



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Clinton sends greetings to Iran

President Clinton sent videotaped greetings to the Iranian people and endorsed their president's recent call for cultural exchanges between the two countries.

"The United States regrets the estrangement of our two nations," Clinton said on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, a three-day feast marking the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

### Israelis getting gas masks

The number of Israelis showing up at gas mask stations fearing an attack from Iraq has increased significantly, according to the Israeli daily Ma'ariv.

Meanwhile, there were reports that the Cabinet discussed mass inoculations against biological warfare.

### Netanyahu meets U.S. envoy

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu conferred with the U.S. ambassador to Israel about an American proposal that Israel make phased redeployments in the West Bank which would be linked to Palestinian steps to crack down on terror.

Ambassador Edward Walker also met with Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai to discuss the tensions in the Persian Gulf region over U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq. [Page 4]

### Survey: Support for Rabbinate

An Orthodox Union survey of 500 Israeli Jewish adults found that 45 percent believe that the Chief Rabbinate is the most appropriate body to decide the question "Who is a Jew?"

About half of those surveyed said there should be a single standard for conversions to Judaism in Israel, but almost as many — 43 percent — said more than one standard is acceptable.

### Evangelicals to give \$1 million

The Rev. John Hagee, pastor of the 16,000-member Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, is donating \$1 million to the United Jewish Appeal to underwrite the cost of immigration from the former Soviet Union to Israel.

The evangelical leader is scheduled to present the donation to Elisha Ben-Elissar, Israel's ambassador to the United States, next week at the National Religious Broadcaster's conference in Washington.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Israeli jobs head to Jordan: Is this a win-win situation?

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The peace process isn't the only crisis that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing.

In December, the premier was booed during a trip to the development town of Ofakim, where unemployment has risen to nearly 15 percent. More recently, a one-day strike was held in several Druse villages to protest a loss of jobs in the textile industries, and the country's labor and social affairs minister has predicted that unemployment will increase by a quarter in the upcoming months.

The president of one of Israel's textile firms has a partial, albeit surprising, solution to the problem: Move Israeli plants to Jordan and Egypt.

When Israeli companies open plants in other Middle Eastern countries, said Dov Lautman of Delta Textile Industries, everyone wins: the Jordanian workers, the Israeli workers, the company — and the peace process.

"It's a win-win-win situation," Lautman believes, though not everyone agrees.

For Lautman and others, however, the story is simple.

Since Jordan and Israel signed a peace treaty three years ago, Jordanians have encouraged Israeli entrepreneurs to invest in Jordan. Lured by low wages — the average monthly salary in Israel is approximately \$1,400; in Jordan it approximates \$300 and in Egypt it's around \$100 — some Israeli companies have complied.

Some 15 Israeli textile factories now operate plants in Jordan, manufacturing goods that are mostly destined for exports to the United States. The products are designed and tailored in Israel, transferred to some 30 sewing plants in Jordan and then returned to Israel for packing and shipment.

Delta operates — jointly with Jordanian partners — a large textile plant in the Jordanian city of Irbid.

"Only thanks to us employing 700 workers in Jordan, can we employ 3,000 workers in Israel at a decent salary," Lautman said in a recent interview. "Had it not been for them, we would have had to close down our Israeli plants."

Indeed, the use of Jordanian labor is allowing Israeli firms, some say, to compete with goods made in the Far East.

Textile companies that don't want to open plants abroad will suffer, said Lautman. As an example, he mentioned Gibor Sabrina, which recently closed down its sewing plant and laid off 1,000 workers.

"Had Sabrina employed 200 workers in Jordan, it could have kept 800 of its Israeli workers," he said.

Economic experts such as Severe Plotzker, the economics editor of the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, suggested that Jordan's close location to Israel makes it a valuable partner.

"Had it not been for the peace with Jordan, Delta Textile would have opened sewing workshops in Bulgaria and Romania," Plotzker wrote recently. If this were the case, he suggested, the plants would have been transferred to Eastern Europe, and the Israeli plants would have been forced to closed down altogether.

If Delta's Lautman touts the joint efforts, Aharon Efroni, an Israeli businessman, is accepting them reluctantly.

Efroni is working on a computer project in Jordan in which the Jordanians would buy parts from Italy, assemble them and then ship them to Israel for final assembly.

He doesn't buy Lautman's assertions. "Of course, this hurts the Israeli worker," said

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Jubilee text has omission

Educational materials created by an Israeli publisher to mark the Jewish state's 50th anniversary make no mention of the Oslo accords, an Israeli newspaper reported.

The booklets, which were chosen for use by the Tel Aviv elementary school system, make no reference to the Israeli-Palestinian peace track in the section titled, "The Peace Process Between Israel and the Arabs."

### Former Knesset member arrested

A former Knesset member was among five people arrested on suspicion of involvement in starting a fire at the Tel Aviv Cultural Center in 1996 in order to file insurance claims on pieces of art stored there.

Samuel Flatto-Sharon, who denied the allegations against him, avoided extradition to France in 1977 to face fraud charges after he was elected to the Knesset on an independent ticket.

### New JNF chairman named

Shlomo Gravetz was named world chairman of Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael, the Israel-based parent of the Jewish National Fund.

Gravetz served as chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel's Youth and Hechalutz Department during the past five years.

He replaces longtime world chairman Moshe Rivlin, who will become president of the organization.

### Palestinian detainee dies

A Palestinian teen-ager arrested on car theft charges died from injuries he sustained after trying to commit suicide two weeks ago, Israeli police said.

The 18-year-old, who was said to be despondent about the effect his arrest would have on his new wife, had tried to hang himself in the shower at a Jerusalem jail.

Efroni. "Unfortunately, this trend will continue," he predicted. "There is no other way. People are businessmen who want to make money before they are patriots. The Israeli economy will have to adjust to the new reality. It simply has no other choice."

Textiles is the main Israeli industry that has opened in Jordan — it relies on a cheap manual labor pool widely available in the Hashemite kingdom — but other industries have followed suit.

Other Israeli businesses now operating in Jordan include food plants, metal factories whose products are exported to the United States, battery plants, a tin-box factory, plastics, agricultural projects — and one small computer software plant.

Some 2,500 Jordanians have joined the labor force as a result of the Israeli plants there.

And this appears to be only the beginning.

The Israeli Embassy in Amman is aware of more than 20 other plans for new Israeli plants in Jordan at some level of cooperation with the Jordanians. These include spheres like plastics, electronics, communication and even diamond polishing.

Some 50 Israeli plants are also slated to open in the northern Gaza Strip.

Israeli economic involvement continues, despite the political setbacks.

"One can notice a slowdown in new initiatives," said Gil Feiler of the Info-Prod Research Center in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan, "but there are new initiatives, and whatever was started continues."

Israelis also invest in the West Bank — and Egypt. Companies like Delta and Tefron also own plants there.

But whereas in Jordan business is based on copartnership with Jordanians, in Egypt those companies are the sole owners of the plants.

In both countries, some of the clothes manufactured are exported to European countries without any mention of the Israeli origin of the company — so that the products will count against the quotas that Europe has for these countries, and not for Israel.

Not everyone appears to be seeing the benefits.

Mohammed Ramal, who owns a sewing plant in an Israeli Druse village — unemployment now exceeds 15 percent in some of these villages — says the government should shoulder some of the responsibility, which he says "does not understand that its first duty is to provide its own citizens with decent employment opportunities." □

## Israeli religious courts to offer Internet divorce

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Filing for divorce in Israel may soon be just a mouse click away.

Keeping apace with the times, the Orthodox-controlled rabbinical court system is putting the final touches on a Web site that will enable Israelis to file via the Internet for a get — the religious divorce required to dissolve a Jewish marriage.

"I believe that it is a matter of months before divorce papers can be filed from home," Rabbi Eliahu Ben Dahan, director of Israel's religious court system, told the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot. Dahan said those seeking a divorce would also be able to use credit cards to pay the fee for opening a divorce file the electronic way.

Accompanying the latest innovations at the Chief Rabbinate was the release of a report providing updated statistics about Israeli divorce rates. According to the report, the city of Tel Aviv maintained its lead with the most number of divorces in 1997 — 2,584 couples split up there last year, out of a total of 8,092 divorces nationally.

In a related development, the Knesset Law Committee has completed preparations for final action on a bill that would authorize sanctions on men who refuse to grant a get to their wives.

Four years ago, the Knesset authorized the rabbinical courts to enact civil sanctions against men withholding a get. These included prohibitions on leaving the country, getting a driver's license and restrictions on banks accounts and credit cards.

The measures proved effective enough that the Knesset committee decided to set the policy into law. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Papon trial suspended

The trial of war crimes suspect Maurice Papon was suspended after a lawyer for the plaintiffs said the presiding judge should be removed over an alleged conflict of interest.

Arno Klarfeld said an uncle of the judge was married to a Jewish woman whose family was deported from France to Auschwitz at the time that Papon served as a high-ranking bureaucrat for France's wartime Vichy regime. Judge Jean-Louis Castagnede declined comment, but colleagues said he hasn't seen the uncle since childhood.

### Latvia honors savior of Jews

A street in the Latvian capital of Riga was named for a Christian who saved dozens of Jews during the Nazi occupation.

Zanis Lipke Street is located in a neighborhood near the former Riga Ghetto, where more than 25,000 Jews were exterminated during World War II.

### School choir director fired

The school system of Albuquerque, N.M., fired the director of a school choir for organizing a concert that emphasized Christian songs and music.

School officials said Frank Rotolo had violated guidelines calling for a separation of religion from regular school activities.

### Israel lodges protest

Israel is protesting to Italy and Switzerland over the arrest of an Israeli man in connection with an alleged plot to kidnap the heiress to the Onassis shipping fortune. Israeli officials say there is insufficient evidence against Ronen Balulu, who was detained last November in Italy.

Swiss officials believe that Balulu and six other Israelis conspired to abduct 12-year-old Athena Roussel last February in the Swiss resort of St. Moritz.

### Gypsies seeking compensation

Gypsy leaders in Germany are reportedly pressing the government to pay monthly compensation to some 200 Gypsies who survived the Holocaust but have been unable to qualify for compensation.

The number of Gypsies killed during the Holocaust is estimated between 200,000 and 500,000.

### AJCongress criticizes attack

"Right to Life" does not mean the right to cause death," the American Jewish Congress said in a statement condemning the bombing of an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Ala.

One person was killed and two injured in the blast. The clinic has been the target of past anti-abortion protests.

## Both sides declare victory in court's Bible course ruling

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Both sides in a church-state standoff are declaring victory in the wake of a split ruling in a case involving a controversial school Bible course in Florida.

The decision allows a school district in Lee County, Fla., to teach a course based on the Old Testament, but bars it from teaching one based on the New Testament.

The case is important because church-state watchdogs say the Christian Coalition has been looking to Lee County as a test case in its nationwide effort to bring religion into the public schools. Three of the five members on the school board are said to have close ties to the conservative Christian lobby.

In the case, seven parents, clergy and other community members — including the president of the local Jewish federation — had filed suit to block the Bible curriculum, claiming that it teaches the Bible as historical fact and indoctrinates students to Christianity.

The two-part proposed course would have covered both the Old and New Testaments, but it was the slant of the New Testament version that mainly troubled the local residents.

U.S. District Judge Elizabeth Kovachevich said the school board could implement the course based on the Old Testament because it was "ostensibly designed to teach history and not religion," thereby meeting the requirement that the course had a secular purpose. But she issued an injunction against the use of the New Testament curriculum, ruling that the court "finds it difficult to conceive how the account of the resurrection or of miracles could be taught as secular history."

The American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way, two watchdog groups backing the plaintiffs, welcomed the injunction against the New Testament curriculum.

"We see this as a kind of stealth curriculum that quite nicely fits into the broad agenda of the religious right in the public schools, which is to begin by first getting your candidates elected" to school boards, "and then start in with a Bible curriculum and prayer in schools," said Lisa Versaci, Florida state director of People For the American Way.

She said the watchdog groups intend to closely monitor and videotape the Old Testament class, which began in late January, to make sure it does not cross the line.

For its part, the American Center for Law and Justice — the Virginia-based group created by Christian Coalition leader, the Rev. Pat Robertson, that has been defending the school board — hailed the decision clearing the way for the Old Testament class. The group said it was reviewing the injunction against the New Testament phase. □

## Ten Commandments intact

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Ten Commandments still stand.

In the latest round of a closely watched church-state dispute, the Alabama Supreme Court has decided to allow a circuit judge to continue displaying the Ten Commandments in his courtroom and to conduct prayers before court sessions.

The court rejected on technical grounds a religious-freedom lawsuit brought by Gov. Fob James and Attorney General Bill Pryor.

They were asking the court to uphold as constitutional Judge Roy Moore's practice of displaying the Ten Commandments behind the bench and opening court with prayers.

The judge said they lacked standing to bring the lawsuit.

But by dismissing the suit, the court allowed the religious activities to continue, as the state had sought.

An earlier suit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of two Etowah County residents against the judge's conduct was also thrown out on the grounds that the plaintiffs lacked legal standing. □

## Albright to discuss peace, Iraq crisis during Israel visit

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Amid the escalating crisis with Iraq, the United States is working to salvage the peace process.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held talks Thursday with the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Edward Walker, ahead of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's meeting with Netanyahu on Saturday night.

Albright is also expected to meet later with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Albright's visit, in turn, comes on the heels of separate talks President Clinton held in Washington last week with Netanyahu and Arafat.

American officials were quoted by the Israeli daily Ha'aretz as saying that while the secretary of state is also holding talks on the Iraqi crisis with regional leaders, the focus of her talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders would be the peace process and an American proposal regarding a further redeployment from the West Bank.

"Albright's visit to Israel is by neither a courtesy call nor focused solely on Iraq," a senior American official was quoted by the paper as saying.

"The peace process will comprise an important part of her trip."

A senior American source was quoted as saying that the American administration believes that a deal on the redeployment is possible.

"If there is goodwill on both sides, we do not think it will be difficult to work out the details," the source said.

The source was optimistic that Netanyahu would agree to a U.S. proposal of a phased redeployment based on a Palestinian fulfillment of obligations.

The United States is interested in a further redeployment of about 12 percent.

Israel has refrained from specifying the extent of the redeployment, though prior to Netanyahu's talks in Washington, the Jewish state's Cabinet ministers estimated that it would not exceed 10 percent.

The Palestinians have demanded up to 30 percent of the West Bank in this redeployment.

They are seeking approximately 90 percent of the West Bank before the start of the final-status talks negotiations.

The Palestinians already have about 27 percent of the West Bank as a result of previous Israeli turnovers of lands in the territories.

Palestinian officials said this week that in his discussions with Clinton, Arafat declared that he would resign rather than capitulate to American pressure and agree to the Israeli proposals regarding the West Bank pullback.

Arafat told the Palestinian Authority that Clinton twice tried to get him to agree to smaller Israeli troop redeployments in the West Bank during their discussions.

Israel denied this week reports that the United States had asked it to keep a low profile in the Iraqi crisis. Israel's defense minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, said Israel would be ready to act if necessary.

Israel's president, Ezer Weizman, said Thursday he was not too concerned about an Iraqi missile attack.

While speaking during a visit to an Arab village to mark the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Weizman said the Iraqis were aware that the "route a missile takes from Iraq is not one way." □

## European nations ask U.S. to lift sanctions against Iran

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Deep splits have emerged between the European Union and the United States over policy toward Iran.

The rift emerged this week when E.U. foreign ministers decided to review their ban on high-level contacts with Iran in defiance of America's long-standing policy of seeking international sanctions against Tehran.

The ministers said sanctions were no longer appropriate to what they perceive as an emerging moderation there.

Foreign Secretary Robin Cook of Britain, which holds the rotating E.U. presidency, said the 15-member bloc had instructed its political directors to examine the policy and report back within a month.

Cook, who chaired a meeting of E.U. foreign ministers in Brussels on Monday, told a news conference that the European Union and the United States agree Iran must be stopped from acquiring weapons of mass destruction and from sponsoring terrorism.

But this goal, he said, could be achieved by blocking the export of weapons and related equipment to Iran — particularly Russian missile technology — and pooling intelligence on terrorist activities.

He added that signs of moderation in Iran suggested that "a policy of general economic and political isolation may be counter-productive."

Ever since the landslide election last year of Iranian President Mohammed Khatami, Tehran-watchers have found signs of moderation in his speeches, although there have been no clear-cut signs of a change in Tehran's foreign policy, particularly toward Israel.

During a visit to Washington earlier this month, Cook said he had urged the Clinton administration and the U.S. Congress to work toward a convergence of E.U. and U.S. policy on the Islamic fundamentalist state.

"The only net gainer" from a split is Iran, said Cook, asserting that a policy of general isolation "does not undermine Iran but it does undermine trans-Atlantic relations."

European countries temporarily suspended their diplomatic contacts with Iran in March 1997 after a court in Germany ruled that Iran had ordered the 1992 killings of Iranian dissidents in Berlin.

E.U. member states withdrew their ambassadors, but returned them in December.

Europe and America have already clashed over U.S. legislation to blacklist any companies that do significant business with Tehran, particularly in the energy field.

The E.U. rejected the U.S. move as invalid because it sought to legislate beyond American borders. □