



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel apologizes to Switzerland

Israel issued a formal apology for a failed Mossad operation in the Swiss capital on Feb. 19, but stopped short of pledging that the foreign intelligence agency would refrain from future actions on Swiss territory.

The Mossad launched the operation after Israel received information that the fundamentalist Hezbollah movement was planning a terror attack on a Jewish target in Switzerland, according to a Swiss newspaper report.

Syria reportedly sends overtures

Syria is interested in resuming peace negotiations with Israel, according to the Israeli daily Ma'ariv.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent statement that he would withdraw Israeli troops from southern Lebanon in exchange for the proper "security safeguards" came in response to the overtures from Damascus, the paper reported.

Holocaust denier fined

A French court slapped a \$21,000 fine on a French scholar for minimizing the extent of the Holocaust in a book, but stopped short of giving him a prison sentence. After the verdict was issued, activists from Betar, a Zionist youth group, reportedly attacked four Arab journalists covering the trial. [Page 1]

Sharansky visits Russia

Israel's trade minister, Natan Sharansky, is visiting Russia for two days of talks. The meetings are expected to focus on Israeli concerns about Russian nuclear cooperation with Iran.

Sharansky is expected to speak with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov.

Weapons ferried from Jordan

Israeli security forces apprehended a Palestinian attempting to ferry two boatloads of weapons into the West Bank from Jordan via the Dead Sea.

The Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak, told the Cabinet that the intercepted arms, which included assault rifles, were apparently going to be delivered to the Palestinian Authority.

Palestinian officials denied any knowledge of the smuggling attempt.

French court fines writer for minimizing Holocaust

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — A French court has slapped a \$21,000 fine on a French scholar for minimizing the Holocaust, but stopped short of giving him a prison sentence.

Roger Garaudy, 84, a former Marxist philosopher and politician who converted to Islam, denied the existence of Nazi gas chambers and dismissed claims that 6 million Jews perished under the Nazis in his 1996 book, "The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics."

Contesting the truth of proven crimes against humanity is illegal in France and can be punished by up to one year in jail and a \$60,000 fine. Prosecutors had waived demands for a jail term.

Garaudy, who fought the Nazi occupation of France, also argued in his book that the slaughter of the Jews could be called pogroms or even a massacre, but did not qualify as genocide.

CRIF, the umbrella group of secular French Jewish organizations, applauded the verdict, but said it "did not understand the absence of punishment for the book's publisher, Vielle Taupe, which publishes extreme-right works.

"The attempt to deny the scale of the genocide of the Jews, which has been recognized by the international community, is an attack on history, memory and morality. It was a repugnant political and ideological maneuver aimed at delegitimizing the very existence of the State of Israel," CRIF said in a statement.

When the verdict was handed down last Friday, activists from Betar, a Zionist youth group, stood outside the courtroom, shouting "Nazi" and "Garaudy in Jail."

Dozens of police held them back when they attempted to assault extreme-right wing personalities — including the notorious French revisionist Robert Faurisson and Henri Fenet, a Frenchman who had fought with the Germans in World War II and was a member of the SS — as they entered the courtroom.

The Betar activists reportedly attacked four Arab journalists covering the trial, including an Egyptian television journalist who was beaten up as he was taping his broadcast.

Garaudy stayed away from the court.

Garaudy's trial had sparked a powerful wave of support across the Arab world, even in countries that have peace treaties with Israel.

Such support appeared to emanate from two, intertwined fronts: defense of his freedom of expression to question the Holocaust and support for his criticism of Israel and the "Zionist-controlled media."

Protesting outside the French Cultural Center in the Gaza Strip, 70 Palestinian intellectuals recently held banners proclaiming, "Garaudy, All of Palestine Is With You."

And in the Persian Gulf, the United Arab Emirates daily al-Khaleej published an appeal on its front page to its readers to send donations and messages of support to Garaudy.

But nowhere has Garaudy's star shone more brightly than in Egypt, where he recently visited as a guest of Egyptian Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni to lecture and participate in symposiums at the annual Cairo Book Fair.

Garaudy did not disappoint his hosts.

"Under France's freedom of speech, you can attack President Jacques Chirac or even the pope. "But when you criticize Israel, you are lost," Garaudy told a seminar

MIDEAST FOCUS

Would-be kidnapper sentenced

An Israeli court sentenced an Arab resident of eastern Jerusalem to 18 months in jail on charges of conspiring to kidnap Israeli soldiers and public figures, including Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert and Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo.

The court also said it would bring charges against another Arab who stands accused of involvement in a foundation that funnels moneys raised abroad to the families of Hamas suicide bombers.

Pro-Iraq demonstrations continue

Hundreds of Palestinians held pro-Iraq demonstrations over the weekend in the West Bank towns of Hebron and Ramallah.

The demonstrations, which have continued even after a diplomatic solution was apparently reached to defuse the crisis with Iraq, were widely viewed as a reflection of Palestinian discontent over the deadlocked negotiations with Israel.

Israeli jet crashes

An Israeli air force jet crashed near the West Bank town of Nablus during a Feb. 26 training flight, killing both the pilot and navigator.

According to an initial inquiry, the plane struck an antenna tower on a mountain. The two killed were identified as Maj. Uriel Kultin, 27, from Bat Yam, and Capt. Uri Manor, 22, from Haifa.

Religious group seeks children

A fervently Orthodox Jewish group is seeking parents willing to hand over their newborn sons to be raised in isolation and purity in preparation for building the Third Temple in Jerusalem, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The group is seeking only those families who are Kohanim, or members of the priestly class that served in the First and Second Temples, the newspaper reported.



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organized by Egypt's Ministry of Culture and other professional unions.

"This is because the media in the West is 95 percent controlled by the Zionists," he added.

Some Egyptians accused the West of double standards in trying Garaudy while protecting British author Salman Rushdie, whose novel "The Satanic Verses" prompted Iran's late leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, to issue a death sentence against him.

In France, CRIF officials denounced the support given Garaudy by the Arab world, saying they were "deeply upset and shocked" by "this anti-Semitic, obscurantist attitude, which can only be an obstacle to reconciliation among peoples."

A heated controversy over Garaudy's book swept France in 1996.

That year, Abbot Pierre, a Roman Catholic priest who had helped French Jews escape deportation to Nazi concentration camps, defended the author as an "honest man." □

(JTA correspondent Douglas Davis in London contributed to this report.)

U.S. presses Swiss firms to pay insurance policies

By Fredy Rom

ZURICH (JTA) — American pressure is mounting on Swiss insurance companies to make good on unpaid policies from the Holocaust era.

The row intensified last week after Swiss insurers argued that domestic laws bar them from opening up their books regarding the insurance policies taken out by Holocaust victims.

U.S. insurance officials, in turn, have accused Swiss insurers of blocking access to their archives to cover up their behavior during World War II.

The National Association of Insurance Commissioners has been holding a series of hearings across the United States to seek out Holocaust survivors and the heirs of victims who have not received payouts from insurance policies held during World War II.

The officials are investigating claims that European insurance firms blocked payments to the families of death camp victims.

Deborah Senn, president of the commissioners group, threatened to send American inspectors to Switzerland.

"We see a legal basis for investigations in Switzerland because these companies also operate in the U.S.," Senn said in an interview published here.

The efforts of her group are significant for European insurers because the American officials have regulatory power over the American affiliates and subsidiaries of the targeted European insurance companies.

In a reflection of how seriously Swiss officials take the issue, the Foreign Ministry will soon be dispatching Ambassador Thomas Borer to Washington for meetings with the U.S. insurance officials.

Borer, who has served as Switzerland's point man on issues relating to the country's wartime activities, spent much of last year dealing with accusations that Swiss banks had close financial ties to the Nazis and hoarded the contents of long-dormant bank accounts opened by Holocaust victims.

"We are setting up meetings with U.S. officials to discuss ways of solving this problem. We are trying to establish dialogue," said a Swiss Foreign Ministry spokeswoman.

Last year, a group of Holocaust victims and their families filed a class-action lawsuit against seven European insurance companies, alleging they withheld, concealed or converted the proceeds of policies sold before 1946.

The experiences of many of the claimants parallel those of depositors trying to collect on dormant Swiss bank accounts, but the sums at stake may be much larger in the insurance suit.

Lawyers for the survivors estimate that the class-action lawsuit, now pending in New York federal court, could affect 10,000 claimants and involve billions of dollars in damages. □

JEWISH WORLD

Alleged war criminal charged

Lithuanian officials announced they are pressing charges against a man alleged to have participated in the murder of Jews during World War II.

Kazys Gimzauskas, 89, is suspected of giving orders to arrest, interrogate, imprison and execute Jews between 1941 and 1944, when he was deputy head of the Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian security police, known as the *Saugumas*.

Gimzauskas served under Aleksandras Lileikis, 90, who is slated to go on trial this week on similar charges.

Lileikis and Gimzauskas deny the charges against them.

The bedridden Gimzauskas said he would not be able to attend his trial. A date for his trial has not yet been set.

Germany occupied Lithuania from 1941 to 1944, during which time approximately 94 percent of Lithuania's prewar Jewish community of 240,000 died in the Holocaust. The Baltic country is now home to some 5,000 Jews.

Gimzauskas moved to the United States in 1956 and lived in St. Petersburg, Fla. He returned to Lithuania in 1993.

Baltic leader calls for tolerance

Lithuania's new president called in his inaugural address for "tolerance for ethnic minorities and different religions."

After he was elected in January, reports surfaced in the Russian press that Valdas Adamkus fought on the side of Nazis during their occupation of Lithuania. Adamkus denies the charge.

Russian Jews seek shul's return

Jews in the southern Russian city of Krasnodar are charging that anti-Semitism among local officials lay behind their refusal to return a synagogue to the community.

The synagogue, which was built in the 1880s, was confiscated by Communist officials in 1936.

Human rights activists have charged that racist policies have been openly practiced by local authorities since the December 1996 election of a new regional governor.

Poland focuses on Jewish past

City officials in the Polish town of Plonsk announced a competition for historical work on Polish-Jewish relations.

They issued a call for memoirs, diaries, interviews and other works related to 20th-century relations between Jews and non-Jews in Poland.

Plonsk, located near Warsaw, is the birthplace of Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion.

Israel set to bring home remnant of Jews in Ethiopia

By Nancy Zuckerbrod

Washington Jewish Week

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Every day in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, roughly 2,000 Jews come together in a crowded compound to learn about Jewish rituals and prayer, Israeli culture and Hebrew.

In a few months, these Ethiopians, known as Falash Mura, will have their prayers answered — the compound will close and they will go home to Zion.

"The Ethiopian government has been very cooperative," said Avi Granot, Israel's ambassador to Ethiopia.

"Anyone who wants to leave Ethiopia can."

According to Israeli officials, some 3,500 Ethiopians who are believed to be Jewish and who are living in the northern province of Gondar, where Jews have historically resided, could also come to Israel within a year.

The Falash Mura are leaving the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa at a rate of 400 per month, according to Gadi Baltiansky, a spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

That's more than three times what the average rate of emigration from Ethiopia to Israel has been during the last few years.

Several American activists say the change in policy stems from a recent legal settlement between the Israeli government and the Israeli Ethiopian rights organization South Wing to Zion, as well as others.

But Baltiansky said it was a government decision that dates back to last June. He said it took time for Israeli officials to verify that the Ethiopians trying to go to Israel were of Jewish descent, which has apparently been verified.

"Their Judaism can't be questioned," he said.

The Falash Mura currently in Addis Ababa, or recent generations before them, converted to Christianity or assimilated out of Judaism.

Israel deemed them not Jewish and left them behind in 1991, when it airlifted some 14,000 Jews out of Addis Ababa during Operation Solomon.

This came seven years after the first airlift, Operation Moses.

Since then, the Falash Mura remaining in Ethiopia have returned to Judaism and live Orthodox lives centered around the compound. They are aided by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry.

That these Jews will finally be able to leave is "thrilling," said Rabbi Avis Miller, associate rabbi of Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, who visited Ethiopia in 1989.

With the plight of Ethiopian Jews waiting in Addis Ababa apparently near resolution, the Israeli government is turning its attention to the Falash Mura living in Gondar.

"We saw a community there that is in very critical condition," said Avraham Neguise, an Ethiopian Jewish activist who recently visited the region along with officials from the Jewish state.

"They are very sick," he said.

Neguise said in a telephone interview that he met with a family of 11 that had buried five of their children in the past two years. Their journey to join other Falash Mura in the city of Gondar from the isolated region of Lower Quara, near the Sudanese border, was treacherous.

An Israeli envoy in Addis Ababa, Avi Granot, confirmed that assessment in a telephone interview.

Granot said the difficulty of the journey partially accounts for why it took so long for this group of approximately 1,000 Jews to get to Gondar.

The ambassador said another 2,000 Jews are still living in villages in Quara.

"Every effort is being made to secure the aliyah of the remaining Jews both in Gondar and in Quara," Granot said. □

Jewish feminists recall when the 'earth shook'

By Rebecca Segall

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's been 25 years since the passionate movements of the 1960s inspired 500 Jewish women to come together for the first national Jewish women's conference.

"The impact of the first conference was seismic. I mean, the earth shook," said Letty Cottin Pogrebin.

Pogrebin was one of about 85 women who met last week to mark that pivotal event in the history of women in Judaism.

One of the few at last week's event who didn't attend the 1973 gathering, Pogrebin said she discovered her Jewish feminism only years after that first conference.

"It got all women from all sects to think about their roles in loving and critical ways," said Pogrebin, a founder of Ms. magazine. "We don't want to destroy, we want to be included; we want to be given our dignity as Jewish women."

"I think that the stamps that the organizers have left on the community set a tone of respect, beginning from a place of knowledge and spiritual commitment, rather than on trashing Judaism."

The conference in 1973 included sessions on: "Jewish Women in Political Life" led by then-lawmakers Bella Abzug and Elizabeth Holtzman; "Women and Spiritual Judaism"; "Women in Israel: Myth and Reality"; "Women in Jewish Education"; and "Jewish Women and Halachah."

"Our goal was to begin a Jewish feminist movement," said Doris Gold, who at the time of the 1973 conference was a coordinator for the National Organization for Women.

"This never actually happened," she said, meaning that nothing as institutional as NOW has emerged, "but what did happen is that the 1973 event stimulated an activist spirit among the women who attended, who brought their energies to their various Jewish programs."

Feminist ideas began to enter Jewish discourse. As Pogrebin put it: "We have to talk about things, before action can take place."

Indeed, there has been lots of talk and even some work in print.

The 25th anniversary event, held at Congregation Habonim in Manhattan, was decorated with tens of published works and other signs of accomplishments made by the first conference veterans.

The morning session focused on memories of the 25th conference and the afternoon session was titled "The Future Agenda." Authors of the most influential books on Jewish women's issues shared the room.

"Women's history tends to become forgotten, marginalized, or trivialized; we wanted to make sure that this would not happen" with the first conference, said Aviva Cantor, organizer of the event and author of "Jewish Women, Jewish Men: The Legacy of Patriarchy in Jewish Life," "The Egalitarian Haggadah" and editor of the "Bibliography on the Jewish Woman: 1900-1985."

Blu Greenberg, who attended both conferences and was a prime organizer and leader of last month's Conference on Feminism and Orthodoxy, said that in 1973 she agreed with the guest rabbis who opposed female rabbinic ordination. But now cites the achievement of women's ordination in Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist denominations as the biggest gain since that time. And she sets new goals:

"I think that right now exists the most learned generation of

Jewish women in Jewish history," Greenberg said. "This community of learned women will power the engine of ordination in Orthodoxy, because knowledge is the source of leadership and authority in Judaism."

In addition to affecting modern Orthodoxy and the liberal streams, feminism has penetrated even the most traditional streams of Judaism.

At the same time that the big names in Jewish feminism were meeting last week, there was another conference for Jewish women going on in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, N.Y.

"The feminist movements are a sign of the time of Moshiach," Miriam Greenberg said to a group of Lubavitch women, referring to the late Lubavitch Rebbe Menachem Schneerson's unusual declaration that because women play an essential role in bringing the Messiah, they should be admired by the entire community.

People, she said, "are finally recognizing women's extraordinary, spiritual role in Judaism." She is not talking about female rabbis, of course. Her issues are different. But they share one common goal: to obtain respect and spiritual growth within Judaism. □

Court's landmark decision bolsters war criminal cases

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — A Canadian court has ruled that a suspected war criminal who gained citizenship under false pretenses may be stripped of his citizenship and deported.

The court ruled that Wasily Bogutin, 87, lied about his past when he entered Canada in 1951, telling immigration officials nothing about his role during World War II with the Selidovka District Police in Ukraine.

The police unit had collaborated with the Nazis in murdering some civilians and deporting many others to forced labor camps in Germany between 1941 and 1943. Relying upon evidence that Canadian Justice Department officials gathered in Bogutin's native Ukraine last summer, the court determined that he took part in the deportations, although not necessarily the murders.

The court further determined that because he lied to gain admittance to Canada, his citizenship could be revoked.

Canada has long been accused of dragging its feet in launching proceedings against suspected war criminals living in its midst, but the ruling received plaudits from the Canadian Jewish Congress.

"It's the first time the government has achieved any success in court," said Irving Abella, chair of the CJC's War Crimes Committee. "The precedent has now been set so that those who lied about their role in World War II can be stripped of their citizenship, and once it's taken away from them, they can be deported."

The Justice Department won a conviction in 1990 against Latvian-born war-crimes suspect Konrad Kalejs, but Kalejs is not a Canadian citizen. More recently, lawyers for two suspects, Ladislaus Csizsik-Csatary of Toronto and Momertas Rolland Maciukas of Montreal, announced they would not contest denaturalization proceedings against them. Csizsik-Csatary has already left the country.

Abella urged that Bogutin be stripped of his citizenship and that deportation proceedings commence as soon as possible.

"We hope that this development will provide the additional momentum necessary to carry forward with the remaining cases still to be heard before the federal court," he said. □