



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Mossad in new brouhaha

Israeli and Swiss officials confirmed reports that an Israeli Mossad agent had been arrested in Switzerland in connection with an attempt to bug telephones in a building on the outskirts of Bern. Switzerland is awaiting an official apology from Israel over the incident.

Leaks about the bungled Mossad operation were apparently made to the Israeli media by Mossad officials seeking to ensure the resignation of the agency's head, Danny Yatom. [Page 3]

### Report: Israel helped nail Iraqis

Israeli intelligence officials provided vital information in 1995 to help force the Iraqis to admit that they were running an elaborate program to produce biological weapons, The New York Times reported. Without the information, U.N. inspectors might have had to abandon their weapons-inspection program.

### Israel operating in Iraq

Israeli commandos operating behind Iraqi lines found evidence of Scud missiles, according to the London-based newsletter Foreign Report.

The well-respected newsletter also reports that Israeli, American and British special forces operating inside Iraq are unlikely to be withdrawn in the immediate future, despite this week's agreement between Baghdad and the United Nations. [Page 4]

### House mulls protections

About a dozen religiously observant Americans urged U.S. lawmakers to enact protections for religious freedom during a hearing of a subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee.

As Congress contemplates legislation to restore the protections afforded under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the witnesses testified about personal hardships they have suffered without the law, which was invalidated by the Supreme Court last year.

### B'nai B'rith leader meets Arafat

B'nai B'rith President Tommy Baer met Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat today in the Gaza Strip.

Under Baer's leadership, B'nai B'rith has grown sharply critical of Arafat and at one point called on the United States to suspend all contact with him.

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### From Oregon to North Dakota, Jewish politics, too, are local

By Matthew Dorf

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla. (JTA) — From Oregon to Massachusetts, from Texas to North Dakota, the Jewish agenda is adapting to the old political adage that "all politics are local."

Communities once driven by such concerns as anti-Semitism and Soviet Jewry now are training their energies with greater frequency on home-grown issues.

Take the case of Minneapolis. The Minneapolis Jewish community relations council, which also covers the Dakotas, spent a good chunk of last year defeating a measure that would have banned all circumcision in North Dakota.

After a large number of African immigrants who settled in the state began performing ritual female circumcisions, called genital mutilation by its opponents, the state legislature moved to ban the practice.

But a bloc of feminist legislators said that if you're banning female circumcision you must also ban male circumcisions, according to Jay Tcath, director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas.

When the link failed in the legislature, the lawmakers took their case to court. Late last year, the law was upheld — without the male circumcision ban. But just because the issues are local does not mean they are unique to each community.

From interviews with dozens of Jewish officials on the front lines of community relations and coalition building, it is clear that many of the issues that shape the local agenda are shared by CRCs across the country.

As diverse as their communities and organizational structures are, a common thread of policy, politics and partnerships runs through the agencies that are responsible for setting policy and communicating it with the broader local community.

The change in focus could not have come at a more critical time, as the federal government continues to shift power and dollars to the states.

With this shift, many community relations councils, officials say, have found themselves in the enviable position of harnessing renewed energy and activism among grass-roots American Jewry.

"The problems no longer are anti-Semitism, an Israel besieged and Soviet Jewry. Civil rights ain't what it used to be," said Tcath. "So whither the JCRCs?" he asked.

According to Tcath and many of his colleagues who gathered this week in the sunshine state for the annual plenum of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, they're doing just fine. They're just doing it a little differently.

The JCPA, formerly known as the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, is an umbrella body of 117 local community relations councils and 13 national agencies.

"No one's calling us on Russian-Iranian missile cooperation. Ninety percent of our incoming calls are on local issues," Tcath said.

Rabbi Doug Kahn, director of the San Francisco Jewish Community Relations Council, said the CRCs' "historic mission is to safeguard the condition under which the Jewish community can flourish, both here and abroad. Now there's an expansion of the agenda," with a greater focus on domestic issues.

Among the issues now occupying the attention of local Jewish organizational officials and activists across the country are school vouchers and prayer in public schools, issues of religious freedom and social welfare benefits for poor and immigrant

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Meridor elected JAFI treasurer

Salai Meridor was elected treasurer of the Jewish Agency for Israel. Meridor, who is also slated to become chairman of the agency in 2000, is the former head of the Settlement Division of the World Zionist Organization. Meridor will oversee the agency's \$400 million annual budget. The budget represents a \$15 million cut.

Meanwhile, the Agency's Board of Governors elected Eli Ben Eliezer as director of the new Jewish-Zionist Education Department of the Jewish Agency. Ben Eliezer is a former director of the Education Administration in Jerusalem and of research and development at the World ORT headquarters in London. The Board of Governors also authorized the establishment of a joint institute for Jewish studies, as long as the Israeli government pays for it. Such an institute, to prepare potential converts in Israel, was part of a proposal by the Ne'eman Committee, an intradenominational group seeking a compromise to the conversion issue.

### New Mossad head sought

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held consultations with Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon about finding a replacement for Danny Yatom as head of Mossad. Netanyahu is favoring the head of the Israel Defense Force's northern command, Maj. Gen. Amiram Levine, according to Israeli media reports.

### Palestinians issue census

There are 2.9 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and eastern Jerusalem, according to the first census conducted by the Palestinian Authority. An Israeli census conducted in the mid-1990s put the figure at just over 2 million. The Palestinian official in charge of the census said the discrepancy arose because Israel underreported the Palestinian population.



## Daily News Bulletin

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populations, according to CRC officials here. It's a shift that Kahn, who serves as the director of the national CRC directors association, said is a "natural" change.

While the CRCs were "initially a little hesitant to grab hold of the area, we are the institutions in the community that possess the expertise," he said, because of their longtime work in coalition building and advocacy.

Many activists say that while the shift to local issues is complete, it is not new.

Following the 1988 Democratic National Convention, when pro-Palestinian activists scored a major victory by bringing a vote on Palestinian statehood to the floor of the assembly, Jewish activists began to focus on forging better relations on the state level. Both the Republicans and Democrats elect their delegates to the national conventions locally.

According to many officials on the front lines of local Jewish politics, the shift toward local issues intensified after the 1994 Republican revolution, when Republicans were swept into power in Congress. This shift gave much more power to the states, as Congress left it up to individual states to decide how to spend billions of federal dollars.

The Jewish community received a "wake-up call," Nancy Kaufman, director of the Jewish Relations Council of Greater Boston, said. "Somehow we forgot about the state."

Across the country, the push for welfare reform and the shift of social welfare benefits from the federal to the state level further galvanized local Jewish communities to develop better relations with state officials. Until then, people had mostly concentrated on relations with members of Congress.

"We basically realized that the government was the federation's single largest donor," Kaufman said. In Boston, 67 percent of the budget of Jewish social service providers come from government funds.

Welfare reform, which has led to a reduction in benefits such as food stamps and Medicaid for the needy and some immigrants, is one issue that concerns virtually all of the local CRCs. "Everyone thinks that their community is unique, but every community deals with the same issues," said Susan Abravanel, vice chair of JCPA and former chair of the CRC in Portland, Ore.

For all the concentration on local efforts, activists stressed that the national scene is not being neglected. Instead it's taking on a different spin.

In the community known as MetroWest, N.J., people are still reeling from last year's Senate battle between Richard Zimmer and Robert Torricelli that analysts widely regarded as one of the dirtiest and ugliest in recent memory.

"Until the Zimmer-Torricelli race, campaign finance reform was one of those 'up-there' Washington issues," said David Mallach, director of the CRC in MetroWest. Now the community is seeking ways to support campaign finance reform.

But like most communities, MetroWest has its own home-grown issue that ranks high on the agenda.

"The largest New Jersey issue is the formula used to fund suburban school districts," Mallach said. That's what matters because "that's where the Jewish community lives."

In some communities, one of the best results of the local orientation has been an increasing number of Jewish activists.

"We're experiencing a renaissance of an enormous energy," Boston's Kaufman said. "People are wanting vehicles to do something. We are giving people a Jewish context." □

## Israel looks into Internet porn

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel might strike back against pornography and security information appearing on the country's Internet sites.

At a hearing on the matter this week before the Knesset's Research and Development Committee, a member of Knesset said he was shocked to see the amount of information available on the Israeli air force site. He said the information included classified information regarding personnel and aircraft. Another speaker at the meeting, a religious student, said he ended up at a pornographic site while looking for pictures of cars. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Court angers Argentine Jews

Argentine Jews reacted with animosity to news that Argentina's highest court believes that Islamic Jihad terrorists "might have been involved" in the March 17, 1992, bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires. The Argentine government does not want to "investigate the Argentines that helped carry out the bombing" because "they probably were cops," said one Jewish official.

### Lauck refused release

An American neo-Nazi known as the "Farmbelt Fuhrer" lost an appeal for early release from a German prison. Gary Lauck, a Nebraska native who sports a Hitler-like mustache and speaks with an affected German accent, is serving a four-year sentence for smuggling right-wing propaganda into Germany in violation of that country's strict anti-hate laws.

### Righteous Gentiles at jubilee

Israel plans to invite 50 people who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust to participate in the Jewish state's jubilee celebrations, the Israeli Foreign Ministry announced. The delegation of the so-called Righteous Among Nations from 22 countries will be asked to participate in Israel's Remembrance Day and Independence Day celebrations.

### Neo-Nazis arrested

Four neo-Nazis were arrested in eastern Germany on charges they attacked two handicapped people. The youths allegedly assaulted the people with iron bars and then tried to set their hair on fire.

### Exhibit opens at Buchenwald

An art exhibit opened at the former Buchenwald concentration camp. The exhibit includes works created by the camp's inmates, some of which were commissioned by their Nazi captors.

### Greek minister sparks protest

Israel protested comments made in Cairo by Greece's foreign minister that criticized growing Israeli-Turkish military ties.

Theodor Pangalos had called the ties "an alliance of wrongdoers that brings us to a Cold War situation."

### Germany might extradite

The Tel Aviv District Court postponed the trial of Stefan Josef Smyrek, a German citizen suspected of planning to help the Hezbollah fundamentalist movement carry out a terror attack in Israel.

The court said the delay was given to allow German authorities time to begin extradition proceedings, if they choose.

## Swiss arrest of Mossad agent further tarnishes agency's image

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The once-vaunted image of the Mossad has been tarnished again.

The latest blow to Israel's foreign intelligence service came Thursday, when Israeli and Swiss officials confirmed reports that an Israeli Mossad agent had been arrested in Switzerland in connection with an attempt to bug telephones in a building on the outskirts of Bern. Swiss officials said the man had been arrested while trying to install wiretapping equipment in the building.

Four other Israelis were also believed to have been involved in the affair — two who went into the building with him, and two who apparently stood watch outside.

Police were alerted when a neighbor called in the middle of the night to say that there were people loitering outside the building.

The four were apparently released by local police after being detained briefly and were believed to have left the country, according to Swiss officials.

They added that contrary to reports in Israel, the bugging involved the home of a private citizen, not diplomats. The officials would not comment on reports that the five were attempting to eavesdrop on members of the fundamentalist Hezbollah movement.

The Israeli arrested was facing charges of illegal espionage activity, conducting an illegal wiretap and damaging private property.

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed news of the arrest.

Switzerland launched an official protest over the incident and has demanded an apology from Israel. The Israeli ambassador to Switzerland already has expressed regret over the incident, Israel Radio reported.

The Israeli daily Yediot Achronot had reported Wednesday that a recent operational foul-up by the Mossad was believed to have led to the resignation this week of Mossad's director, Danny Yatom.

In December, reports surfaced that a veteran Mossad field officer had been feeding his superiors misleading information about Syria and pocketing money intended for informers. That official, Yehuda Gil, is currently on trial.

According to observers, the failed operation in Switzerland provided the last nail in Yatom's professional coffin. What's less clear, however, is the long-term implications for the Mossad and its ability to carry out its operations. □

(JTA correspondent Fredy Rom in Bern contributed to this report.)

## Argentine Jews angry at report on embassy bombing

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Argentine Jews reacted with skepticism — and some animosity — to news that Argentina's highest court believes Islamic Jihad terrorists "might have been involved" in the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy here.

"It's very easy to blame Hezbollah or Jihad," said a Jewish community official. "Israel will like that. The hard part is to investigate the Argentines that helped carry out the bombing.

"Our government does not want to do that, because they probably were cops," the official added, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Argentine Supreme Court is charged with investigating the bombing, which left 29 dead and more than 100 wounded.

The court made the reference to Islamic Jihad while clearing four Pakistani nationals who were briefly detained after the bombing.

They made no mention of any help provided to the attackers by local sympathizers, despite the fact that several Argentine police officers are charged with involvement in the 1994 Buenos Aires bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center, which killed 86 people. □

## Is U.S. ready to issue an ultimatum on peace?

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — The Clinton administration is set to launch a "take-it-or-leave-it" initiative next week in a bid to break the impasse in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, according to the London-based newsletter Foreign Report.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is understood to have decided to use "shock tactics" to break the stalemate after returning "completely frustrated" from her last trip to the Middle East.

As part of the initiative, Washington is expected to present a compromise formula, coupled with an ultimatum that unless the proposal is accepted by Israel and the Palestinians, the United States will abandon any further involvement in the peace process and publicly blame whichever side backs away.

State Department officials in Washington, however, say the United States would never fully abandon a peace process it has invested in so heavily.

At the same time, the U.S. officials make clear that they are serious that both Israel and the Palestinians must take steps to move the stagnant peace process forward.

The U.S. proposal is said to call for a phased Israeli withdrawal from 13 percent of the West Bank during a 12-week period.

The redeployments would be accompanied by Palestinian fulfillment of what is being described as "some of their commitments."

Washington and Jerusalem, however, are likely to clash over an additional U.S. demand that Israel conduct further withdrawals from the West Bank before the start of final-status talks.

Albright is said to have concluded that only such an ultimatum will convince Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to budge from their entrenched, apparently irreconcilable, positions.

The Clinton administration's resolve is understood to have been reinforced by its failure to win overt Arab support for its confrontation with Iraq because of perceived "double standards" in enforcing U.N. resolutions and its perceived one-sided support for Israel.

According to Foreign Report, some Israeli Labor Party leaders are said to have secretly urged Arafat to accept the U.S. proposal in order to "expose Netanyahu's obstructionism" and perhaps even contribute to his downfall. □

## Report: Israelis locate Scuds in western Iraq

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Israeli commandos operating behind Iraqi lines have found evidence of Scud missiles, according to the London-based newsletter Foreign Report.

The Israelis have been operating in Iraq's western desert — which Iraq used as a launching pad for 39 Scud attacks on Israel during the 1991 Gulf War — in a bid to reduce the chances of a new Scud attack in case of renewed fighting in the Gulf.

The well-respected newsletter also reports that Israeli,

American and British special forces operating inside Iraq are unlikely to be withdrawn in the immediate future, despite this week's agreement in Iraq between Baghdad and the United Nations.

The forces were part of the preparations for military action against the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to force compliance with U.N. demands for unlimited access to weapons sites.

Quoting U.S. sources in Amman, Jordan, and in the Israeli air force, the newsletter says that in addition to searching for Scud missile bases, the units have been conducting reconnaissance missions of Iraqi troop movements, as well as preparing drills for rescuing downed American and British pilots and arranging hideouts.

The Israelis are said to have arrived in western Iraq from Turkey "with the permission of the Turkish generals."

The newsletter says that if the agreement hammered out by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan holds, the three countries will have to decide whether or not to withdraw their special units. □

## ADL: Arrest of black Baptist revives feelings of 'betrayal'

By Rebecca Segall

NEW YORK (JTA) — This week's arrest of the president of the National Baptist Convention on multiple charges of fraud has revived memories of a good deed gone awry.

Among the charges leveled against the Rev. Henry Lyons was the diversion of a \$225,000 donation from the Anti-Defamation League.

Only approximately \$31,000 of the gift was used by the Baptist reverend as intended: to rebuild vandalized black southern churches.

The balance has since been recovered and redistributed to the churches in need of repair, according to Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL.

Following news of Lyons' arrest Wednesday, Foxman said, "We feel betrayed on the one hand, but since the missing money was returned, we are satisfied."

Details regarding Lyons' embezzlement came to light after Lyons' wife, Deborah, was arrested Wednesday for allegedly setting fire to a waterfront house he owned with colleague Bernice Edwards.

Edwards was also arrested on charges of racketeering the same day.

At a 1996 news conference in New York, the ADL teamed up with the National Urban League to present the money to Lyons.

Weeks later, Lyons sent a letter to the ADL stating that six Alabama churches each received \$35,000 and that a seventh was due to receive \$15,000.

But an article in the Tampa Tribune reported three of those churches received checks for only \$10,000 each, and a fourth for as little as \$1000. The others received nothing.

After learning about the discrepancies between the amount given and the amount received by the churches, Foxman sent a letter to Lyons, asking "for a complete accounting."

Soon after, the balance of the funds was returned to ADL and redistributed to the needy churches. □