



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Albright set to mediate

President Clinton is on the verge of dispatching U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to broker a meeting between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

The meeting, to be held in an as-yet-undisclosed site in Europe, would follow up on an aggressive week of Middle East peacemaking in Washington.

### Arafat meets with Clinton

Yasser Arafat told reporters he was encouraged by his meeting with President Clinton, who confronted the Palestinian Authority chairman with a stark assessment of his failure to crack down on terrorism.

Arafat, who was slated to meet Clinton again Thursday night, also said the Palestinian Covenant had already been nullified to the satisfaction of Israel and the United States.

### Lewinsky attended L.A. temple

The former White House intern alleged to have had an affair with President Clinton is the daughter of a prominent Los Angeles Jewish physician.

Monica Lewinsky's father, Bernard, and Monica's mother, Marcia, joined Sinai Temple, an upscale West Los Angeles Conservative synagogue, in the mid-1970s, and Monica later attended its religious school. The Lewinsky family still belongs to the synagogue.

### Tobacco company cited

A U.S. lawmaker cited evidence that a major tobacco company employs specific marketing strategies to attract Jews, blacks and other ethnic groups.

A memo from the R.J. Reynolds company said in part that Jewish consumers would respond favorably to "situations [that] should be current and 'in' and be readily identified as 'Jewish.'"

Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) said the memo, which reflects "discriminatory marketing practices," should be referred to Congress.

### Arafat visit protested

Several Holocaust survivors, Jewish leaders and politicians criticized the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's decision to give Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat a VIP tour.

New York state Democratic Assemblyman Dov Hikind was among those who addressed a news conference in New York.

## Controversy erupts over Swiss WWII labor camps

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Talk to Jews from Poland, Germany, Yugoslavia or Hungary who somehow escaped the Nazi dragnets and made it to safety in Switzerland, and they will assert, usually with considerable emotion, some or all of the following statements:

- During World War II, Switzerland split up Jewish refugee families, putting the men into forced labor camps, where they underwent long hours of back-breaking work under primitive living conditions.

- The Swiss treated the refugees with decency and respect, and living conditions were no harsher than those endured by most of the Swiss population.

- The forced camps were surrounded by barbed wire and patrolled by armed guards.

- Many of the camps were actually former resort hotels and the refugees were free to leave on weekends and meet with their families in other parts of the country.

- The Swiss allowed refugees to attend universities and pursue their studies, often at no cost.

- Anti-Semitism was pervasive throughout the Swiss population, and Christian refugees were treated markedly better than Jewish ones.

- Switzerland was no more anti-Semitic at the time than most European countries — or the United States — and all refugees, Jewish and non-Jewish, were treated alike.

The latest furor about Switzerland's questionable role in World War II was triggered earlier this month by a British television documentary that offered a powerful indictment of Switzerland's treatment of Jewish refugees.

But what really caught the attention of the American and international media was a report by historian Alan Morris Schom, commissioned by the Simon Wiesenthal Center and released last week in Los Angeles.

The report, "The Unwanted Guests: Swiss Forced Labor Camps, 1940-1944," included damning charges of Swiss avarice, brutality and anti-Semitism.

Wire services, newspapers and television networks immediately picked up on the report and delivered it around the world, often with provocative headlines and graphics.

The new list of accusations hit Swiss officials like a blow to the belly.

They were already reeling from more than a year's worth of charges that Swiss banks had filled their vaults by appropriating accounts set up by Holocaust victims and by laundering Nazi gold.

But at least these transgressions dealt mainly with bankers and money.

The new report went further by attacking the fundamental image of the Swiss as a decent and humane people.

An official with the Swiss Embassy in Washington telephoned and spoke in a choked voice about a segment televised by CNN that dealt with the Wiesenthal Center report. The report opened with footage of Nazi concentration camps.

The implied comparison was obviously odious and even the harshest critics of Switzerland have rejected it.

No Jews were killed in Swiss camps, though there were some cases of medical negligence, and none were deliberately worked to death.

On the contrary, a number of Jewish veterans of Swiss camps have rallied to the defense of Switzerland, hailing the country as the savior of some 25,000 Jewish refugees — who survived the war together with Switzerland's 20,000 Jewish citizens.

At the same time, however, Switzerland turned back more than 30,000 Jewish refugees at the border.

Al Finci of Los Angeles crossed the Swiss border as a teen-ager with his family in

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Netanyahu returns home

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned to Israel following a series of talks in Washington with President Clinton and other senior U.S. officials.

Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh maintained that the Americans did not place any pressure on Israel regarding the further transfer of West Bank land to the Palestinians.

### Hamas hideout raided

Palestinian security forces raided a Hamas hideout in the West Bank town of Nablus.

The raid, which uncovered timing devices for bombs and a submachine gun, came as Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat was meeting with President Clinton in Washington.

### Former Yediot editor sentenced

A former editor of Israel's largest-circulation daily newspaper received a two-month suspended sentence for using illegal wiretaps as part of a circulation war.

A Tel Aviv court also ordered Moshe Vardi to pay a fine of about \$1,100 for "turning a blind eye" to private investigators' bugging the phones of Vardi's employees at Yediot Achronot.

Vardi's news coordinator, Ruth Ben Ari, was also convicted in connection with the wiretaps and was ordered to perform three months of community service and to pay a fine of about \$2,800.

### Israeli highway criticized

A group of 30 Knesset members signed a petition to halt the construction of a massive highway project through Israel.

The leaders of the initiative said the trans-Israel highway, slated to run from the Galilee to Beersheba, would be an ecological disaster as well as an unsuccessful answer to Israel's transportation needs.



## Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*  
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the spring of 1944. At all times, "we were treated courteously and with respect," he wrote in *The Los Angeles Times*, "and sent to a boarding school for me, a Swiss family for my 10-year old sister, and a vacant hotel, used to accommodate refugees, for my parents."

In an interview, Finci added, "I have no special love for the Swiss, they are a cold and often gruff people, but they saved my life. When my uncle got sick, he was well taken care of for free in a hospital, and when my grandfather died, the Swiss arranged for a burial in a Jewish cemetery."

Arthur Stern, a Holocaust survivor who spent much of the war in Switzerland, described parts of the Schom report as "a lot of garbage." Stern, who holds leadership positions in numerous Jewish organizations, said it violates Jewish tradition when false accusations are leveled for the sake of publicity.

The Swiss government did commit inexcusable acts, but "compared to Portugal, Spain and Sweden, and even the United States, which only admitted 50,000 Jews when 600,000 unused visas were available, Switzerland comes out very well," Stern said.

Despite such testimony, Schom and the writer of the British documentary stand by their reports and say they have witnesses to back up their charges.

Schom said his attempts to interview Swiss officials were rebuffed and that he has had little contact with people who were inmates in the Swiss camps.

Most of his research has been through secondary written sources, but he has spent more than a year studying recently declassified documents in British and French archives.

Simon Reeve, the British journalist who wrote the script for the British television documentary and a lengthy article for the current international edition of *Time* magazine, said in a telephone interview from London that he has interviewed 25 veterans of the Swiss camps, of whom only one "had a positive experience."

"I found that there was a broad policy of anti-Semitism in Switzerland before and during the war, and there is no doubt that Jewish refugees were exploited not just for Switzerland's survival, but to further the country's economy."

One of his witnesses was Manfred Alexander, who after escaping a German concentration camp, made it to Switzerland.

There, Alexander told *The New York Times*, "I was put in a prison with murderers. Then I was sent to camps where they put us into striped uniforms and we worked from daybreak to sundown in the fields. A guard beat people. Those who tried to escape they sent dogs after them."

Other former inmates cited examples of senseless cruelty or sheer greed.

Michael Jacobovitz of New York, then a 17-year old Orthodox Jew from Cologne, Germany, would not eat non-kosher food in his camp, and when he begged a guard for a second slice of bread, was threatened with forcible return to Germany.

How can one reconcile such contradictory experiences and testimonies?

One partial answer, say experts, is that as the fortunes of war turned against Hitler, Swiss policies and attitudes toward Jewish refugees apparently mellowed — so that later arrivals encountered better treatment than the initial waves of refugees.

Also, conditions in the more than 100 camps scattered across Switzerland differed drastically, according to the nature and disposition of the Swiss commandants in charge.

This view was offered by two of the foremost Swiss experts on the refugee camps, both of whom were cited in the British documentary.

Jacques Picard, research director for the Independent Commission of Experts now investigating Swiss refugee policy and other wartime issues, said commandants had great latitude in how to run the camps. Some opted for a humane way; others imposed militaristic and fascist methods.

The status of refugees also varied considerably, noted Guido Koller, a Swiss government historian.

Though legally all refugees were subject to internment, refugees with money or the right contacts were allowed to live with private Swiss families or even study at universities.

A balanced and authoritative evaluation of Switzerland's refugee policy and treatment is expected this summer, when the Commission of Experts, commonly known as the Bergier Commission, is slated to release its findings. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### New document against Papon

Evidence was presented at the trial of war crimes suspect Maurice Papon indicating that he had ordered the roundup of six hospitalized Jews.

The document bolstered the prosecution's claim that the former official of France's pro-Nazi Vichy government had shown unwarranted zeal in ordering the arrests of Jews.

Meanwhile, the defense presented a document showing that Papon tried to help at least one Jew.

### Roe vs. Wade remembered

The National Council of Jewish Women was one of many groups that marked the 25th anniversary of the historic Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision affirming a woman's right to an abortion.

The council restated its opposition to proposals to curb abortion funding and to enact other anti-choice restrictions.

### Swiss fund official resigns

The secretary-general of Switzerland's Holocaust Memorial Fund resigned.

Officials with the World Jewish Restitution Organization said in Zurich that Marco Sassoli resigned over a dispute concerning who would determine which survivors qualify to receive the funds.

### Athlete undergoes surgery

An Australian athlete who was injured in last July's bridge collapse at the Maccabiah Games in Israel underwent emergency brain surgery.

Colin Elterman, whose daughter Sasha has been gravely ill, said the surgery was performed after she "deteriorated badly" from a brain abscess two weeks ago. Her condition is now improved, he said.

### Jewish day school targeted

Vandals lobbed several Molotov cocktails at a Jewish day school in the southern Russian city of Nalchik.

The fire Sunday night caused no injuries but left the building severely damaged.

The area around Nalchik had previously had a relatively low level of anti-Semitism. Some 10,000 Jews left Nalchik for Israel and the United States in the past seven years. About 3,000 Jews still live there.

### Peres to visit Colombia

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres is slated to arrive Friday in Colombia, where the government has been embroiled in a civil conflict with Marxist guerrillas for more than three decades.

Peres is expected to share with government leaders his experiences in the Middle East to see how they may be applied to Colombia's turmoil.

## Report: French banks dumped Jewish-owned stocks during war

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — French banks systematically sold stocks belonging to Jewish customers during World War II, according to documents recently obtained by a French daily newspaper.

The 100 documents, obtained by the newspaper Liberation, reveal how the pro-Nazi Vichy regime ordered French banks to sell stocks belonging to Jews "without delay, nor market considerations."

The discovery of the documents, along with the release last week of a 100-page report detailing Vichy's systematic looting of Jewish property, provides evidence of widespread looting of French Jewish property during the war.

Henri Hajdenberg, president of CRIF, France's umbrella for secular Jewish organizations, said in an interview that the documents could provide new evidence in sorting out restitution problems.

After receiving the orders, the banks transmitted the instructions to official brokers, who zealously carried them out, often within 24 hours. They were sold under the process of Aryanization that the Vichy government put into place through a series of laws to "eliminate the Jewish influence on the national economy."

The documents from 1941, 1943 and 1944 — some are dated even after the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944 — bear the letterheads of some of France's most prominent banks, including two banks that Vichy considered to be under Jewish influence and, therefore, placed under different management.

The warehouse in the Normandy port of Le Havre that stored the documents was destroyed in a fire last August. Liberation did not say how it was able to recover the documents.

Hajdenberg said it is important to find out if the fire, which is currently being investigated, was the result of arson. If it was, he said, it could be linked to the 1996 blaze that destroyed the Paris headquarters of the bank Credit Lyonnais. An investigation into that fire is still under way.

Hajdenberg also said he wanted to know whether the archives were stored in the warehouse recently in order to hide them from investigators seeking to explore the extent of the plundering of Jewish property during the Nazi occupation of France.

The Liberation article came on the heels of the release of the report, which was created by a government-appointed commission charged with investigating the seizure of Jewish property.

The report, which was released Jan. 12, details Vichy's systematic looting of Jewish property, but stopped short of recommending compensation, saying it was too early to estimate the monetary value of the property seized. Hundreds of thousands of archives as well as files from government ministries have yet to be examined.

Hajdenberg accused the Culture, Finance and Foreign Affairs ministries of deliberately dragging their feet in opening their archives to the commission.

"Everyone says they want to help the commission make progress, but no one is making a move," he said.

The report details the 109 anti-Jewish measures passed by Vichy to make Jews more vulnerable, including banning them from many professions, and requiring them to report their whereabouts, register their assets and wear a yellow star.

"Vichy turned Jews into such outcasts that it was easy for the authorities to confiscate property without incurring protest from anyone," said the head of the commission, former Resistance fighter Jean Matteoli.

He said he had received over 100 letters from Jews seeking information about property that disappeared during the war.

The report proposed that some of the 2.2 tons of gold looted by the Nazis that make up France's part of the 5.5 tons in a New York vault could be used to compensate Jews whose families were ruined during the war.

It also studied inventories of the cash, jewelry and bonds seized from the 67,000 Jews who passed through the Drancy detention camp on their way to Auschwitz. □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****Arafat issues charter details, but will the Israelis buy them?***By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat has delivered a document on the explosive issue of the Palestinian Covenant that U.S. officials hope will remove a major stumbling block in the peace process.

But while the Clinton administration is putting a positive spin on Arafat's first detailed outline of how the Palestinians amended their covenant nearly two years ago, Israel is unlikely to share President Clinton's optimism.

The development comes as the administration is on the verge of dispatching U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to broker a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Arafat to follow up on an aggressive week of Middle East peacemaking.

During meetings with Arafat, Clinton continued his attempt to sell a new American peace plan that would revive the long-stalled peace talks.

As expected, Clinton talked tough on terrorism, supporting Israel's demand for increased vigilance against terrorists.

During an Oval Office meeting Thursday, Arafat handed Clinton a letter that for the first time detailed the specific articles of the covenant that the Palestinians say were annulled by a 1996 vote of the Palestine National Council.

Whether in fact the PNC's action in 1996 actually fulfilled the Palestinian commitment to amend its charter calling for the destruction of Israel has long been a matter of debate.

For his part, Arafat, in his letter to Clinton, restated the more general Palestinian position: "All of the provisions of the covenant which are inconsistent with the PLO commitment to recognize and live in peace side by side with Israel are no longer in effect."

But this time Arafat went further, spelling out by number which specific sections of articles and entire articles the PNC nullified.

Of the 33 articles of the covenant, only five remain intact, he said. According to the letter, 12 have been completely nullified and 16 have been changed. But whereas Arafat is contending that these changes will be evident in any future distribution of the covenant, the Israeli premier has made clear that he will only accept a formal vote by the PNC.

"We want that charter revised not in a letter to President Clinton," but in a "constitutional act where the official bodies of the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people meet and tear up that paper," Netanyahu told a Jewish gathering earlier this week, suggesting that he knew of Arafat's letter.

The Israeli demand for a new covenant was included a year ago in the Note for the Record that was attached to the Hebron Agreement.

As recently as Monday, top Netanyahu aide David Bar-Illan complained that the Palestinians had sent, upon Israeli request, a copy of the covenant to the Israelis unchanged from 1964, including the Hebrew spelling mistakes. Nonetheless, the United States hailed the letter as an important peacemaking gesture.

James Rubin, State Department spokesman, called the letter "an important step toward completing the process of revising the

charter." U.S. officials said they forwarded the letter to Israeli officials, who did not have an immediate comment.

After the first of two scheduled meetings with Clinton, Arafat told reporters, "As far as we're concerned, this issue has been put to rest."

In his meetings, meanwhile, Clinton detailed specific areas in which Arafat can improve his war against terrorism, U.S. officials said. Clinton told Arafat that he wants a "credible and significant" Israeli redeployment. But Clinton told Arafat that while any withdrawal will be less than the 30 percent Arafat has demanded, it will be more than the single-digit percentage that Netanyahu has proposed.

Clinton also laid out for Arafat the emerging U.S. plan for a phased further Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, contingent on specific Palestinian actions on combating terrorism.

According to senior Palestinian officials, Arafat told Clinton, "I am willing to take one step, two steps, three steps on security and the charter as long as the Palestinian goal of an independent state is intact."

After meeting with George Tenet, director of the CIA, and later with Albright, Arafat was scheduled to return to the White House.

Then in his only public appearance, Arafat was scheduled to speak at a reception hosted by the Center for Middle East Peace and Economic Cooperation.

By all accounts, he also was still planning a visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington some time before his scheduled departure Friday. □

**Swiss fund to distribute \$150 million to survivors***By Mitchell Danow*

NEW YORK (JTA) — The executive board of Switzerland's Holocaust Memorial Fund approved in principle the total allocation Jewish groups are seeking to distribute to survivors worldwide.

The board also approved at its meeting Wednesday some \$8 million for immediate payment to Hungarian survivors, according to a statement issued by the board.

Some 100,000 Jewish survivors around the world may receive distributions from the fund, the statement added.

The board gave its approval to distributions totaling more than \$150 million, according to the executive director of the World Jewish Congress, Elan Steinberg.

Steinberg added that distributions would begin to survivors in the United States in some three to four months.

Some \$2 million was transferred last week for distribution to Hungarian survivors, according to a source close to the fund.

The agreement in principle reached Wednesday came in addition to the \$11 million allocated last year by the fund.

The source gave a rough breakdown of how most of the funds would be distributed to survivors once the board gives its final approval: approximately \$59 million to survivors in Israel, roughly the same amount to survivors in Eastern Europe and about \$33 million to survivors living in the United States.

The fund was established last February by Switzerland's three largest banks to aid needy survivors worldwide. It has a board made up of Swiss, American Jewish and Israeli officials. □