscovered an organization they had previously taken for granted and dismissed as irrelevant. "I always knew about Hadassah through my mom," says Lisa Hershkin, 29, a school social worker in the New York area.

"I was made a life member for my Bat Mitzvah.

"But I didn't know the specifics until I attended my first convention" this summer, says Hershkin, who now is on the board of Shatil, a young women's Hadassah group based in New York City that boasts 400 members.

Shatil's programs this year have included evenings with an Israeli Knesset member, discussions on American elections and intermarriage, a blood drive, happy hours that raise funds for health care and a High Holiday workshop "from a women's perspective."

'We must get young people involved'

A recent evening found Hershkin at Hadassah's midtown New York headquarters behind a desk, telephoning other younger members to solicit donations for the new mother-child pavilion at the Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center in Jerusalem's Ein Kerem.

Hershkin's interest in Hadassah grew from her "need to be involved," she says. "Tzedakah is how my family brought us up. It's just a part of what you do, of who I am."

From her first meeting, she says, "I realized it wasn't an organization for mothers and grandmothers, and if we want it to continue, we must get young people involved."

Hadassah's historic hallmark has been building and sustaining a network of state-of-the-art health care in Israel, through the Hadassah Medical Organization. Of the estimated \$88 million in support and revenue in fiscal 1997, between \$50 million and \$55 million was spent on Hadassah projects, according to the group's officials. Some of the money went to career counseling services, a technical college and the Jewish National Fund. Hadassah is JNF's largest organizational contributor.

But the lion's share is spent on health facilities and research.

Now, Hadassah has taken up the cudgel for women's health in the United States, crusading on and off Capitol Hill for breast cancer research, and osteoporosis prevention and testing.

Hadassah also has positioned itself at the forefront of the fight against genetic discrimination by health insurers after studies showed that Ashkenazi Jewish women have a potentially heightened hereditary predisposition to breast and ovarian cancers.

This focus is a short leap for Hadassah, which was founded in 1912

by Henrietta Szold, Jewish scholar and Zionist pioneer, following a study group of 12 women whose initial focus was public health nursing in Palestine.

Hadassah long has commanded respect in international, male-dominated Zionist circles.

The most recent evidence of its clout was its success in winning an unusual status that will first take effect at the Zionist Congress, which opens in Jerusalem on Dec. 23.

Hadassah is expected to be assigned 32 delegates for whom it did not have to compete in the recent congress elections. Those delegates are in addition to the 145-member American delegation.

That does not, however, mean it stays entirely out of the political fray.

The organization adopted a policy statement at its convention during the summer reaffirming its commitment to religious pluralism and calling on the Israeli government to reject legislative efforts that would impose "more restrictive definitions of religious conversions."

At the same time, Hadassah has been under fire from the Reform and Conservative Zionist organizations over the way its delegates were assigned by the Zionist political establishment in Israel.

The organization never was limited strictly to health, however. One of its trademark projects, taken on by Szold in 1935, was Youth Aliyah, the program to resettle mostly orphaned European children in Palestine in youth villages.

The new expansion is part of an overarching master plan.

Marlene Post, who lives on Long Island in New York, the group's energetic and outspoken president who was trained as a nurse and has three daughters, says the process of redefining Hadassah began five years ago.

"Our membership was in decline, our grass-roots fund raising was down and we weren't paying attention to developing [new] leaders," she says.

But the picture is changing, and Post has made it her personal mission to cultivate a new, young cadre of leaders.

There has also been a big push to expand programming to broaden Hadassah's appeal, with a new range of activities from literacy tutoring to a popular Jewish family education program called "Training Wheels."

The result: Hadassah has awakened to its own potential power.

Initially, the expansion was resisted by long-time board members who were afraid such a change would take away from the programs for older women and from Hadassah's core missions, Post says.

Strengthening the Zionist connection

But they came around, she adds, when they understood that the plan was to draw in younger women "through issues that are attractive today."

Once they were in, Hadassah would educate them and get them involved in activities that ultimately would "strengthen their Judaism and Zionist connection."

The strategy makes sense to Diane Sherman, a 34-year-old dentist in Solano Beach, Calif., who is the president of Keshet, her area's young women's group, with 40 members.

"It is hard to get young women attracted to a purely Zionist organization," Sherman says.

"Our generation doesn't have the same connection to Zionism as the previous generation did, especially the generation that lived through the Holocaust."

Most young women get involved in Hadassah initially for social reasons, to meet other Jewish women, she adds.

"Later," she says, "they learn the importance of the organization" and the work that it does.

The expansion of Hadassah's programming followed the findings of a special national commission appointed by Hadassah and Brandeis University.

Those findings were compiled in a publication released a few years ago, "Voices for Change: Future Directions for American Jewish Women."

It concluded that young women were alienated from the Jewish establishment and were longing to be connected.

It also found there was a paucity of research and data on Jewish women.

The initiative spawned the new International Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis University.

The institute, which boasts Streisand as its honorary chairwoman, this week is sponsoring its first symposium, focusing on Jewish women around the world.

"If women are the fulcrum of family, we have to know more" about Jewish women, Post says, adding that the institute "may be Hadassah's best gift to the Jewish people."

In her bid for Jewish "resurgence," a word she prefers to "continuity," Post is also focusing on boosting its Young Judaea youth movement.

For now, though, the younger generation has a tough act to follow in terms of dedication and commitment, a hallmark of Hadassah's leaders.

Karen Venezky is a prime example of that dedication.

Venezky commutes by Amtrak three times a week — three-and-a-half hours each way — from Newark, Del., to the organization's national office in Manhattan, where she is the volunteer coordinator for the Center for Innovation, which oversees the strategic planning effort.

"Before I got married," Venezky says, remembering back 30 years, "my mother sat me down for a conversation, and I assumed it was going to be about sex."

Instead, Venezky remembers, "She asked, 'What are you going to do to have a Jewish life?' And I said, 'We're going to join a congregation, light Sabbath candles and celebrate holidays.'"

"She said, 'But what are you going to do for the Jewish people?'" Answering the question, Venezky says: "You can join Hadassah." □

Two Israeli women to fly

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli women may soon be flying high above the skies.

Two years after Israel's High Court of Justice ruled that the Israeli air force cannot ban women from becoming pilots, two female cadets passed the qualifying courses to train as combat pilots.

The Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported that if the two cadets, identified only as "S" and "L," complete the combat course, they could become Israel's first female combat pilots within a year.

In a ground-breaking November 1995 ruling, the high court said women must be allowed into the air force's pilot-training program.

The woman who challenged the air force's policy, South African-born Alice Miller, was ultimately unable to take the training course after she failed the qualifying exam.

But her court battle opened the way for other female candidates.

Earlier this month, El Al, Israel's national airline, dropped a Catch-22 requirement that effectively prevented female pilots from working for the airline. □

Washington hopes for better luck next year on Mideast peace

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Washington hopes that next year will be a better one for the peace process.

In an effort to give some substance to those hopes, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat agreed Thursday to hold separate meetings next month in Washington with President Clinton.

Noting that "1997 was not a good year for the peace process," U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said this week that she wanted to "make sure 1998 is a good year." She made the comment after meeting with Arafat in London and discussions earlier in the day in Paris with Netanyahu.

The Netanyahu-Albright meeting was their second in 12 days — but it appeared clear that their discussions did not achieve the breakthrough needed to end a nearly 10-month-long stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Netanyahu, who had little to offer in the way of new proposals, told Albright that he is facing difficulties trying to get hard-liners in his coalition to agree on Israeli-Palestinian borders in a final-status agreement. His Cabinet must sign off on such a plan before agreeing to any further redeployment in the West Bank.

During a series of stormy meetings this week, Netanyahu's Cabinet refused to back any specific proposal, forcing the premier to arrive essentially empty-handed to the Paris meeting.

Foreign Minister David Levy refused to attend because he said it was a waste of time in the absence of a detailed redeployment plan.

Netanyahu told reporters after the meeting that "specific steps" had been agreed upon.

He refused to elaborate, saying he first wanted to brief his Cabinet.

Netanyahu also said he and Albright did not discuss the specifics of a redeployment, adding that he presented Israel's security concerns based on maps from the 1995 Interim Agreement, which set forth the current West Bank status.

Albright calls meeting 'pleasant'

For her part, Albright said after the three-hour meeting at the Israeli ambassador's residence that her meeting with Netanyahu was "pleasant."

She reportedly told Netanyahu to concentrate on the "practical aspects" of a redeployment rather than focus on those areas that Israel would not cede to the Palestinian Authority because of security concerns.

From Paris, Albright traveled to London to meet with Arafat. Netanyahu continued on to Luxembourg for meetings with European Union leaders.

As Israel struggles to come up with the "credible" redeployment that American officials are seeking, Washington is pressing Arafat to provide a detailed plan to root out Hamas militants from the self-rule areas.

Arafat said after meeting Albright that the United States had approved his plan for cracking down on terrorists, adding that "we now hope the Israeli side will approve the document."

Israeli hard-liners have refused to back any redeployment until Arafat lives up to his commitment to fight terror.

Netanyahu faces pressure not only from conservative members of his coalition, but also from settler leaders, who threatened this week to topple his government if the premier authorizes a redeployment without demanding Palestinian reciprocity. □

Spat erupts on Capitol Hill when lawmaker invokes Nazi comparison

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A war of words has erupted between the chairman of the Republican Party and the only Holocaust survivor in Congress, who compared a witness at a congressional hearing to a former Nazi who lied about his past.

U.S. Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) grew incensed at Republican attempts to portray Donald Smaltz, the independent counsel investigating former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy, as a Democrat.

In testimony during a House congressional hearing last week, Republicans questioning Smaltz portrayed him as a Democrat when, in fact, he has been a registered Republican since 1967. Smaltz, too, left the impression that he has been a Democrat since the 1950s, when he was president of his college campus' Young Democrats.

In questioning Smaltz, Lantos compared Smaltz's selective history to that of Kurt Waldheim, the former United Nations secretary-general and president of Austria, who hid his Nazi past for decades.

Lantos told Smaltz that the counsel reminded him of Waldheim, "who also had a lapse in memory. He conveniently forgot several years when he was a Nazi, and this came out after he left office." Smaltz shot back that he took "umbrage" at any comparison to Waldheim.

The exchange, which focused on Attorney General Janet Reno's decision not to appoint an independent counsel to investigate President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore for campaign fund-raising, took only two minutes.

But this week, Republicans and Democrats have spent hours on the issue. Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson, in a widely circulated news release, demanded an apology from Lantos for comparing the Republican Party to the Nazis.

In an angry response, Lantos said his remarks were aimed only at Smaltz and demanded his own apology for the "totally inaccurate and misleading" news release.

Lantos defended his comparison of Smaltz to Waldheim in remarks published in the San Francisco Chronicle. "The more I think about it the more I think I was totally proper and correct," Lantos said. "If you overlook your involvement in the KKK, or the Nazi Party, or the Republican Party, you are lying. You are deceitful."

Four news releases later, Nicholson responded that Lantos "would be well served to tone down your incendiary rhetoric." Not surprisingly, the National Jewish Coalition, a Republican group, expressed support for Nicholson in the spat, while the National Jewish Democratic Council backed Lantos.

But Ira Forman, executive director of the NJDC, added that "one could argue that a more sensitive analogy could have been used" by Lantos. □

Unemployed protest in Israeli town

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Rising unemployment in Israel has brought warnings that a "social explosion" is imminent.

The predictions were borne out Tuesday, when laid-off workers took part in violent protests in the southern development town of Ofakim. The protests took place one day after official figures showed a 1.2 percent rise in unemployment in November. The statistics put unemployment at its highest levels in five years.

The unemployment figures indicated that development towns in the Negev have been particularly hard-hit. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appointed an emergency team to look into the matter. □

Quebec's 'language police' do about-face on Jewish business

By Bram Eisenthal

MONTREAL (JTA) — Quebec's "language police" have decided not to go to the mat with a Jewish tombstone manufacturer.

A day after threatening L. Berson & Sons with legal action for breaching the Canadian province's language laws, the Commission for the Protection of the French Language backed off.

The commission had threatened to bring Marvin Berson, the company's owner, to court if he did not reduce the size of one Hebrew word on an outdoor sign so that it was smaller than the accompanying French text.

The letter accused him of contravening Article 58 of Quebec's French language charter, which states that all commercial signs must be in French. Another language may be used in conjunction with the French — as long as the French lettering is larger.

The commission's rapid about-face came after wide condemnation by Jewish groups, the media and both the French- and English-speaking public.

"After examining your file we inform you that we have closed" the case, the commission said in a letter faxed Thursday to Berson.

"We ask that you ignore the letter we sent you Dec. 11, 1997," said the fax, which was written in French.

"Excuse us for the disagreements that this letter caused."

Quebec's French-speaking community has long sought to preserve the province's French character — a stance that has often put it at odds with other Quebec residents. Two referendums calling for Quebec to secede from Canada were narrowly defeated in recent years.

A similar case involving Jewish products occurred last year, when boxes of matzah were removed from store shelves in Montreal prior to Passover because there was no French on the boxes. Dubbed "Matzahgate," the case was eventually settled by the government and the community, and the matzah was permitted in stores without French labels during certain periods of the year.

L. Berson & Sons has been located in downtown Montreal for some 50 years and is the city's leading manufacturer of Jewish tombstones.

Berson was happy with the turnaround.

"It's a load off my mind," he said in a telephone interview. "I had my day in the sun and it's time to go on. There are other, more important things in my life to deal with than this." □

Former U.S. Justice official to join Canada war crimes unit

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — A new appointment in Canada's war crimes unit has raised hopes that the government will now move at full speed against suspected Nazi war criminals.

After years of being accused of dragging its feet on the issue, Canada appointed Neal Sher, the former director of the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, as a consultant to its Nazi-hunting unit.

The appointment of Sher, who has also served as executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, was seen by Jewish leaders as a hopeful sign of change in Canada's manner of dealing with suspected war criminals who have been living undisturbed throughout Canada for decades.

"We have been urging successive governments for years to consider bringing in outside counsel," said

Professor Irving Abella, chair of the war crimes committee for the Canadian Jewish Congress. "They could not have made a better choice than Neal Sher."

"His record as head of the American Nazi-hunting office over a 12-year period was impressive. I think it is a sign that the government does indeed realize that time is running out and they must take whatever measures necessary to bring to justice the perpetrators of heinous crimes committed during World War II," he added.

Meanwhile, Bill Hobson, the former head of Canada's war crimes unit, has charged the government with attempting to cover up evidence of political manipulation, incompetent management and anti-Semitic prejudice within the Justice Department.

Hobson accused senior bureaucrats in Ottawa of putting a low priority on the prosecution of alleged Nazi war criminals living in Canada. □

Carlos claims Jews responsible for his alleged terrorist attacks

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — The international terrorist known as "Carlos the Jackal" is attempting to blame Jews for the crimes he is accused of committing.

At his trial Monday in Paris, Carlos, whose real name is Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, denounced the proceedings against him as a "judicial scandal."

"I refuse to prostitute myself in this abstract rite," he said, claiming that he was the victim of a "Zionist plot."

He is on trial for the 1975 killings of two French intelligence agents who were investigating his role in a series of attacks on El Al Airlines at Paris' Orly Airport.

He is also believed to have been involved in the 1976 hijacking of an Air France jetliner to Entebbe, Uganda, prompting a daring Israeli commando operation to rescue the flight's Jewish hostages.

Carlos' three defense lawyers withdrew from the case this week after the court refused to investigate his claim that the killings were carried out by the CIA and Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service.

Carlos, who faces a 30-year prison sentence for each of the 1975 killings, was convicted in absentia in 1992.

Under French law, he must be retried now that he is in French custody. □

Former agent pleads innocent

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A retired Mossad intelligence officer charged with passing on false information about Syria to his superiors and keeping some of the money intended for sources has pleaded innocent.

The trial of Yehuda Gil, which began Wednesday in the Tel Aviv District Court, was held behind closed doors, and the three-judge panel barred any details of the session from being published.

In a terse statement issued after the proceedings, the court said only that the indictment had been read to Gil. It was not immediately clear if he had been charged with espionage.

Israeli media reports disclosed last month that Gil had been passing on false or modified reports for years, which he said were based on a source in Damascus.

Doubts about the reliability of the information prompted an internal investigation which led to his arrest.

Israeli officials denied that Gil's reports had significantly influenced military and political assessments of the situation in Syria or that they had led Israel to the brink of war. □