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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu mulling redeployment

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross met separately with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

The meetings came amid reports that Netanyahu was preparing to present a scaled-down plan for a further redeployment from the West Bank to President Clinton later this month.

Meanwhile, a hard-line faction in the Israeli Knesset sent a letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warning him that they would support a no-confidence motion if he agrees to a further redeployment from the West Bank without concessions from the Palestinians.

Knesset members criticized

A U.S. congressman criticized remarks by two members of the Israeli Knesset that they were opposed to the Oslo peace process.

The critical reaction by Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) to the remarks of the Likud's Uzi Landau and the National Religious Party's Shaul Yahalom came after an international conference of Jewish legislators met with the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

After Landau said the Oslo peace process was a disaster, Frank questioned how the governing coalition could convince the United States that it was prepared to advance the process.

U.S. Orthodox to lobby Knesset

A group of some 75 U.S. Orthodox leaders are traveling to Israel to lobby for the enactment of controversial legislation codifying into law the Orthodox monopoly over conversions in Israel.

The trip is the latest effort by Am Ehad, One Nation, to prevent legal recognition of Reform and Conservative conversions performed in Israel.

Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of Agudath Israel of America and a member of Am Ehad, said the group is going to Israel now because Knesset and government leaders do not "fully understand that Reform conversions mean opening the door to the non-Jews parading as Jews."

Religious pluralism would split the Jewish people in two "with one not able to marry the other," Sherer added.

The Am Ehad mission comes as a government-appointed committee struggles to develop a solution to the conversion crisis.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish war veterans dead but not forgotten at Arlington

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For decades, Christmas wreaths have decorated many of the Jewish graves at Arlington National Cemetery.

Well-intentioned volunteers lean thousands of donated wreaths on headstones throughout the nation's premier cemetery for veterans.

And each year for the past few years, a couple of days before Christmas, Ken Poch removes the wreaths from the Jewish graves.

Until Poch began researching the Jewish history at Arlington, no one knew the location or number of Jewish graves there.

Attention was focused recently on the Jewish dead at Arlington when M. Larry Lawrence, the former U.S. ambassador to Switzerland, was disinterred and moved after it was learned that he fabricated his war record.

Lawrence, who was buried at Arlington for almost two years, has also been removed from Poch's list.

While Lawrence might have gained some notoriety, the other Jewish veterans buried there remain largely unknown to tourists at the popular northern Virginia destination.

Poch, a conference planner who has made it his hobby — and mission — to chronicle the Jews at the cemetery, has cataloged the location and history of the 2,500 Jews buried at Arlington.

While some of the cemetery's Jewish residents are well known, most of their stories have never been told.

Poch, who twice crisscrossed the cemetery's 250,000 graves looking for Jewish veterans, frequently returns to the cemetery with interested Jewish tourists.

For Poch, who served two years in non-active, stateside duty in the 1960s, this has become his duty.

"There's a myth that Jews don't fight and don't serve," he said during a recent visit to the cemetery.

"I want to know who these people were," he said, pointing to one of many graves he has cataloged.

After the Brooklyn, N.Y., native moved to Virginia a few years ago, Poch read "Where They Lie: Someone Should Say Kaddish," a book about the Jewish Civil War dead buried at Arlington.

So Poch took the advice of the title and returned to the cemetery. In the Jewish custom, he placed stones on the headstones of the five Jews buried there who died in the Civil War fighting for the Union. He also said Kaddish, the Jewish prayer cited as a memorial to the dead.

Rich with Jewish history, the cemetery includes:

- Moses Ezekiel, who fought for the Confederacy and is buried next to a sculpture he designed in memory of the Confederate soldiers.

Ezekiel is known as one of the great 19th-century sculptors and was knighted by the king of Italy and kaiser of Germany;

- Six Jewish nurses, including Lt. Col. Rae Landy, who served in the U.S. Army during both world wars.

In 1913, she went to Palestine and helped develop the clinic that later became Hadassah Hospital;

- Two rabbis, including Rabbi Joshua Goldberg, a Navy captain who served in World War I as an infantryman, received five battle ribbons and participated in the first Maccabiah Games in 1912;

- Rabbi Bertram Korn, a Navy rear admiral and the first Jewish chaplain to achieve

MIDEAST FOCUS

Joint naval exercises held

Israeli, American and Turkish vessels are holding joint naval exercise in the eastern Mediterranean.

Iran, Egypt and other Muslim countries have criticized the exercises.

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who observed a joint sea and air rescue drill, called on other regional states, including Syria, to join Israel in future exercises.

"This is a purely humanitarian exercise, to improve our coordination in such rescue efforts," he told reporters Wednesday.

On the eve of the drill, the U.S. State department also rejected the criticism of "some states in the Middle East."

State Department spokesman James Rubin stressed that the exercises were not directed against any particular country.

The commander of the Jordanian navy, Brig. Gen. Hussein Hasawneh, joined the exercises as an observer.

Shin Bet methods explained

A Israeli state official explained to the High Court of Justice the reasoning behind some of the Shin Bet's interrogation methods.

The Shin Bet, Israel's domestic intelligence service, confirmed last week that it uses methods such as sleep deprivation, loud music and putting a sack on prisoners' heads during interrogations.

The official, speaking on behalf of the Shin Bet, said the sack was used to prevent the prisoners from seeing other detainees; the music was to prevent the detainees from speaking to each other, and the handcuffs were to prevent them from assaulting the interrogators.

Chief Justice Aharon Barak convened the expanded nine-judge panel to hear petitions from Palestinian prisoners complaining about the interrogation methods.



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such a high rank in the armed forces;

- Pfc. Robert Cohen, who was taken prisoner of war by the Nazis during the Battle of the Bulge.

He was murdered in the woods along with 85 other Americans;

- Two brothers, Pvt. Marvin Kaminsky and Pfc. Maynard Kaminsky, who were killed three months apart during World War II;

- Adm. Hyman Rickover, the father of the modern Navy;

- Maj. Gen. Julius Ochs Adler, who served in both world wars and later as the general manager of The New York Times;

- Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Freedman, Army special forces.

The first American killed in Somalia in 1993, Freedman was nicknamed "Super Jew";

- Judith Resnick, mission specialist on the Challenger space shuttle, which exploded during its 1986 launch.

- The highest-ranking Jew buried at Arlington is Adm. Jeremy Michael Boorda, chief of naval operations, who killed himself in 1996 amid revelations that he had worn medals to which he was not entitled.

While his headstone bears a Jewish star, a miniature Christmas tree decorated his grave in December.

Also buried there is a key non-Jewish influence on the fighting forces that led to the Israel Defense Force. Maj. Gen. Orde Charles Wingate, of the British Army, trained early Jewish settlers in Palestine in defensive battle techniques. Although British, he was killed on a U.S. plane in Burma and buried with the 12 others who were on board the plane.

Poch acknowledges that his list is not scientific.

Only after World War I were people allowed to place a religious symbol on their headstones.

Jewish graves are frequently marked with a Star of David, but not all Jewish graves are marked.

Poch looks up the service history of veterans with Jewish-sounding names whose graves don't have Jewish markers.

If someone did not list a religion on their form or chose not to reveal their religion during their life, Poch said he does not force them to in death.

But his best information, he says, comes when people hear about his project.

Families regularly contact him with information.

Rabbis who perform Jewish funerals at the cemetery encourage the families to share stories of their loved ones with Poch.

For Poch, it's a duty. "You're only dead if you're forgotten," he said. □

Israel to join in world study of cell phone's health impact

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A recent visitor to Israel observed the following scenario: He was at a restaurant when he noticed two people sitting across from each other at a nearby table.

Each was talking into a cellular telephone cradled against his ear.

Since they were speaking at the same time, the visitor concluded that they were not speaking to each other.

Stories like these abound.

Indeed, cellular phone use has become ubiquitous — some would say oppressive — in Israel.

It is virtually impossible in the country's cities to get through a restaurant meal or a movie without hearing cellular phone rings and conversations.

Now Israelis will find out if their obsession with cellular phones could lead to health problems.

The Jewish state will participate in a World Health Organization study on whether the use of a cellular phone can lead to an increase in brain tumors. A recent study in the Australian Medical Journal suggested a link between the increased use of cellular phones and an increased number of such tumors in Australia. □

JEWISH WORLD

Argentina drafts hate law

Argentina's government is drafting a law that could place persons convicted of hate crimes in jail for up to five years.

Jewish groups called for such a bill after two Jewish cemeteries were vandalized in December.

If the bill is passed by Argentine legislators, vandals would be jailed for one to five years for defacing tombs, corpses or religious symbols, according to a Cabinet spokesman.

Group says Iran tested missile

Iran successfully tested the first Iranian-produced missile capable of reaching Israel, an Iranian opposition group announced at a Washington press conference.

The announcement by the National Council of Resistance of Iran came just hours before Iran's president, Mohammed Khatami, was scheduled to appear in a live televised interview on CNN.

Extremism rises in German army

The number of extremist incidents in the German army doubled in 1997, according to a German army report.

The report comes after several highly publicized neo-Nazi incidents in recent months.

N.Y. governor calls for bias law

New York Gov. George Pataki, in his annual state of the state address, called on the state legislature to pass anti-bias legislation this year.

The measure would stiffen penalties for anti-Semitic attacks and other bias crimes.

New York is one of only 11 states in the country that does not have hate crimes laws.

The American Jewish Congress hailed Pataki's commitment to press for the legislation.

Red Sox change time of opener

The Boston Red Sox baseball team rescheduled the time of its Apr. 10 home opener to accommodate the Passover and Good Friday holidays.

The game will start at 3:05 p.m. in order to allow people to attend mass in the morning.

It will likely end before the beginning of the first Passover seder.

In addition, no alcohol will be served at the game.

Israel to help Papua New Guinea

Israel will send approximately \$6,000 in aid to Papua New Guinea to help with crops destroyed by effects from the weather system known as El Nino.

The money will be sent by an Israeli company and the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Nabisco set to take big bite of burgeoning kosher market

By Eric J. Greenberg and Stewart Ainsworth
New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK (JTA) — Should one eat it as a sandwich, or break it apart and eat the cookie part separately from the cream?

Kosher-observant Jews will now be faced with that classic American dilemma with the historic koshering of the Oreo, billed by its maker, Nabisco, as America's favorite cookie.

It's all part of a move by the Nabisco Biscuit Co. to make many of its cookie and snack products kosher.

Nabisco quietly has signed a contract with the Orthodox Union to supervise the kosher production of such longtime company staples as Chips Ahoy, Barnum's Animal Crackers, Fig Newtons, Social Tea Biscuits and Honey Maid Grahams. Thousands of products have been made kosher over the last several years, and Nabisco appears to be one of the last giant corporations to meet the needs of the kosher consumer.

"This means that a great majority of cookies on the shelves are now kosher," said Rabbi Eliyahu Safran, the senior rabbinic coordinator for the O.U.

And for thousands of Jewish kids who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s not being able to eat Oreos, the Nabisco announcement marks a symbolic shift in American attitudes toward accommodating Jewish religious observance.

"While I'm not Jewish, I can't imagine growing up in America not being able to eat an Oreo cookie," said Nabisco quality control specialist Kevin Murphy.

Also being made under new kosher specifications are about 10 items from Nabisco's Snackwell reduced-fat line.

Some of Nabisco's new kosher products, designated with the classic O.U. kosher label, already have begun to arrive on local store shelves, Murphy said.

But many of Nabisco's most popular cookies and crackers will remain unkosher, notably products containing cheese or cookies with marshmallows such as Mallomars, a company official explained.

Nabisco's efforts to make its line kosher and tap into the fast-growing kosher food industry — now estimated at \$3.25 billion a year — have been nearly seven years in the making.

It took so long to finalize the project because the company wanted to kosher the baking process at its 12 nationwide plants in a cost-effective way, Murphy said.

Perhaps the most significant step came in 1992 when vegetable oil replaced lard in the company's baked products. Murphy said the switch was made not only for kosher purposes but, as American consumers sought products with lower cholesterol, for health reasons as well. The company slowly eliminated all its non-kosher ingredients, and changed its production policies to adhere to O.U.'s standards.

"We had to make sure all ingredients were kosher-approved," said Murphy, who confided he knew little about kosher law before he began working closely with O.U.'s rabbis. He said these days most ingredients available in the food industry are kosher.

O.U. officials praised Nabisco for its cooperation.

"They were extremely meticulous and responsive to every facet of our kosher standards and requirements and have now incorporated the O.U. kosher policy standards into their corporate policy," said Safran.

Nabisco even agreed to keep records about the separation of pans and equipment in the production process. "Most companies don't do that," Safran said.

"You can see the importance they attached to the certification," he said. "They had a formal contract signing and the president of the company was present, which is also rare."

Murphy said he could not say how much it has cost Nabisco to change ingredients and made its huge ovens kosher. But he says he learned a "bunch" about kosher laws and rabbinic supervision from the experience.

"I never understood Jewish dietary customs about meat and dairy being separated at meals," he said. "I always thought rabbis made something kosher by just doing some kind of blessing." □

Republican abortion proposal worries Jewish GOP activists

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For years, the Republican Party has reached out to Jewish voters by touting its big-tent approach.

Just as the party is beginning to reap the rewards of its efforts at the ballot box, the latest anti-abortion battle is threatening the GOP's success in the Jewish community.

At its winter meetings next week, the Republican Party will consider a proposal to cut off party funds to all candidates who do not support a ban on a late-term abortion procedure known to its opponents as "partial-birth abortion."

Fearing that all of their outreach efforts could come crashing down if the GOP adopts a new abortion litmus test, Jewish Republicans are working to defeat the proposal.

"This is a wrong precedent for the party to be setting," said Matt Brooks, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition.

"The party has always and continues to stand for a big tent for inclusiveness."

While the outcome of the vote is uncertain, national party leaders, including Jim Nicholson, chairman of the Republican National Committee, are also opposing the resolution.

Aware that the big tent philosophy could come into question if the party cuts off such moderates as Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House International Relations Committee; Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and New Jersey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman, the National Jewish Coalition has sent a letter to all the members of the Republican National Committee urging them to oppose the measure.

All members of the Republican Jewish group are being asked to lobby their state party leaders against the proposal.

"This is bigger than abortion," said Brooks, whose group does not take a position on the issue. "Our concern is one of a slippery slope. Are we going down the path of allowing the national committee to dictate who is worthy of support?"

Susan Cullman, a Jewish Republican and president of the Republican Coalition for Choice, is working against the proposal.

Not only does this resolution threaten the Republican majority more than any other issue, "it alienates sitting Republican legislators," she said in a statement.

Many members of Congress who support a ban on the late-term abortion procedure are not supporting the resolution.

A spokesman for Rep. Jon Fox (R-Pa.) said, "For the party to be successful in the long term, it must be inclusive of all points of view."

The party's resolutions committee plans to vote on the resolution Jan. 16. If it passes, all 168 members of the Republican National Committee will also vote that weekend. □

Swiss document shows bank moved money for senior Nazis

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — At least one Swiss bank was involved in transferring money for high-ranking Nazi officials from Germany to Switzerland at the end of World War II, according to a document found in the Swiss Federal Archives.

Some of the money allegedly transferred by the director of the Swiss Agricultural Bank on behalf of "high-ranking members of the Nazi regime" originally belonged to French people "who doubtless died in concentration camps or were otherwise murdered," the document said.

The document — a letter written by a Swiss army officer at the end of the war — was released Tuesday by U.S. Senate Banking Committee Chairman Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), who has been one of Switzerland's harshest critics. The letter said the amount being transferred was about "11 million" — presumably Swiss francs, an amount worth about \$74 million today.

"If this document is true," D'Amato said, "it is a chilling indictment of this particular Swiss banker and raises serious questions concerning the activities of other Swiss bankers from this period."

The letter was written Feb. 16, 1945, by a general staff officer in the Swiss Army Command to the director of the Swiss Federal Finance Administration.

If true, the letter suggests that both the Swiss army and the country's financial authorities were aware of at least one instance of "flight capital" moving from Germany to Switzerland to help Nazi officials who foresaw the defeat of Hitler's forces.

D'Amato forwarded the letter to Jean-Francois Bergier, chairman of an international panel of historians that was created by Switzerland in December 1996 to study the extent of the country's financial dealings with the Nazis.

A spokesman for the commission said, "We will, of course, investigate this case carefully." □

Survivors in Israel seek role in worldwide restitution talks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Holocaust survivor groups in Israel are complaining that world Jewish organizations are not representing their interests in restitution negotiations.

Moshe Zanbar, the head of the umbrella organization for survivors in Israel, said Wednesday that in the ongoing efforts to obtain restitution, the voice and needs of the survivors themselves have been lost.

He said that of "350,000 survivors in Israel, 10 percent are in a difficult economic situation. We feel obligated to help them."

Zanbar was joined at a news conference by representatives from various Israeli Holocaust survivor groups, of which there are 29. They maintained that such organizations as the World Jewish Restitution Organization, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency for Israel have been very involved in restitution efforts, but that survivor groups in Israel had been excluded from those efforts.

In New York, the executive director of the World Jewish Congress, which is the main force behind the WJRO, countered their claim.

"They are a part of the WJRO and have a voice within the Jewish democratic world," said Elan Steinberg.

"They are entitled to their views," Steinberg added. "But they are indeed within the tent of the WJRO."

Detailing his complaints, Zanbar said that in restitution negotiations with Germany, survivors were not consulted in the early round of discussions. □