



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Albright to visit Mideast

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is scheduled to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat separately during a visit to the Middle East in the coming days.

Much of her attention during the trip, however, is expected to focus on the escalating crisis with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Orthodox leaders reject proposal

The leaders of Israel's fervently Orthodox Shas, Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah movs issued a joint edict rejecting the compromise proposed by the Ne'eman Committee for resolving the crisis on conversions performed in the Jewish state.

The edict termed the Conservative and Reform movements "destroyers of religion trying to get their claws into the Holy Land." [Page 1]

Butler meets Jewish leaders

Iraq possesses enough biological weapons to "blow away Tel Aviv," the head of the U.N. weapons inspection team was quoted as telling The New York Times.

But Richard Butler was more cautious in subsequent remarks to told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, telling them an attack on Tel Aviv "could be the case."

House passes survivor aid bill

The U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation authorizing \$25 million to Holocaust survivor groups.

The action fulfills a pledge made by the Clinton administration in December to contribute that amount to a new international fund to benefit survivors.

The legislation, known as the Holocaust Victims Redress Act, also attempts to make good on a postwar U.S. pledge to compensate survivors for lost assets.

The bill, passed by the Senate last year, now awaits President Clinton's signature.

Lewinsky lawyer on Israel

Former White House intern Monica Lewinsky is not interested in bringing down President Clinton, in part because she believes he is good for Israel, her lawyer told an Israeli newspaper.

William Ginsburg told Yediot Ahronot that as Jews, both he and Lewinsky admire Clinton. [Page 3]

NEWS ANALYSIS

No end to conversion crisis as two competing plans surface

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

New York (JTA) — They set out to save the unity of the Jewish people — but only created more confusion.

Architects of two proposals intended to defuse the long-simmering crisis over conversion to Judaism in Israel this week created more chaos than clarity.

Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews continued to fight over the issues that go to the heart of the legitimacy of Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel.

The developments will likely do little to bridge the deep rift between Israel and American Jews, the overwhelming majority of whom support the liberal movements' push for recognition in Israel. And neither proposal — one that would find a religious way to accept non-Orthodox converts, another that would grant more limited, civil recognition — got a green light from Israel's Orthodox religious establishment.

The real tests could come next month, when petitions by the Reform and Conservative movements to have their converts registered as Jewish by the government are scheduled to come before Israel's Supreme Court.

Parties to two, mutually exclusive proposals say they hope their recommendations will obviate the need to continue the lawsuits. They also hope that they would avert any move by the Knesset to pass legislation that would close the doors on legal recognition of Reform and Conservative converts.

After seven months of complex and intensive negotiations, a committee of Israeli representatives of the three major streams developed a compromise plan that was presented to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday.

The proposal by the committee would have the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements jointly prepare potential converts. The formal conversion would be conducted by Orthodox religious courts. But the success of the proposal depended on a nod from Israel's Chief Rabbinate, which has sole control over conversions in Israel.

But even before there was any word from the chief rabbis, an alternative plan was announced with great fanfare in Jerusalem on Sunday.

That plan — developed secretly by representatives of Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, the liberal movements and Avraham Burg, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel — is a technical solution limiting recognition of non-Orthodox converts to the civil realm. The plan's creators say that it was developed as "a safety net" in case the Ne'eman Committee's proposal failed.

The purely technical solution would circumvent the need — or possibility of — a more comprehensive approach to resolving other issues related to the recognition of non-Orthodox movements in Israel, said those involved with the process.

Some say it could also be an easier solution for Israel's Orthodox authorities to accept because it does not extend any religious recognition of Reform and Conservative Judaism. But Ya'acov Ne'eman, Israel's finance minister and head of the committee that reached an earlier compromise, denounced the Burg-backed proposal and said it has undermined his committee's work.

For their part, even the creators of the technical proposal are uncertain about how it could be implemented.

"We have to give it a couple of days to see what will happen," Burg said in a conference call from Jerusalem on Tuesday with Jewish journalists.

It falls far short of what some said only weeks ago they had hoped to accomplish through the Ne'eman negotiations, but the Burg proposal is being welcomed as "a victory" by Reform and Conservative leaders because for the first time it would permit non-Orthodox conversions to be recognized by the State of Israel. "This gets the state

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel offers Dakar reward

Israel's Defense Ministry is offering a reward to anyone who can provide information to help locate the Dakar submarine, which was lost at sea in 1968.

The decision to offer the reward was made in conjunction with the families of the 69 crew members who were on board the submarine when it disappeared during its maiden voyage from Britain to Israel. A memorial ceremony was held Tuesday for the lost crew members at Jerusalem's Mount Herzl military cemetery. Searches for the submarine in recent years failed to turn up information regarding its position when it was lost.

New searches are slated to begin in a few weeks.

Consortium to build highway

An international consortium including Israeli, American, Canadian and French firms has won a bid to build Israel's first electronic toll road.

The consortium will build the first 55-mile portion of the Cross-Israel Highway, which will eventually reach from Hadera in northern Israel to Gedera in the south.

Israel has trade surplus with U.S.

Israel's trade surplus with the United States showed a dramatic gain, reaching \$1.8 billion for 1997, according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics.

The surplus stood at only \$400 million the previous year.

Bank governor seeks spending

The governor of the Bank of Israel said the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should spend more on infrastructure projects, particularly transportation, in order to combat the country's growing unemployment.

Jacob Frenkel also called for job training programs to combat unemployment, which reached 8.1 percent for the third quarter of 1997.

out of the discrimination business on conversions, which is a step forward," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists of America.

Proponents also say it would provide a legal precedent, which could then be used in court to try and demand the same government neutrality on marriage and other matters of personal status, which are now the sole province of the Orthodox rabbinate, said a source involved in the discussions.

The proposal would require the national identity cards carried by all Israelis to indicate whether someone is a convert or born Jewish. It would change the religion category to the letter "yud," from the current "yehudi," for Jew, and add two numbers indicating one's year of birth or date of conversion. But Israel's Population Registry would keep the certificates of conversion on file, enabling the Orthodox authorities to deny marriage between a non-Orthodox convert and someone born Jewish.

For now, there seem to be few people who believe that the Ne'eman Committee's proposal to solve the conversion crisis in Israel may still be viable — but Ne'eman is chief among them. Ne'eman believes that "it is inconceivable that the chief rabbis would not agree" to his group's compromise solution since, he said, it was a "break-through" that the Reform and Conservative movements were agreeing that only Orthodox rabbis could perform conversions.

"If the Orthodox rabbis do not agree to it, it would be a disaster," Ne'eman said in a phone interview from Florida, where he had just addressed an Israel Bonds event.

He denounced the Burg alternative as "unconstitutional" and "against Jewish law" because it would distinguish converts from those born Jewish.

Rabbi Uri Regev, the Reform movement's representative in the negotiations for both proposals, responded to the criticism, saying that he had hoped for a technical solution all along, "but Ne'eman was locked into his 'ultimate solution' concept and wouldn't hear of it."

Still, questions were raised about why the same Reform and Conservative movement representatives involved in the committee's negotiations would seem to undercut its feasibility by developing another approach just as the process was drawing to a close.

Leaders of the Reform and Conservative movement said they believed all along that Israel's chief rabbis would not approve the Ne'eman Committee's more comprehensive proposal. The separate track seemed to provide a more realistic solution, they said.

Every current sign indicates that they were right about ultimate rejection of the Ne'eman proposal.

The politically powerful fervently Orthodox parties in Israel — Shas, Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah — issued a joint edict Tuesday rejecting the Ne'eman Committee's approach. The statement termed the Conservative and Reform movements "destroyers of religion trying to get their claws into the Holy Land."

For his part, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau said he needs several weeks to consider the recommended solution put forward by the Ne'eman Committee.

Lau's decision was interpreted by Reform leaders as "an emphatic rejection by the chief rabbi and other rabbinic leaders," Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said during a news conference on the issue Monday. But representatives of the fervently Orthodox Agudath Israel of America said they were not at all certain that the Burg proposal would fly either.

Rabbi Avi Shafran, a spokesman for Agudah, said if the Burg proposal seems to confer legitimacy on the Reform and Conservative movements, "there will be great opposition to it" among the same people opposed to the Ne'eman Committee proposal.

Despite their last-minute retreat from the Ne'eman Committee proposal, leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements say the committee process was worthwhile.

"The Israeli media have been constantly explaining what is Conservative and Reform Judaism to Israelis. The public has come to better understand what we're all about," Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, said at a news conference Monday.

"That's a tremendous gain," he said.

Meanwhile, officials of the central American Jewish fund-raising establishment hope that one way or the other, the issue will be resolved soon.

Richard Wexler, national chairman of the United Jewish Appeal, welcomed both proposals and said both "can only help our communities and our campaign." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Germany remembers Auschwitz

Germany commemorated the 53rd anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz with readings, exhibits and programs.

Yehuda Bauer, the director of the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, addressed the German Parliament to mark the anniversary of the death camp's liberation. The number of events on Jan. 27 have proliferated since 1994, when German President Roman Herzog proclaimed the day a national day of commemoration.

The events come as German officials are expected to continue negotiations with representatives of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany about relaxing eligibility requirements for Holocaust survivors' pensions.

Priebke appeal begins

The appeals trial of former Nazi SS Capt. Erich Priebke opened in a Rome military court.

Priebke, 84, was convicted last summer of taking part in the March 1944 massacre of 335 Italians — about 75 of them Jews — at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome.

He has only two months left to serve, but is appealing the verdict in an attempt to clear his name. Prosecutors are also appealing in an effort to get a stiffer sentence imposed on him.

Germany names fund reps

Germany announced its representatives who will jointly administer a \$93.4 million German-Czech fund aimed at helping Holocaust victims in the Czech Republic.

The announcement meant that the fund, which will support communal projects, could begin its work after a year's delay.

Painting may have been looted

A cubist painting by Georges Braque hanging in the Pompidou Center in Paris may have been stolen by the Nazis from a prominent Jewish art collector, according to a French newspaper.

The daily *Le Monde* said "The Guitar Player" and other important artworks seized by the Nazis had belonged to Alphonse Kann, who fled to London during the war and died in 1948.

Former UJA official dies

A former director general of the United Jewish Appeal and founder of its Israel office has died. Chaim Vinitsky, who many called "Mr. Israel," died earlier this month in Israel.

Vinitsky worked for the UJA for more than 25 years before working with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Media puts full-court press on Monica Lewinsky's shul

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Sinai Temple is not adverse to publicity, but the Conservative synagogue in West Los Angeles would just as soon do without the onslaught of media inquiries that have kept its telephones ringing off the hook.

The full-court press on the temple was applied by members of a media desperate for any details even remotely connected to the White House sex scandal after word leaked out that the family of Monica Lewinsky, 24, belonged to the synagogue, located in an upscale part of town.

And while the involvement of the Lewinsky family in the Jewish community is apparently limited, Lewinsky's lawyer referred repeatedly to Jewish issues and Israel in an interview with an Israeli daily, even linking the scandal and the future of the Clinton presidency with Israeli-American relations.

Lewinsky, a former White House intern, is at the center of the furor that has become the No. 1 media topic worldwide.

According to the interview her lawyer, William Ginsburg, granted the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Achronot*, Monica's paternal grandfather left Germany in the 1930s and immigrated to England.

Her father, Dr. Bernard Lewinsky, and her mother, Marcia, joined Sinai Temple in 1976, and Monica and her younger brother, Michael, attended the temple's religious school.

Bernard Lewinsky, a cancer specialist, divorced his wife, a book author and freelance journalist, about 10 years ago and has remarried, all along keeping his Sinai Temple membership current.

He is apparently not involved in temple activities or in the Jewish community in general, although Ginsburg claimed that Bernard Lewinsky recites the Shema every morning.

There is no evidence that Lewinsky participated in Jewish student activities at either of the two colleges she attended, Santa Monica College in California or Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Ore. — from which she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology in 1995.

Ginsburg stressed in the interview with *Yediot Achronot* that Lewinsky is prepared to testify about her relationship with the president in exchange for immunity, but he added that both he and Lewinsky want to keep Clinton in the presidency, in part because of their support for his policies vis-a-vis Israel.

"We are both Clinton fans and respect his positions and his policies regarding Israel," he said.

"I don't want the president to step down," he added. "Who knows who will follow Clinton and how he will relate to Israel?"

When asked if Lewinsky would flee to Israel, which is what Maryland teen-ager Samuel Sheinbein did last year after allegedly committing murder, Ginsburg replied, "It would not be good for Monica's image. She has to finish her part in the incident. After it's all over, if Monica wants to go, that could be a great possibility. I'm sure she would be very at ease in Israel."

Lewinsky grew up in an affluent family that lived in a \$1.6 million home and she attended Beverly Hills High School, fictionally portrayed on the TV sitcom "Beverly Hills 90210."

An insight into the family's lifestyle is provided in court records of the parents' divorce proceedings, unearthed by the newspaper the *Santa Monica Outlook*.

"I and the children have never had to worry about the cost of anything that was reasonably desired," Marcia Lewinsky testified.

She discussed how the family traveled first class, spent \$20,000 a year on vacations, ate at the finest restaurants and housed a new Cadillac and a new Mercedes-Benz in its garage. In addition, she said, "We have always provided the children with extensive extracurricular lessons and tutoring to satisfy any desires that either they or we may have." □

Israeli finance minister moves to phase out U.S. economic aid

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For years, Israel has talked about ending its dependence on American foreign aid.

Now the Jewish state is doing something about it.

Israeli Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman came to Capitol Hill and the White House this week to respond to Republican congressional proposals aimed at phasing out \$1.2 billion in annual economic aid from the United States.

Israel traditionally receives an additional \$1.8 billion in U.S. military assistance.

The Israeli move ends the longtime debate over whether Israel should hold out for the aid as long as possible or move proactively to help shape a new aid package. Successive Israeli governments have pledged to end the aid, but have said the time is not ripe.

News of the development caught most Jewish officials by surprise. U.S. aid to Israel has long been a top legislative priority in the Jewish community.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged in a 1996 speech to a joint meeting of Congress to begin phasing out Israel's U.S. aid before the end of his scheduled four-year term.

Eager to cut the foreign aid budget, many Republicans hailed Netanyahu's proposal. Some lawmakers joked during the speech that they should ask Netanyahu for the pledge in writing.

But Netanyahu later backed away from the promise, telling reporters that the cut would depend on Israel's economic situation and could take two terms in office.

But now, according to Israeli, congressional and Jewish sources, Netanyahu's finance minister has brought a plan that could begin cuts in aid in fiscal year 2000.

Since 1993, at least, the Israelis have talked openly about the need to cut aid. When Israel's former ambassador to the United States, Zalman Shoval, left Washington that year, he sensed a growing antipathy toward foreign aid.

Israel has long been the largest recipient of U.S. aid, with Egypt second at \$2.1 billion. This year's total foreign aid allocation was \$13 billion.

Shoval said at the time that Israel would be well advised to begin weaning itself off the economic aid, and to solidify its grip on the military assistance.

Unless something is done, "we could face a situation where we shall be faced with a unilateral decision on the part of the United States to cut foreign aid along lines that would be less convenient for us and also politically more difficult for our friends in Congress to resist," Shoval said in an interview with the Forward newspaper.

While more details were likely to emerge after Ne'eman met with members of Congress and Clinton administration officials this week, the plan appears to follow an outline originally proposed over the last few years by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.).

Callahan discussed the ideas with Ne'eman last year.

Of the \$1.2 billion in cash Israel receives each year, about \$1 billion is returned to pay loans dating back to the 1960s and 1970s.

Under the Ne'eman plan, Israel would use the extra \$200 million to pay off the loan's principal.

As the loan payments and outstanding balance shrink below

\$1.2 billion, the United States would phase out the economic assistance together.

At the same time, the United States would increase military funding for specific programs through the defense budget. These would likely include the Arrow anti-missile missile, the Nautilus laser project and other Israeli and joint U.S.-Israeli projects.

At the end of the process, which as proposed would take 10 years, the United States would provide Israel annually with about \$2.5 billion in military aid in place of the combined \$3 billion in economic and military assistance, sources said.

The de facto guarantee of continued military aid would allow Israel to plan its long-range defensive strategy, U.S. officials said.

Egypt, with a \$2.1 billion aid package that has been linked to Israel's since the signing of the Camp David accords, faces similar cuts, congressional sources said. The move comes only months after Israel agreed for the second year to divert \$50 million of its economic aid package to Jordan. Israel's contribution to Jordan's aid could rise to \$100 million next year.

Officials at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, welcomed Ne'eman's initiative, while emphasizing that this is an Israeli proposal.

"This will be well received by Congress," predicted an AIPAC official, who added that Israel has always "been sensitive to U.S. economic constraints."

AIPAC's primary responsibility is to lobby for Israel's aid package.

Many Jewish officials expressed pride that Israel is in a position to talk about ending the economic assistance that has long been vital for the Jewish state's economic success.

"It's a marvelous thing to see Israel say, 'We are a healthy, economically secure country,'" said Reva Price, Washington representative of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

Others used the occasion to reflect on the role that the aid played in Israel's success.

"This aid was one of the most generous and far-sighted decisions ever made by one nation to help another," said Rabbi David Saperstein, executive director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism.

Saperstein, who has lobbied for Israel's aid for decades, said, "This will not have a major impact on the way pro-Israel advocacy is done in America. There's still plenty to work for." □

Spy's isolation may change

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The head of security in Israel's defense establishment has withdrawn his objection to removing convicted nuclear spy Mordechai Vanunu from solitary confinement, Israel Television reported.

Vanunu has served 12 years of an 18-year sentence he was given for disclosing Israel's nuclear weapons capabilities to the Times of London. Vanunu, a technician employed at Israel's nuclear facility at Dimona, was lured from London to Rome in 1986 and kidnapped by Israeli agents, who brought him to Israel. He was convicted after being tried in secret and has since been kept in solitary confinement.

He is not permitted to talk to or be photographed by the media.

The television report did not explain the security official's change of opinion. □