



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Little progress on the peace front

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Israel and the Palestinian Authority agreed to send representatives to Washington next week for discussions.

The announcement came after little progress was reported in separate talks that the secretary of state held over the weekend with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat. Also over the weekend, the Palestine Liberation Organization's executive committee failed to take action regarding their promise to remove the destruction of Israel clauses from their charter. [Page 4]

Israel to defend itself

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Israel has the right to defend itself if attacked by Iraq.

"It is obviously always up to each country to determine its own way of defending itself," Albright said.

During the 1991 Gulf War, Israel, under pressure from the Bush administration, refrained from responding to Iraqi Scud attacks. [Page 4]

Iran reconsiders positions

Iran's vice president said some members of the Iranian administration are reconsidering their rejection of the Oslo peace accords.

Masoumeh Ebetkar, Iran's first female vice president, said in an interview in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot, "We understand that this is a very complex and fragile problem and we don't want to take a dogmatic position on the issue."

Ebetkar also said Iran is interested in a dialogue with the Israeli people, but not on a diplomatic level.

Nazis sent art to Switzerland

Switzerland was a prime destination for Jewish-owned art works plundered by the Nazis, according to documents recently found in the U.S. National Archives and released by the World Jewish Congress.

The Nazis traded art they considered "degenerate" for Germanic or Dutch paintings.

The paintings sent to Switzerland included works by Van Gogh, Degas, Cezanne and Goya.

The World Jewish Congress established a commission last fall on art looted during World War II.

ISRAEL AT 50

Jewish youth see Zionism as ideology of Israel's past

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Herzliya Gymnasia school sits on a corner plot of land in the prestigious neighborhood of north Tel Aviv, a sandstone-colored building surrounded by palm trees and grassy areas studded with flowers and benches.

More than 1,000 junior high and high school students attend the Gymnasia, which was established in 1905, the first high school in the country that taught Hebrew and later became a cultural center for the burgeoning city of Tel Aviv.

At the school's entrance is a display of photos and essays commemorating Israel's jubilee year — a large portrait of Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, is posted prominently in the middle, as if to remind the students whom to thank for the tiled floor beneath their Doc Martens, shoes popular with teen-agers.

Lee Avzuk, Shimrit Tsiiporen, Anat Tal and Lior Ben-Kereth — four typical Tel Aviv teen-agers dressed in baggy clothes — pay no attention to the blue and white display and make their way through the maze of hallways and classrooms to the school's cafeteria where they plop themselves down to drink coffee and discuss Zionism and patriotism in their country's 50th year of statehood.

Tal, a lanky 11th grader huddled in her khaki green army-style jacket, is somewhat disillusioned with the concept of Zionism, commenting that it's a romantic concept from the past, existing only in politics. Her friends agree, adding that army duty and youth movements are two of the last vestiges of patriotism left in their young state, and even those are losing in popularity.

"All the guys have to say they want to be paratroopers, even if they don't want to," says Tal. "That's their Zionism."

That's a fairly typical reaction, according to Doubi Schwartz, director of Tel Aviv and Israel's central region for Melitz, a non-profit organization specializing in informal education for high school students.

Melitz has been organizing seminars about Israeli solidarity and patriotic values for the jubilee year, primarily in secular schools.

"Most students feel quite strongly about living here," says Schwartz, "but it's about belonging, not about history."

"They tell me, 'We were born here, it's our place,' " he says. "They don't want to talk about history or roots, they're more interested in the consequences, how today's headlines will affect them."

He adds that army duty has come to represent Zionism for most young Israelis, since "there aren't any swamps left to drain in Hadera," referring to agricultural projects done in the early years of the state.

Tsiiporen believes that Jews outside of Israel are taking the jubilee year more seriously than Israelis, partially because they have no other identity.

"What they don't realize is that Judaism and Zionism are two different things," she says, "and because we're here, it's less important to us."

For the most part, Melitz educators are accustomed to approaching students with questions, not answers. It's a different attitude than that of the Education Ministry, which declared Israel's 50th anniversary as the central subject of the year, devoting additional class hours to the study of Israeli society's accomplishments.

Yet the ministry, as well as the government's jubilee celebrations, has been plagued by managerial and internal troubles, and the death of the education minister, Zevulun

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. sends vaccines to Israel

The United States agreed in principle to send Israel vaccines against biological agents that Iraq is believed to possess, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Ha'aretz reported that the request came before the current crisis over U.N. weapons inspections of Iraqi arms, but the report appeared as thousands of Israelis are picking up new gas masks daily to defend themselves against possible Iraqi gas attacks in the event of military strikes in the Persian Gulf.

Yeshiva student stabbed

A teen-age yeshiva student was stabbed on his way to the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City.

Police suspected an Arab woman or an Arab man was responsible for the attack. The victim is in stable condition at a Jerusalem hospital.

An end to the Jubilee?

Israel's tourism minister reportedly called for disbanding the group planning the events for Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz quoted officials close to Moshe Katzav as saying he had declared that the group had "run out of steam" and reached the end of the road.

Since its founding a year ago, the group has been beset by funding and organizational problems.

Belly dancer files vs. diplomat

Egypt's ambassador to Israel cited diplomatic immunity in refusing to be served papers in a civil suit filed against him by a belly dancer, Israel Radio reported.

The dancer is seeking approximately \$285,000 in damages from Mohammed Basiouny, claiming he sexually assaulted her. An Israeli government investigation into the matter last year was dropped for lack of evidence.

Hammer, hasn't simplified matters. An Education Ministry spokesman said teachers spent several weeks during the summer attending workshops organized by the ministry about how to teach the jubilee material. But on Sept. 1, usually the first day of school, educators organized a countrywide strike, protesting their low salaries.

They returned to their blackboards and workbooks within a few days, but refused to participate in or organize any outside school activities until their salaries improved. High school students also got involved, organizing a student union strike in several major cities to protest the lack of school trips and extracurricular projects.

Not a good start to the jubilee year, but typical of Israel's politicized society.

The Education Ministry's 70-page history book, targeted at elementary schools and titled "Israel's Jubilee," recently came under fire in the Israeli media for not mentioning the Palestinians when it discusses Israeli society. The ministry spokesman refused to comment on the workbook's contents.

Educator Pinchas Simcha created a workbook about the jubilee for Melitz, dealing with Zionism and 50 years of independence. In accordance with Melitz protocol, the material doesn't emphasize history, ideology or the past, but rather Israel's culture in the context of Israeli Zionism. "The old style is Zionism ABC," says Simcha. "We know there are problems with the nation's youth. The Zionism of 50 years ago was a truth for the country's youth and a fact of their future. That's not true any longer."

Maybe not for everyone. But Dima Shattachyan, who moved with his family to Bat Yam four years ago from Ukraine, still calls himself a Zionist. "I'm happy about 50 years of statehood," says Shattachyan, an 18-year-old design student at the Goldstein Youth Village High School in Jerusalem.

"Zionism is about Jews living in their own state, building it, defending it, developing it," says Shattachyan, who will be entering the army in the summer. "All countries have their problems, people should just deal with it."

Not a typical reaction, according to Melitz's Schwartz, who says many Russian students clearly state they didn't come to Israel out of any Zionist motivation, and are then pounced on by their Israeli contemporaries for not being "Zionistic enough."

"It's true," says Ben-Kereth of the Herzliya Gymnasia foursome. "The Russians didn't come here for Zionism, they came because it wasn't good for them there. They don't even speak the language."

"Who can blame them?" asks Avzuk. "They should come here for terrorist bombings?"

Avzuk reminisces about the days following Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, when the country's youth gathered in city squares to light memorial candles and vent their feelings and frustrations. "That was Zionism," she says. "Because we were mourning together."

Tal nods her head. "We're a warm country, everyone knows everyone because it's such a small world here," she explains. "So even if it's not as Zionist as it was 50 years ago, it's still different than other countries." □

South African Jew receives therapy

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — An 8-year-old South African boy underwent gene therapy last week for a Jewish genetic disease — thanks to funds provided by the South African Jewish community.

Asher Gluckman, who suffers from Canavan Disease, was the first South African to undergo the therapy, which took place at Yale University Medical School in New Haven, Conn. He is one of 15 victims of the disease undergoing the therapy at Yale.

The therapy involves transplanting a synthetic gene in order to combat Canavan, a congenital birth disorder. Children who suffer from Canavan cannot walk, talk and, at times, breathe on their own.

Death almost always occurs before the age of 10.

Canavan is a recessive disorder, which means that both parents must carry the disease in order for them to pass it on to their children. While rare, it has a 1 in 33 carrier rate among Ashkenazi Jews. Gluckman's parents, who flew to the United States with their son, received the money for the procedure after appeals from South Africa's chief rabbi, Cyril Harris, and the South African Jewish Times newspaper. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Rabbi faces charges in Belarus

The former chief rabbi of Belarus was released from a Minsk prison after being arrested on charges he attempted to smuggle valuable Hebrew books out of the former Soviet republic.

When Rabbi Velvl Tabak left the Belarussian capital last April, he was prevented by customs authorities from taking several 18th-century books out of the country.

Tabak, an American citizen, is out on bail, but still faces the charges. Tabak was the chief rabbi of Belarus in 1995 and 1996.

Eizenstat wants end to sanctions

The Clinton administration's point man on the Nazi gold issue called for an end to threats of economic sanctions against Swiss banks by U.S. state and local governments.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, last Friday, Stuart Eizenstat, the U.S. undersecretary of state for economic affairs, said the moratorium on sanctions, currently slated to run through March, should be made permanent.

Farrakhan in Moscow

Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan told more than 5,000 Russian Muslims gathered in Moscow's central mosque to spread Islam throughout Russia.

Russian Jewish community leaders said they did not understand the purpose of Farrakhan's visit, which marks the halfway point of his worldwide tour.

Nazi experiments studied

An Austrian hospital that killed children for Nazi experiments hosted a symposium on the medical legacy of the Third Reich and its implications for medical ethics.

Among the issues discussed at the conference at Am Steinhof, which still stores the brain specimens of about 400 children killed during World War II, was that doctors who conducted the experiments were never punished for their actions.

Am Steinhof, Vienna's state psychiatric hospital, was one of many "neurological clinics" in the Third Reich. Children died there as a result of neglect, starvation and drug overdoses by doctors.

Costner to host Jubilee show

The producers of a CBS television show celebrating Israel's 50th anniversary have selected non-Jewish actor Kevin Costner to be the host of the show.

The starring role for Costner will help the show appeal to a wider audience, according to the its organizers.

The show will air on CBS on Apr. 15.

Four Seasons Hotel worker claims anti-Semitism in suit

By Nancy Zuckerbrod
Washington Jewish Week

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Washington's posh Four Seasons Hotel has been hit with charges of anti-Semitism.

That accusation is at the center of a lawsuit against the hotel — a favorite of Jewish leaders such as Jewish National Fund President Ronald Lauder and World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman — filed in U.S. District Court by banquet waiter Lev Akselrod.

In his suit, Akselrod — a Russian Jew who immigrated to the United States in 1979 and obtained citizenship in 1986 — claims to have suffered religious discrimination during the six years he has worked at the Four Seasons.

Akselrod said in an interview that he sensed trouble shortly after he started working at the hotel, when his former supervisor Alberto Mezzomo, a defendant in the case, said to him, "Are you a Jew, Lev? I did not know you were a Jew."

Akselrod said conditions deteriorated after that encounter, resulting in an oppressive and hostile work environment. His accusations include:

- While cleaning up after Jewish functions such as weddings and Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, Mezzomo and waiters he supervised allegedly wore yarmulkes left by guests, mimicked their accents and made derogatory remarks about Jews.

- When Akselrod was asked to serve Jewish musicians performing at a Jewish function, Mezzomo allegedly remarked, "Why didn't Hitler kill all those Jews? I hate them all. Why aren't they like we are?"

- Allegedly, some waiters routinely addressed each other with salutes of "Heil Hitler!"

Akselrod said that when he complained to Mezzomo about such behavior, Mezzomo told him, "You don't have any rights." Akselrod also claims he asked Mezzomo's supervisor, Gunther Karsch, to put a stop to the offending behavior, but he said Karsch's response was, "People don't change."

"He didn't care. I was very disappointed," said Akselrod, who, in January 1996, turned to Stanley Bromley, general manager of the hotel.

Akselrod said he thought Bromley would be horrified at his account of events because he, too, is Jewish. "But he didn't do anything," said Akselrod. "This is what destroyed me."

Bromley said in an interview, "We really don't think the public arena is where this should be discussed. It's not fair." He refused to elaborate further, as did a lawyer for the hotel. In addition, calls to Mezzomo went unanswered.

In October 1996, Akselrod complained again, this time to the hotel's personnel office. An investigation ensued, and Mezzomo and Karsch were reportedly suspended for several days. But when they returned to work, the two men retaliated against Akselrod by cutting his hours roughly in half, said John Gleklen, Akselrod's lawyer.

Gleklen said hotel management prevented Akselrod from getting a full-time job at a Four Seasons hotel in California. "He was blacklisted by the Four Seasons because he complained," Gleklen said.

The hotel's stated reason for not giving his client a full-time position was because he did not know enough about wines, said Gleklen.

Gleklen also said Akselrod hopes to obtain the full-time position, back pay for lost wages and monetary damages in excess of \$75,000 for pain and suffering.

The Four Seasons has until mid-February to answer the complaint. According to Gleklen, Mezzomo and Karsch are no longer working there, but the Four Seasons refuses to confirm that this is true.

The two sides have engaged in settlement negotiations, but they have not been successful, said Gleklen. He cited an unacceptable offer and Akselrod's unwillingness to be silent about what happened as the reason those talks failed to produce a deal.

Akselrod is "not willing to be silent" because he fled from anti-Semitism in Russia and lost his grandparents in the Holocaust, added Gleklen. □

U.S. presses peace talks amid looming Iraqi conflict

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With a possible U.S. military confrontation with Iraq looming, the top American foreign policy official is pressing for progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Madeleine Albright, the U.S. secretary of state, said she expected Israeli and Palestinian leaders to make the "hard decisions" needed to move the process forward.

"We have been stalled at this point in the peace process negotiating the same issues for a long time, frankly for too long," Albright said Sunday at a Jerusalem news conference.

"There is far too much at stake for this to go on. It is no longer enough to simply talk about wanting peace, it is time to make the difficult decisions and exercise the leadership necessary to achieve it."

Albright said her separate talks over the weekend with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat achieved only "minimal" progress, but she announced that both sides had agreed to send emissaries to Washington next week for follow-up discussions.

Albright's brief stopover in Israel and the Palestinian self-rule areas came amid talks in Europe and the Middle East on the mounting tensions in the Persian Gulf over U.N. weapons inspections of Iraq sites. Albright was clear in stressing that the United States differentiates between whatever criticism it may have of Israel regarding the peace process and any possible threats the Jewish state may face if the Iraqi crisis escalates.

"Of course there may be differences between us in how to pursue Middle East peace. But let me say directly to the Israeli people — nothing will shake the iron-clad commitment of the U.S. when it comes to the security of Israel."

At the news conference, Albright would not respond to a question about whether the United States had asked Israel to refrain from responding to an Iraq attack, but she indicated that Washington would not oppose Israeli military action.

"It is obviously always up to each country to determine its own way of defending itself," Albright said.

Albright said the United States was ready to use "substantial" force if diplomatic efforts to resolve the U.N. weapons inspection crisis in Iraq failed.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu stressed that Israel alone would decide how to defend itself.

"We will respond as needed, to protect Israel and fortify its national security," he said. "We are the only ones making the decision."

During the 1991 Gulf War, Israel, under pressure from the Bush administration, refrained from responding to Iraqi Scud missile attacks.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Sunday that the United States has agreed in principle to send Israel vaccines against biological agents that Iraq is believed to possess. The report comes as thousands of Israelis are picking up new gas masks daily to defend themselves against possible Iraqi gas attacks in the event of war in the Persian Gulf.

On the peace process, Israeli and Palestinian officials said

Albright's talks, her second in the region since becoming secretary of state, did little to jar the impasse.

Israeli-Palestinian talks have been deadlocked for nearly a year, with the latest obstacles being the scope of the next Israeli troop redeployment from the West Bank and Israeli demands for Palestinian action to meet its commitments from previously signed agreements.

Netanyahu told his Cabinet on Sunday that no decision had been made yet on the scope of the redeployment. Israel has conditioned implementation of the pullback on Palestinians' compliance with their commitments, among them nullification of clauses in the Palestinian covenant calling for Israel's destruction.

Netanyahu said a reported move over the weekend by the Palestine Liberation Organization's executive committee to approve a letter Arafat gave President Clinton last week on the nullification of the covenant was a "step in the right direction." However, he stood firm on Israel's belief that only the Palestine National Council is authorized to complete revision of the charter, voted on nearly two years ago.

Conflicting reports emerged from the PLO meeting, with Palestinian officials denying that any decision on Arafat's letter was taken. □

German firm agrees to pay some former slave workers

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — A German metals and chemical firm is giving money to a small number of World War II slave workers.

The money from Degussa AG, which admitted last year that it melted down gold and silver stripped from concentration camp victims, will go to former laborers at a factory in Poland built by Degussa to produce carbon black, the main material needed for automobile tires.

The announcement marks the first time that a German corporation has made such an offer since the discussion of the role of Swiss banks during the war refocused attention on the role of German banks and companies in the Nazi era.

The company declined to identify either the amount of money or the number and identity of the recipients. A daughter of a former Degussa factory manager in the Polish town of Gliwice, has been pressing the company, the largest metal refinery in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, to pay money to five survivors of the factory that she located.

In keeping with the policy of all German companies who employed forced labor during the Nazi era, Degussa said the money is humanitarian help — and not compensation. Business leaders fear acknowledgment of the principle of compensation for time spent in forced labor could trigger a flood of claims from former workers.

The millions of slave workers forced to work for the Nazi regime received little or no salary for their work, which was conducted under extreme working conditions. Corporate leaders say financial claims from former slave workers were settled through compensation payments made by the postwar German government.

Despite this stance, a few companies have given individual payments to small groups of former workers. □