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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel sets forth demands

The Israeli Cabinet set forth a 12-page list of conditions that the Palestinian Authority must fulfill before Israel authorizes a redeployment in the West Bank.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied that Israel was presenting the self-rule authority with an ultimatum before progress would be achieved in the peace process. The Palestinians, meanwhile, rejected the Cabinet decision, calling it further proof of the Israeli government's intention to ignore already signed agreements.

Albright cites lack of progress

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright expressed regret over the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process during her year-end policy address.

As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat prepare for separate summit meetings with President Clinton next week, Albright said she hopes the two leaders "will be prepared to make the tough decisions necessary to support the Oslo process and to marry the interim issues with permanent status" negotiations.

U.S. rabbis lobby in Israel

A delegation of some 75 American Orthodox rabbis arrived in Israel to lobby Knesset members to support a controversial conversion bill that would codify the Orthodox movement's sole authority over Jewish conversions performed in Israel.

Meeting with Knesset members and rabbinic leaders, the delegation, which was spearheaded by the fervently Orthodox Agudath Israel of America, stressed that compromise could only be reached in business matters, not in religious affairs. [Page 4]

Study blasts Swiss camps

A study commissioned by the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center found that Jewish refugees confined in Swiss labor camps during World War II were subjected to sadistic conditions and threatened to be turned over to the Gestapo if they attempted to leave the camps.

"These were really slave labor camps," the author of the study, historian Alan Morris Schom, told the Los Angeles Times. The study's findings, which echoed those contained in a recent British television documentary, were flatly denied by Swiss officials.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish juror spares life of Oklahoma bomb abettor

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Growing up in northern Idaho, Niki Deutchman had no idea that she would one day play a pivotal role in one of America's most infamous trials.

But she did have an inkling that she would become a Jew.

Deutchman was the forewoman of the jury that was unable to decide the fate of Terry Nichols for his role in the April 19, 1995, bombing of an Oklahoma City federal building that killed 168 people.

While a majority of jury members favored the death penalty, a few disagreed, including Deutchman, whose stance and public comments after the trial last week infuriated many of the people affected most directly by the bombing, particularly relatives of the dead.

Deutchman's key role in sparing Nichols' life has turned the spotlight on the 47-year-old childbirth educator from Denver and reignited debate over the death penalty.

In an exclusive telephone interview, Deutchman, who has received several death threats, talked of her path to Judaism and her faith's impact on the way she handled the case.

"Being Jewish helped me to be able to keep an open mind and really consider the evidence," said Deutchman, who became a Jew 24 years ago after a lifelong interest in Judaism.

"In Judaism, there are a lot of sides to every question," she said.

The jury convicted Nichols of conspiracy and involuntary manslaughter. It acquitted him of two bomb-related counts and of murder.

The jury would have had to vote unanimously for his execution.

The most severe penalty that the judge in the case, Richard Matsch, may now impose is a life sentence.

Deutchman, who said she wore a Star of David necklace at the Jan. 7 news conference following the jury's dismissal, said she did not consult with her rabbi or any others about her position on the death penalty in this case.

But she said she plans to talk about the issue further with the rabbi of her Reform congregation in Denver.

"My feeling has been — and I may re-evaluate it now — that the death penalty is something that is not for us to judge, but probably something between each person and God."

At the same time, "if someone is truly a threat in a big way to others, and has been found guilty of a crime, then maybe the threat needs to be removed.

"I had to be able to feel like the death penalty had some sort of place to be able to serve on this jury," she said.

Judaism, too, has a mixed view of the death penalty.

While many Jews are opposed to the death penalty, it is not forbidden by halachah, or Jewish law.

However, in times when Jewish courts had the ability to impose capital sentences, it "never, ever was" employed, said Rabbi Michael Broyde, the director of the Beth Din of America, an Orthodox religious court.

Deutchman's rabbi, Steven Foster of Reform Temple Emanuel, said, "The death penalty as it was reflected in the Bible was really the first insurance program.

"The notion of 'a life for a life' was not intended to take a life," but was instead intended to provide compensation to relatives of murder victims, Foster said.

He noted that the Reform movement has taken the position that the death penalty

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel breaks up Hamas cell

Israeli security officials warned that a security alert remained in effect despite the uncovering in recent days of a large Hamas bomb-making factory in Nablus and the arrest of dozens of Hamas activists.

The head of the Israel Defense Force's central command, Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, said the Palestinian Authority should be doing more to prevent terrorism.

U.S. officials cite flight to Israel

American law-enforcement officials are concerned that Israeli citizens suspected of crimes in the United States will flee to Israel to escape prosecution.

The fears were expressed after three Israelis suspected of laundering \$44 million for a Colombian cocaine cartel fled trial in Florida by hopping a flight to Israel, which bars the extradition of its citizens.

A similar situation took place last year, when a Maryland teen accused of murder, Samuel Sheinbein, fled to Israel, where he is now fighting his extradition.

Details published about trial

An Israeli military court allowed details to be published regarding the arrest and trial of a suspected Hezbollah member charged with helping the Shi'ite organization carry out attacks during a 1996 campaign in Lebanon known as Operation Grapes of Wrath.

Israeli media reported that Ahmed Banjak was detained in August 1996 and tried for aiding Hezbollah and undergoing weapons training at one of its camps. Banjak said that his confession was forged and he was taken to Israel against his will.

Arafat visits Jordan

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat crossed into Jordan from the West Bank to discuss the stalled peace process with Jordan's King Hussein.

Hussein personally drove Arafat to his palace in the Jordanian capital of Amman, according to news reports.



Daily News Bulletin

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"is contrary to the worldview of our people."

When he learned that his congregant was on the Nichols jury, Foster told her he didn't want to discuss the trial with her, that he didn't want "to compromise" her, he said.

But when the trial was over, he called Deutchman to tell her that he is proud of her "for taking her stand."

The use of the death penalty has also been controversial in Israel — where one of the issues is whether it should be enacted against terrorists.

So far, only convicted Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann has been executed in the Jewish state.

The Orthodox view of a secular court's applying the death sentence depends on the context and details of the case, Broyde said.

He added that he had "no idea" whether Jewish law would say that it was merited in the Nichols case.

Though Deutchman was advised by her attorney and law enforcement officials not to speak to the press because she has received death threats, she answered JTA's questions.

Deutchman, who this week was preparing to teach a childbirth education course from a Jewish perspective, said in a telephone interview that her goal was "to do justice, rather than vengeance."

She was very critical of the government's handling of the case, saying, "The evidence that the government presented did not convince me beyond a reasonable doubt that Nichols is indeed so involved in this whole thing that he is a major threat. I had to follow the law."

At her news conference, Deutchman went further, saying the U.S. government had "dropped the ball" and the prosecutors had used "distortion and innuendo."

She also said then that "Terry Nichols wasn't directly present or implicated with anything."

She also praised Nichols' lead defense attorney, Michael Tigar, who, according to news stories, tried to charm jury members by framing his questions and comments in a way that he thought that they could relate to.

In his summation, the defense attorney, who apparently knew that Deutchman was Jewish, spoke about family relationships, using the biblical patriarch Joseph and his brothers as a model.

While growing up in a Christian home in northern Idaho, Deutchman had a keen interest in things Jewish.

"I did a lot of Bible study on my own," she said.

"When I asked my Sunday school teachers about what being Jewish was all about, they wouldn't know how to answer, and they didn't care.

"They just sent me off to read some Bible passage which didn't even deal with the questions just to get rid of me," she said.

After two years at the University of Idaho, Deutchman wanted to travel and went to Israel on a Brandeis University program.

When she returned to the United States, she contacted a rabbi who encouraged her to begin reading about Judaism.

Three years later she underwent a Reform conversion.

Six months after that experience, Deutchman was converted according to Jewish law.

She later married a Jewish man; they have a daughter who is now 13 and preparing to become a Bat Mitzvah.

Deutchman has been attending Temple Emanuel each Saturday morning as she prepares for her own, adult Bat Mitzvah, which is scheduled for June.

She said she, her husband and daughter are regular temple goers.

Under fire from many in her area for allowing Terry Nichols to live when so many of his victims are dead, Deutchman has found her synagogue a haven.

"The rabbis and the cantor and some of the congregants have been very supportive," she said.

None of the congregants, she said, "has said anything even if they didn't agree, and I appreciate that." □

JEWISH WORLD

French issue study of looting

A French government commission probing Jewish property confiscated during the Nazi occupation found that the property included businesses, bank accounts, stocks, buildings, artworks and jewels, as well as a \$280,000 fine the Nazis demanded from the French Jewish community.

But the commission said it still had to determine what had become of the property, including how much of it had been returned to the rightful heirs after the war and how much was in the hands of the state.

The investigators, who have been studying the issue for the past year, said it was still too early to judge the exact value of the looted possessions.

U.S. officials complain to Swiss

A group of American financial officials wrote a letter to the Swiss president complaining about his "egregious" recent remarks that most of the criticism of Switzerland for its dealings with the Nazis had come from New York.

The officials, representing state and city governments and led by New York City Comptroller Alan Hevesi, said the perceived intent of Flavio Cotti's remarks "borders on anti-Semitism."

French newspaper apologizes

A French Catholic newspaper apologized for anti-Semitic editorials it published a century ago when France was debating the case of Capt. Alfred Dreyfus.

The apology from the La Croix newspaper came on the 100th anniversary of the publication of "J'Accuse," French writer Emile Zola's defense of Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer wrongly convicted of spying for Germany.

Intermarriage rate studied

Australian Jews have an intermarriage rate of 14.1 percent, a rise of 1.1 percent during the past five years, according to an article published in an Australian social science journal.

The authors contrasted the rate with that found in the United States, which they put at more than 50 percent. They predicted that intermarriage would decrease in Australia with increased immigration from Eastern Europe and South Africa and the "re-kindling of the Jewish religion" for some of the immigrants.

ADL honors Vatican official

The Anti-Defamation League honored the President of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Jews for his work in promoting Jewish-Catholic relations.

Cardinal Edward Cassidy was presented with the ADL's Joseph Lichten Interfaith Award at a ceremony in Rome.

AJCommittee opens in Berlin to deepen German-Jewish ties

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — More than 50 years after the Holocaust, the American Jewish world is coming to Germany.

On Feb. 9, the American Jewish Committee will officially open its office in Berlin — the first German branch of a major American Jewish organization. The office will help facilitate Jewish-German relations, bring American and German Jews closer together and coordinate the AJCommittee's increased activities in Central and Eastern Europe.

More than 400 guests, including prominent representatives of the German political and academic establishments and Jewish leaders from other Central and Eastern European countries, have signed up to attend the opening festivities in Berlin.

They will be toasted by top-level government officials, including German President Roman Herzog and leaders of German Jewry. Germany's foreign minister, Klaus Kinkel, is slated to be the keynote speaker at a dinner the AJCommittee is planning to hold at Berlin's most prestigious new hotel to celebrate the opening of the office.

The move, which comes after 18 years of visits and exchanges between AJCommittee representatives and German officials, reflects a recognition by the organized American Jewish world that Jewish life here is undergoing a revival.

The steady immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union since the fall of communism has turned German Jewry into one of the fastest-growing Jewish communities in the world.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, fewer than 30,000 Jews lived in Germany. Today, there are nearly 70,000, and the population is expected to rise to more than 100,000 over the next two years.

After World War II, when Jewish life in Germany was relaunched by a small group of Holocaust survivors, mostly displaced from Eastern Europe, Jews around the world questioned the wisdom of such a step. Indeed, Jewish representatives of German Jewish organizations frequently complained of verbal attacks by Jews elsewhere for their decision to live in Germany.

Such attacks have not ended. Last year, during a brief state visit to Germany, Israeli President Ezer Weizman said Jews should no longer live in Germany.

The AJCommittee, however, has changed its tune.

Until a few years ago, the organization's delegations often came to Germany to meet with leading politicians without informing the local Jewish community. Attempts by American Jewish organizations to establish regular contact with German Jewish groups were often met with mistrust on both sides.

However, relations between American Jewish leaders and top officials of the Jewish community in Germany have been improving in recent years with the ascension of new leaders here.

The head of the German Jewish community, Ignatz Bubis, is a real estate developer with considerable political and diplomatic skills. He has close contacts to American Jewry and frequently lectures in the United States.

The new head of the Berlin Jewish community, 45-year-old Andreas Nachama, has settled numerous long-running internal disputes within the Berlin community in just six months in office.

"We have a role supporting the development and revival of Jewish communities in Germany," said Andrew Baker, director of European relations at the AJCommittee's office in Washington.

According to Baker, the new office will not only help boost the development of the country's Jewish community, but will play a role defining the next generation of relations between non-Jews and Jews in Germany, a relationship that he believes is still defined by guilt.

This is evident, he said, in discussions in Germany about the inclusion of the Holocaust in issues such as the 1991 Gulf War, and even the extreme fear of unemployment, which many fear could lead to a neo-Nazi political revival. □

U.S. Orthodox leaders urge adoption of conversion bill

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A delegation of some 75 American Orthodox leaders are lobbying Knesset members to support a controversial conversion bill that would codify into law the Orthodox establishment's control over conversions performed in the Jewish state.

At a news conference Monday, the delegation, which was spearheaded by the fervently Orthodox Agudath Israel of America, said it was impractical to think a compromise on conversion could be reached.

During a meeting with Knesset the following day, delegates representing the group Am Echad told members of the Likud Party caucus that compromises could only be reached in business matters, not in religious affairs.

The head of the delegation, Rabbi Moshe Sherer of Aguda, said it was inconceivable that an individual undergoing the conversion process within the Reform movement could be expected to follow halachah, or Jewish law.

"You can't expect a candidate to go to a Reform rabbi who will tell him to observe Shabbat and kashrut when the Reform rabbi himself doesn't observe kashrut," Sherer said at the news conference.

The visit comes as a committee appointed by the prime minister to craft a solution on the conversion issue that is acceptable to the Orthodox, Reform and Conservative movements approaches a Jan. 31 deadline to submit its recommendations for solving the problem.

Members of the committee, headed by Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, have encountered serious difficulties along the way.

Reform members have said the representative from the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate failed to cooperate with the efforts and warned that no compromise could be reached without a genuine effort by all sides.

The delegation also met with members of the Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party, whose Russian immigrant constituency could be seriously affected by the decision on the conversion issue.

Knesset member Roman Bronfman of Yisrael Ba'Aliyah said that if the Ne'eman Committee fails to come up with a compromise, his faction will work to "ensure that it gets another extension."

Yisrael Ba'Aliyah's support on the conversion issue is so crucial that some commentators have suggested that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to appoint the party's leader, Industry and Trade Minister Natan Sharansky, to take over the Foreign Ministry portfolio after the recent resignation of Geshet's David Levy.

Meanwhile, opposition leader Ehud Barak said his caucus would vote against the conversion bill if it is brought before the Knesset. The prime minister created the Ne'eman Committee after the Knesset took a first step in April toward passing the conversion legislation.

In a related development, Sephardi Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron verbally approved the recommendations of another committee dealing with the conversion in Israel of children adopted abroad.

The head of the committee, Rabbi Haim Druckman, a former Knesset member from the National Religious Party, said the committee had recommended that after the children undergo conversion, the families not be required to adopt a religiously observant lifestyle.

This requirement had prompted parents of some of the adopted infants to arrange for their conversions at the Conservative movement's Kibbutz Hannaton.

After the Interior Ministry refused to recognize the babies as Jewish, several families took their dilemma to Israel's High Court of Justice in 1995. A court decision is still pending. □

Israeli garbage dump threatens environment

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has a new set of environmental woes.

Environmental officials here warned this week of pending disaster at the Hiriya dump site in central Israel.

Experts said deep cracks in the mountain of rubbish had been discovered after recent rains, which sent garbage tumbling down its slopes.

An El Al pilot said in an Israel Radio interview that, given the dump's proximity to Ben-Gurion Airport, birds attracted to the dump could cause air disasters if sucked into plane engines.

For years, Israeli environmentalists have warned against impending catastrophe, pointing toward decades of unfettered growth.

They warn that air pollution in Israel's major cities is reaching dangerous new levels, landfills are overflowing, water is growing scarcer and open spaces are rapidly disappearing under asphalt and encroaching urbanization. They also note that virtually all of Israel's rivers are either partially or heavily polluted.

The pollution of Israel's rivers was highlighted last summer, when two Australian athletes, who fell with dozens of others from a collapsed bridge during Israel's Maccabiah Games, died after swallowing water from the polluted Yarkon River that runs through Tel Aviv. □

South African rabbis call for fast after tragic deaths

By Suzanne Belling

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — Rabbis in Johannesburg are calling on their congregants to observe a half-day fast and to give tzedakah, charity, on Monday in the wake of a recent spate of tragic Jewish deaths here.

The rabbis were expected to make their appeal at Friday evening services.

During the recent holiday season, there were two murder victims, one carjack victim and two suicides.

A woman and her two daughters were killed in a car accident. In 1997, there were eight Jewish murder victims, according to the Union of Orthodox Synagogues of South Africa.

A rising crime rate has been one of the main causes of Jewish emigration from South Africa in recent months. □