



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Rabbinate puts off decision

Israel's Orthodox Chief Rabbinate postponed until next week a decision on a solution aimed at ending the crisis over conversions performed in the Jewish state.

The rabbinate said a written copy of the proposal outlined by the state-appointed Ne'eman Committee did not arrive until after Monday's meeting of the Chief Rabbinate Council — which was convenient timing, according to some observers, who said the council wanted another week to deliberate.

### Ne'eman plans Washington talks

Israeli Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman is reportedly planning to hold talks in Washington with members of the Clinton administration and Congress about phasing out America's \$1.2 billion in annual economic aid to Israel.

The plan, which would go into effect next year and take place over a 10-year period, would be part of a package to lower Israel's debt. Some of the aid could be redirected into the \$1.8 billion in annual U.S. military aid to Israel.

### Terror attack thwarted

Israeli security forces said they caught two Palestinians on their way to Jerusalem to carry out a terrorist attack.

The forces have been on high alert for an attack during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, which ends this week.

### Jubilee concert held

Music mostly overshadowed politics as a sellout crowd of 15,000 people gathered at a Philadelphia arena to celebrate Israel's 50th anniversary.

The largest jubilee event in America featured the first joint performance of the Israel Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

### Swiss panel postpones report

A panel of historians appointed by Switzerland postponed its initial report on the country's wartime financial dealings with the Nazis and its refugee policy, according to a spokesman for the group.

The Independent Commission of Experts, also known as the Bergier Commission, now plans to issue the report in late February or early March. The report was originally slated for last December.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Falwell's effort to influence U.S. policy unlikely to succeed

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Rev. Jerry Falwell is still trying to make his mark. But whether the once-powerful evangelical Christian leader will succeed in his latest effort to influence Middle East politics is far from certain.

Falwell has announced that he intends to mobilize 200,000 evangelical Christian ministers to lobby Congress in an effort to push the U.S. government not to pressure Israel to cede any more land to the Palestinians.

He made his plans public last week shortly after meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was in Washington for discussions with President Clinton and other senior officials about the Middle East peace process.

In a telephone interview, he outlined his plan. "We pledged to help him from our pulpits and our media ministries, our printed publications and in other ways, that we would do everything we could to mobilize those 70 million evangelicals into lobbying Congress," Falwell said.

But even taking into consideration the influence of groups like the Christian Coalition, some observers question how effective Falwell — or anyone — can be in getting the vast number of evangelical Christians to convert their biblically based love for Israel into political action.

Some, too, question the wisdom of Netanyahu cozying up to Falwell, who has been a vocal foe of Clinton.

Falwell and other evangelical leaders have long been vocal supporters on behalf of Israel's interests, from lobbying Congress against the sale of AWACS reconnaissance planes to Saudi Arabia more than a decade ago to speaking out on behalf of oppressed Soviet Jewry.

Most recently, the evangelical community, through the International Fellowship of Christians & Jews, has become the single largest philanthropic contributor to the Jewish state — through the United Jewish Appeal.

Many Jews have long been uncomfortable or ambivalent about this support.

"Falwell cannot take a stand in the internal political problems of Israel," said Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of interfaith affairs for the Anti-Defamation League.

"He doesn't live in Israel. Though we appreciate very much his support for Israel, that doesn't give him the right to get involved in internal matters."

Others question the wisdom of Israel's leader publicly courting support from a community whose domestic political agenda veers sharply from the views of the organized American Jewish community on matters ranging from abortion to school prayer.

Indeed Falwell's announced intention of working with the Southern Baptist Convention on his initiative angered many. In June 1996, the Southern Baptists passed a resolution stating that their members should single out Jews for evangelization and conversion to belief in Jesus.

The 15.6 million-member denomination's vote to target Jews for evangelism met with strong opposition from the Jewish community.

Some parts of the Christian community said they were deeply offended by the stand as well.

In any event, the Falwell-Southern Baptist Convention alliance on this issue already seems to be showing signs of trouble.

Though the Rev. Morris Chapman, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's executive committee, participated in last week's meeting with Netanyahu, Chapman

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Arafat planning summit

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat said he is planning to organize an Arab summit to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock.

Observers question whether he will succeed in convening all the leaders of the 21-member Arab League because of divisions within the Arab world.

### World Bank to back Gaza project

The World Bank approved a \$10 million loan for the construction of an industrial park in the Gaza Strip, according to news reports.

Israeli, Palestinian and foreign companies are expected to open factories in the park, which is expected to be completed by March.

### Kach seeks reinstatement

A militantly anti-Arab group in Israel petitioned the country's Supreme Court to reinstate its legal status.

Kach, which was founded by U.S.-born Rabbi Meir Kahane, was outlawed after Dr. Baruch Goldstein killed 29 Palestinians worshipping at Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs in February 1994.

### Bank of Israel lowers rate

The Bank of Israel lowered its key lending rate for February by 0.5 percent — to 12.9 percent. The move was the first change in the rate since last August. The bank attributed the cut to falling inflation.

### Israel, Canada discuss asylum

Israel is reportedly asking Canada to grant political asylum to a Syrian and an Iranian held in an Israeli jail.

Israel's High Court of Justice heard a petition from the two, who are seeking their release.

The men, who infiltrated into Israel several years ago, said they feared for their lives if sent back to their home countries.



## Daily News Bulletin

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and his associates have since said they will not be communicating with their constituents about the matter. Chapman issued a terse statement last week, saying, "It is well known that Southern Baptists individually form their own assessments of world affairs."

For his part, William Merrell, director of Convention relations, said in a phone interview, "We do not intend an initiative urging pastors to speak about Israel from the pulpit or to lobby Congress. They will make their own minds up about that."

"Dr. Chapman went to the meeting as an interested party and friend of Israel," but that is all. Falwell said he plans to contact each of those 200,000 evangelical pastors himself through direct mail, electronic mail and fax.

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, founder of the International Fellowship, which in 1997 raised \$5.5 million for the United Jewish Appeal from over 90,000 evangelical Christians, strongly opposes Falwell's initiative and doubts that such a strategy will work. "Most evangelicals are apolitical, contrary to public perception, and they do not like being used in the political strategies of others," he said.

"Translating evangelical love for Israel into concrete political action is a step that still hasn't been made. Translating it into action for a particular policy or point of view is one step further."

Falwell agrees that mobilizing his followers will be tough, but believes it can happen with the involvement of individual pastors.

"People respond to their pastors as opposed to appeals from politicians and the press. When the pastor says, 'Get involved with something,' they do it."

"We want them to go to Israel and see the situation, write letters to the editor and lobby their representatives in Congress."

"Our job is to do everything we can to alert and awaken the rank-and-file evangelical Christian," who doesn't know how vulnerable Israel is to the Arab states around it, he said.

By his own count Falwell has visited Israel 27 times since the late 1960s, and is planning to take the freshman class of his Liberty University, some 3,000 students, to the Holy Land next January. Israel plays a special role in fundamentalist Christian theology. Evangelicals quote Chapter 12 of the Book of Genesis, in which God tells Abraham that God will "bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you."

"From the Pharaohs to Hitlers to Stalins and the Soviet Union, history should tell us something about the validity of that covenant," Falwell said in the telephone interview. On more pragmatic grounds, he said, American support for Netanyahu should be unwavering because "it's in America's best interests to support Israel because Israel is our only true friend."

"If it were not for our financial support for Israel, we'd need a military presence there at much greater cost to protect our interests," he said.

Despite the Jewish ambivalence about Falwell and other evangelical Christians, Israeli prime ministers have often welcomed them warmly. Falwell's biography boasts of his having met with premiers Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Netanyahu. Begin awarded him the Jabotinsky Centennial Medal for Friendship to Israel in 1980.

"Under Likud, evangelicals get a much warmer welcome from Israeli governments than they have under Labor," said Klenicki. "It's almost a natural partnership." □

## Israel trying to deport alleged Russian mobster

MOSCOW (JTA) — Israeli officials are trying to revoke the citizenship of as many as 30 alleged Russian mafia chiefs currently living in the Jewish state, according to reports in the Russian media.

Israel announced last week that it might soon deport one of the alleged mobsters, Anton Malevsky, who reportedly heads one of Moscow's most notorious organized crime groups.

Malevsky, 31, settled in Israel in 1994 after leaving Russia, reportedly because he feared that rival gangs would assassinate him.

He received an Israeli passport the same year. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Dutch archives destroyed

The Dutch Ministry of Finance deliberately destroyed hundreds of archives detailing the wartime liquidation of Jewish companies by Nazi-appointed administrators, according to a report in a Dutch daily newspaper.

The archives, which contained important information for those with claims resulting from such liquidations, were destroyed in 1991 — a year before unclaimed moneys were legally transferred to the Dutch state, the report said.

A Ministry of Finance spokesman said the archives were destroyed "in accordance with the regulations applying at the time. The destruction of archives concerning World War II was banned in 1997."

These archives should have been kept at least until 1992, when new legislation transferred unclaimed money to the state, said a Dutch lawyer.

### Germans convicted in Scud case

A German court sentenced two businessmen for illegally exporting Scud missile parts to Iraq in the late 1980s.

Gerhard Paul was sentenced to 38 months in jail, and his colleague, Hans Georg Friedrich, received a two-year suspended sentence. Friedrich must also pay a \$15,500 fine to the city of Darmstadt's chapter of the Society for Christian-Jewish relations.

Judge Rainer Buss said the two men continued the exports despite a growing threat to Israel from the rockets. He said they also ignored the negative impact of their sales on Germany's relations with Israel.

Israelis, forced to spend time in bomb shelters during the 1991 Gulf War because of Iraqi shelling, were outraged by reports that German companies aided Iraq's military program.

"Even today, this continues to play a role in the sensitive German-Israeli relationship," said Buss.

Both Paul and Friedrich were convicted of numerous violations of export regulations on military hardware to countries in sensitive political locations.

### New right-wing party formed

Leaders of a new right-wing party said recent reports of neo-Nazi incidents in the German army are exaggerated.

The leaders of the party, Union of Free Citizens — Freedom Offensive, accused German Defense Minister Volker Ruehe of overreacting to the incidents, which include producing videos with anti-Semitic and racist content and distributing neo-Nazi literature.

The new party, which formed over the weekend when two existing parties merged, opposes further European integration. It advocates nationalism, tax cuts, greater restrictions on foreigners and abolishment of the right to political asylum.

## European peace initiative prompts dispute with Israel

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A squabble has erupted between Israel and the European Union.

Senior Israeli officials in Europe are reacting angrily to increasingly strident demands by the E.U. for a place alongside the United States at the high table of Middle East peace diplomacy.

Europe has repeatedly sought to be a part of the peace process, but the latest E.U. bid took the form of a recent initiative by European Commissioner Manuel Marin, which, replete with veiled threats and warnings, is demanding that the 15-nation European Union receive a larger, more active role in recognition of its financial assistance to the peace process.

The initiative, approved by the European Commission, which serves as the E.U.'s highest decision-making body, seeks to translate Europe's economic aid into political clout.

It also links future economic cooperation with Israel to Israeli acceptance of enhanced European involvement in the diplomatic process.

Israel knows it cannot simply ignore the demands of the European Union, which is its largest single trading partner, accounting for about one-third of Israel's total foreign trade.

The Marin initiative complains that the substantial economic assistance to the Palestinians by the European Union has been "contaminated" — a frequently used word — by Israeli measures that have stunted Palestinian development.

Without referring to widespread corruption and cronyism within the Palestinian Authority or Israel's own economic assistance to the Palestinians, the 23-page document lays the blame for Palestinian economic misfortune exclusively on measures that have been taken by Israel, particularly the closures it imposes on the self-rule areas after each terror attack.

The European Union has been the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority, but the E.U. document speaks of "international donor fatigue" brought on by a lack of progress and warns that "regional cooperation and integration cannot make headway unless there is real progress toward a solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict."

It says the European Commission, which is responsible for allocating E.U. aid, would like to extend the economic assistance program to the Palestinians.

But the document goes on to state that while the commission can make proposals to improve the situation, "real advancement will only be possible if a number of conditions are met."

Heading the list of demands is an end to the closures, which would allow the Palestinians "to exercise their right to economic development," and unfettered trade access for the Palestinians to foreign markets, including Israel.

And the document warns that the joint Israeli-E.U. dialogue, which is designed to overcome trade obstacles, "would have to be re-evaluated" in the absence of "tangible results."

One Israeli source in Europe criticized the European Union demand that Israel should end its closures as a security measure for the sake of developing the Palestinian economy.

"No external body can tell a sovereign government to knowingly endanger its citizens," said the source.

The source also contemptuously dismissed expressions of European concern for Israel's security.

"Its proposal to assist on security matters is nonsense."

A statement by the Israeli Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem was more diplomatic in rejecting Europe's demand for a greater role in bilateral talks.

The ministry insisted that "the existing frameworks are adequate to meet the current needs."

And while it encouraged Europe to continue its efforts to strengthen the Palestinian economy, it said inadequate reference was made to the efforts Israel has invested in improving the Palestinian economy. □

## NEWS ANALYSIS

## Divine act or coincidence? Israelis ponder sex scandal

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — If President Clinton's problems were in the hands of Israeli public opinion, he wouldn't have a problem at all.

The outpouring of press coverage about Clinton's alleged affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky has reached the news-addicted shores of Israel, where it has provoked widespread sympathy for the beleaguered American president.

Scientific polls are not yet available, but random sampling carried out by the news media has found a widespread feeling here that Clinton is being persecuted by his political foes, hounded by the press and harassed by a string of vindictive former lovers — all for doing what many men do, and what many more dream of doing.

After all, say many of those asked, there was no rape involved, no seduction, no sexual harassment.

And even if what he is alleged to have done is morally reprehensible, they add, the test is how he runs the country and foreign affairs, not how he handles his sex drive.

In a reflection of sentiments here, billboards appeared across Israel this week with the message, "We Support You, Friend" — reminiscent of the phrase "Goodbye, Friend," that Clinton used in his 1995 eulogy at the funeral of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Inevitably, political pundits are comparing Clinton's woes with a similar problem encountered by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu's leadership of the Likud Party was nearly derailed soon after it began in 1993, when he chose to go live on prime-time television to tell a bemused Israeli public that he had been having an adulterous affair. The admission of philandering apparently did him little harm — except with his wife, Sara, who was reportedly close to walking out.

During his premiership, Netanyahu has repeatedly been embarrassed by media accounts unflattering to his wife and to their relationship.

But he weathers these attacks with aplomb, indeed with a measure of pained dignity.

And, as far as an eagle-eyed press corps is aware, Netanyahu — perhaps unlike Clinton — has stopped sowing his wild oats now that he has attained the pinnacle of power.

There are persistent rumors that surface in the press here, despite repeated denials, that after his televised admission of adultery Netanyahu and his wife drew up a binding contract regulating his future behavior in their marriage.

Some link this to their insistence that she — and often their two children — accompany him on his official visits abroad.

On the more serious policy level, the atmosphere in government circles, in the immediate aftermath of Netanyahu's difficult visit to Washington last week, is one of discernible relief.

Instead of a period of ongoing and intense tension in the U.S.-Israeli relationship, many officials foresee a period in which the top policy-makers in Washington are preoccupied with the fight for the president's survival.

But a counter-theory — that domestic straits make for foreign policy assertiveness and even adventurism — is also current here.

Veteran Israeli officials recall the Nixon administration's vigorous pursuit of diplomatic openings in the period after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when President Nixon was up to his neck in the Watergate affair.

And while that policy was conducted by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the president, despite his sagging political fortunes or perhaps because of them, was intimately involved.

Nixon toured the Middle East early in 1974 in an effort to immerse himself in the statesmanship side of his job, which he excelled at and enjoyed.

Conceivably, if there is a protracted period in which a wounded president fights for survival, there could also ensue a period of energetic foreign policy initiatives, conducted with the president's personal involvement.

The Israeli-Arab conflict is a natural arena for a president looking to be presidential.

This is not, of course, good news for those on the Israeli right who are apprehensive about American pressure on Netanyahu to provide concessions to the Palestinians. Among them are some who openly have hailed "Monicagate" as a veritable miracle — Divine intervention along the lines of the Purim story.

"She's a latter-day Queen Esther," one Orthodox observer said of Lewinsky, referring to the biblical account of a beautiful young Jewess who captured the heart of Persian King Ahasuerus and was able to avert the wicked vizier Haman's plot to destroy the Jewish people.

Indeed, the timing of the crisis — Netanyahu was alone with Clinton in the family quarters of the White House when the first editions of the Jan. 21 Washington Post hit the streets with the report — has not been lost in the Arab world.

The fact that the affair exploded in Washington during the Netanyahu visit, and just as the Clinton administration was trying to press Israel to move forward in the stalled peace process, left some Arab politicians, columnists and the average person on the street in the Arab world convinced that a Zionist conspiracy was behind the sex scandal.

"It is not a joke," Lebanese Premier Rafik al-Hariri told his Parliament during the annual budget debate. "The Zionist lobby is twisting the arm of the president of the greatest country in the world."

Arab analysts differed only on whether Israel's Mossad was behind the conspiracy or whether it was the responsibility of the American Jewish lobby.

The popular Al-Akhbar daily in Egypt said American Jews were trying to preoccupy Clinton with anything but the peace process. Similar comments were made by Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, and by the press in the Persian Gulf, Syria and the Palestinian self-rule areas. The Lebanese newspaper A-Nahar opined last week that because of the Lewinsky affair, the peace process had become "uninteresting."

Zionist plots and immoral sex have long been a popular combination in the Arab media. The Egyptian and Palestinian press reported extensively last year about Israeli schemes to spread the AIDS epidemic in the Arab world.

And there were rumors last year in the Gaza Strip that Israel had laced chewing gum with impotence-inducing chemicals and aphrodisiacs. □

(JTA correspondent Gil Sedan in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)