



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

INS plans changes

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service plans to pull the plug on independent groups, including Jewish communal organizations across the country, which have been administering the civics portion of the citizenship test.

Beginning Sept. 1, only INS agencies will give the test — a move that immigration advocates fear will lengthen the waiting time for applicants. Jewish agencies administered tens of thousands of the tests last year to refugees from the former Soviet Union.

Report: Lebanese channel opens

Israel and Lebanon have reportedly opened a secret channel of negotiations to discuss an Israeli troop withdrawal from the southern Lebanon security zone. But Lebanon's foreign minister, Faris Bouez, said he saw "few hopes" for establishing peace with Israel as long as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu remained in office.

Israelis polled on Pollard

A large majority of Israelis polled recently believe that Israel should acknowledge that Jonathan Pollard was acting as its agent. The poll of 500 Israelis conducted by the Gallup Organization showed that 74 percent of the respondents called on Israel to take responsibility for Pollard, who is serving a life sentence in an American prison for spying for Israel.

Terror network uncovered

Israeli security forces uncovered a terrorist network from the Ramallah, Nablus and Jerusalem areas that was involved in two suicide bombings last year in Jerusalem, killing 21 people and wounding more than 300.

Palestinian security forces also arrested some members of a cell in the Nablus area. The suspects reportedly told the Palestinian security forces that the cell was planning an attack in central Israel.

Lileikis trial postponed

A Lithuanian court postponed for 10 weeks the trial of a man suspected of handing Jews over to Nazi death squads during World War II. The move, intended to give lawyers time to gather witnesses and documents, came a day after the start of proceedings against 91-year-old Aleksandras Lileikis. [Page 3]

Jews distance themselves from 'messianic' jubilee event

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — It looks, at first glance, like one more celebration of Israel's 50th birthday.

A closer look, however, reveals that "Israel's Jubilee: 50 Years in the Land!" is being run by leaders of the "messianic Jewish" movement, which cloaks Christian theology in Jewish terminology and practice.

The conference, slated to begin April 29 in Orlando, Fla., has prompted questions and confusion about its true intentions. Several prominent Jews invited to speak at the conference have backed out after learning more about who is behind it.

Promotional material for the event, sponsored by the Christian Alliance for Israel, says it will be "the largest gathering in American history to proclaim Christian love and commitment to Israel and the Jewish people."

"I'm trying to build unity here," said conference chairwoman Cheryl Schang, who describes herself as a "Christian Gentile" who lives in Jacksonville, Fla., where the Christian Alliance is based.

"I believe we have a biblical duty and responsibility to stand with Israel and support the Jewish people," Schang said.

But many Jews are not buying it. "This conference is part of their methodology for getting close to the Jewish community, which is exactly what they want," said Mark Powers, national director of Jews for Judaism, an anti-missionary organization based in Baltimore. "The subterfuge of saying it's an event just for Christians is pure baloney. It's an attempt to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the Jewish community, and any Jewish leader who falls for that gives them the credibility that they crave."

While evangelical Christian support for Israel — both political and financial — is not new, it makes some Jews uncomfortable. The discomfort stems in part because proselytizing is part of evangelical theology and in part because the domestic political agenda of that community veers sharply from that of most of the American Jewish community on matters from abortion to school prayer.

The fact that many of the organizers and speakers slated for this program are "messianic Jews" has raised the hackles of even some usual Jewish allies.

Rabbi Daniel Lapin, an Orthodox rabbi and political conservative based in Washington state, said he accepted an invitation to participate in the event but was unaware of who the organizers and other speakers were.

Lapin's name and photograph appear on promotional material for the five-day conference, alongside photos of people who have been at the forefront of missionizing Jews to believe in Jesus.

Lapin said in an interview that he would now reconsider his plans.

Several prominent Jews who say they were initially unfamiliar with the organizers have decided not to attend. These include Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America; and Howard Kohr, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby.

"We certainly welcome Christians celebrating Israel's 50th anniversary," Hoenlein said. "But if they're Jews for Jesus and other proselytizing groups, we don't give them credibility by associating with them."

Some also say they were misled by the organizers and were told that other Jewish leaders had already accepted when, in fact, they had not. "They absolutely were

MIDEAST FOCUS

Premier won't send Shoval

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided not to send a former ambassador to the United States, Zalman Shoval, to lobby the U.S. Congress against President Clinton's Middle East peace initiative. Netanyahu has launched a campaign aimed at avoiding any U.S. pressure on Israel to accept the initiative.

Netanyahu visits Europe

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu arrived in Madrid for the start of a European tour that is slated to include meetings in Germany, Norway and Britain.

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai is expected to hold talks with senior officials in the Netherlands and France this weekend. Among the issues on their agenda are the peace process and a security arrangement with Lebanon that would enable Israel to withdraw its forces from southern Lebanon.

Israelis, Swiss disagree

A dispute between Israel and Switzerland delayed the release of a Mossad agent arrested last month in Switzerland. Israel requested that the agent be deported, but Swiss officials announced that he will be put on trial. Israel's attorney general, Elyakim Rubinstein, returned to Israel after trying to secure the release of the agent, who was arrested for allegedly trying to bug the Bern apartment of a Lebanese national with suspected ties to Hezbollah.

Rabbi: Yediot story a hoax

A rabbi from Bnei Brak denounced as a hoax a newspaper report that a religious court there forced a man to divorce his wife because she was raped.

The story drew protests from Israeli women's groups after it was published last month by the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot. An editor at Yediot was quoted as saying he would check the rabbi's charge.

deceptive in things they said when they invited me," said Klein.

"I'm offended by these Jews-for-Jesus-Hebrew-Christians-Messianics, whatever you want to call them," he said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was also invited. And although Schang, the conference chairwoman, said the prime minister had said he was hoping to attend, a spokeswoman at the Israeli Embassy in Washington said Tuesday that he would not be there.

Schang said she does not understand why Jews object to participating in an event with "messianic Jewish" leaders. "Somehow they got it in their mind that I'm out to convert them, which is absolutely not true," she said.

Schang said there would be no proselytizing permitted at the conference.

But critics note that one of the organizers of the Florida event is Jonathan Bernis, a self-declared rabbi and head of "Hear O Israel!" ministries who has toured the former Soviet Union for the last three years holding massive rallies in Moscow, Kiev and other large cities with significant Jewish populations.

In articles in the Messianic Times newspaper, Bernis claims to have converted 35,000 Russian Jews to belief in Jesus in the last couple of years, said Powers of Jews for Judaism.

Others slated to speak at the "Israel Jubilee" event include:

- Joel Chernoff, who runs the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, and his brother David, who is the "rabbi" of Beth Yeshua, a large "messianic" congregation in Philadelphia.

- Jay Sekulow, a Jewish convert to Christianity and an attorney who runs Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice in Virginia Beach, Va. Sekulow has represented Jews for Jesus before the U.S. Supreme Court and in a lawsuit against the New York Jewish Community Relations Council.

Schang said she is worried that the refusal of Jewish leaders to participate will damage the support many mainstream Jewish organizations are now trying to build in the evangelical community. "I don't want the Christian community feeling like the Jews are out to get them, that the Jews are trying to tear down their support," she said. □

Clinton reappoints chairman of Holocaust museum council

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Clinton has moved to avoid another flare-up at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum by reappointing Miles Lerman this week as the head of its governing body.

Lerman, whose five-year term as chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council was set to expire in May, embroiled the museum in controversy earlier this year when he flip-flopped on extending an invitation to Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to visit the museum.

Lerman absorbed a second round of criticism last month after the museum council forced Walter Reich, the museum's director, to resign in the wake of the incident.

In several highly visible op-ed pieces, supporters of Reich, including Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel and Marvin Kalb, director of the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University, accused the museum council of unfairly scapegoating him.

Lerman blamed the Arafat episode on "bad advice" from Reich, who opposed the visit. Lerman later acknowledged that he had erred by failing to consult with the council's executive committee about the invitation. Some Reich supporters publicly called on Clinton to replace Lerman, contributing to an atmosphere that museum officials worried would prove damaging to the institution.

For that reason, observers said, the Clinton administration decided to act sooner rather than later on Lerman's reappointment in order to defuse any further controversy.

The search for Reich's replacement, meanwhile, continues. The museum's associate director, Sara Bloomfield, who has worked at the museum and with its organizing group for nearly 12 years, will become acting director April 1. □



Daily News Bulletin

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JEWISH WORLD

Ford sued by ex-slave laborer

A Russian woman forced to work at a factory in Nazi Germany run by a subsidiary of the Ford Motor Co. filed suit against the auto manufacturer, claiming the company illegally profited from her work as a slave laborer.

The suit, filed in New Jersey, was made possible after Germany last year enacted a law allowing forced laborers to file claims against corporations that used forced labor during the war.

Sweden lists dormant accounts

Sweden published the names of the holders of 649 bank accounts totaling some \$880,000 that have remained dormant since the end of World War II.

Jewish representatives on a government-appointed commission probing the accounts said they believed some of the moneys belonged to Jews murdered during the Holocaust.

The list of account holders can be viewed on the World Wide Web at: www.ud.se

Court hears voucher case

The Wisconsin Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a constitutional challenge to a \$55 million school voucher program in Milwaukee.

Last year, a Wisconsin appeals court struck down the initiative as unconstitutional, saying it violated the state's prohibition against using state money "for the benefit of religious societies, or religious or theological seminaries."

Under the plan adopted by the state, private and parochial schools would receive \$3,600 per student.

Swiss seek retraction

The Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center refused a Swiss request to retract a report it issued in January charging that Switzerland forced Jewish refugees during World War II to work in slave labor camps.

A Swiss official called the report "nothing but an anti-Swiss polemic." Some former Jewish refugees also criticized the report.

Ex-Resistance member testifies

A senior member of the French Resistance testified that Maurice Papon was not a member of the anti-Nazi movement.

Jean-Pierre Bloch, a Jewish Resistance member, said Papon's name was not on the roster of the group's members.

Papon, on trial before a French court on charges of ordering the arrest or deportation of 1,560 Jews — including 223 children — from wartime France, has repeatedly maintained that he was a member of the Resistance.

Lithuanian court postpones trial of alleged war criminal

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A Vilnius judge has adjourned the trial of an alleged Nazi war criminal for 10 weeks — just a day after the trial began.

In ruling for the adjournment, however, a judge with the Vilnius Regional Court, Viktoras Kazys, rejected an appeal by the lawyer for Aleksandras Lileikis to drop the charges against his 91-year-old client.

Lileikis is accused of having handed Jews over to Nazi death squads during World War II while he was head of the Saugamus, the Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian security police.

The defense categorically denies the charges of genocide against Lileikis, saying they are based on documents forged by the KGB after World War II in an attempt to discredit Lithuanian emigres.

On Thursday, the court commissioned the prosecution to obtain originals of the documents used as evidence against Lileikis. Many of the documents have been provided by the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations.

The court also instructed the prosecution to question witnesses living outside of Lithuania, including an elderly Jewish woman living in the United States.

According to the defense, the woman, whose name is given as Grace Montes and who reportedly lives in an old-age home in Denver, Colo., might be Shifra Grodnikaite, a Jewish woman Lileikis has claimed he rescued during the Nazi occupation from 1941 to 1944.

Grodnikaite is reportedly living in the United States or Israel, but investigators have been unable to locate her.

Lileikis' lawyer said he was satisfied by the court's decision to put off the trial until May 18.

Lithuanian Jewish officials who have said that they would not attend court hearings to avoid possible clashes with ultranationalists, were outraged by the judge's decision. One Jewish activist who insisted on anonymity said that by delaying the trial authorities are clearly waiting for Lileikis to die.

Lileikis is being tried in absentia. Earlier this year, he reportedly had a stroke, and Lithuanian officials said it would be difficult for him to attend court sessions.

The Lileikis case is the first trial for Holocaust crimes in any of the three Baltic states since they gained their independence from the Soviet Union seven years ago.

Some 94 percent of Lithuania's prewar Jewish community of 240,000 died in the Holocaust. □

Israeli held for smuggling diamonds

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian authorities have detained an Israeli on diamond-smuggling charges.

Avraham Aderet was hiding more than five pounds of diamonds on his body last Friday when he tried to leave Russia, according to customs officials at the Moscow international airport.

According to investigators with the Moscow police department, Aderet said an unidentified person had asked him to transfer the diamonds on an El Al flight bound for Tel Aviv.

The precious stones have an estimated value of \$150,000 to \$250,000.

The Israeli Embassy in Moscow confirmed the arrest and said it was monitoring the situation. Representatives of Moscow's Jewish community say they have been making every effort to ease the situation of the 45-year-old Tel Aviv resident, who is an observant Jew.

According to Rabbi Berel Lazar, chairman of the Rabbinical Alliance of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the community has been providing the detainee with kosher food. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

U.S. standing in Arab world may influence peace process*By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With the U.S.-Iraq confrontation off the front burner, Israel and the Palestinians are busily preparing for a new bout of American diplomacy.

A new peacemaking initiative was widely anticipated in the aftermath of a showdown with Iraq.

Pundits predicted that the United States, unpopular and resented in large parts of the Arab world after another massive bombardment of Iraq, would have made high-profile efforts to restart the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process — by vigorously pressuring Israel if necessary.

As it happened, the bombardment was averted by the diplomatic efforts of the U.N. secretary-general. But resolving the Iraqi crisis peacefully did little to diminish Arab hostility toward Washington.

Across the region the argument is often made that Washington displays "double standards." Israel, it is claimed, flouts or ignores U.N. resolutions just as Iraq does. And Israel, too, has weapons of mass destruction. It is not hard, of course, to punch holes in this spurious analogy, and U.S. diplomats regularly do so.

Just the same, the Clinton administration would clearly like to be perceived, at least by the Arab moderates, as being even-handed. Hence the expectation this week, in Israel and in the Gaza Strip, that a renewed American diplomatic initiative is imminent.

In meetings President Clinton held in January with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, it was clear that an American proposal was taking shape. Sources say that under the proposal, Israel would withdraw another 13.1 percent from the West Bank. That redeployment would be made in phases and would be directly linked to Palestinian cooperation on security issues.

The Palestinians want much more than the 13.1 percent. But they will not balk because their key demand — that another Israeli redeployment follow later this year — enjoys Washington's support. For the Israeli government, 13.1 percent is too much. It prefers to keep the figure down to a single digit and to make that redeployment the last. Israel also wants any subsequent troop pullbacks to be part of the final-status negotiations.

But the way that the United States emerged from the latest round of its seven-year conflict with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein may determine if, and how, this dispute is resolved.

Can the Netanyahu government now more readily afford to reject U.S. proposals given the way Washington's standing in the Arab world has been weakened? And does Washington's determination to improve its position among the Arab moderates mean that it will push all the harder for Netanyahu — and Arafat — to swallow its proposals for advancing the peace process?

Israeli and Palestinian leaders, at any rate, are anxious to project an image of earnest desire to move matters forward. This explains a recent intense series of meetings between the two sides.

Last week, Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai met with Arafat's second-in-command, Mahmoud Abbas, to discuss an issue left unresolved from the 1995 Interim Agreement — the opening of a Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinians

asserted later that nothing was achieved at the meeting and that the airport's opening is still blocked by disputes over security.

But this did not prevent the parties from arranging additional meetings this week, at the home of the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Edward Walker, just to show how earnest they were.

Israeli Cabinet minister Ariel Sharon, meanwhile, is understood to be conducting contacts on a high level with the Palestinian Authority, and there are reports that Netanyahu is also holding similar meetings.

The expectant atmosphere that was created after the Iraqi crisis was defused has also affected the dormant peace talks with Syria and Lebanon. Israeli Cabinet minister Michael Eitan, long an advocate of a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, said he discerned at Sunday's Cabinet meeting a significant shift in the prime minister's policy regarding a pullback.

A lengthy debate took place, in the wake of fighting last week in Lebanon that left three Israeli soldiers dead.

Netanyahu and Mordechai have both stressed in recent days that Israel accepts U.N. Security Council Resolution 425, issued in 1978, requiring it to withdraw from southern Lebanon and requiring the Lebanese government to take control of the area.

Lebanon's foreign minister was quoted as saying that there was nothing new in Netanyahu's remarks about the resolution, and that Israel must unconditionally withdraw from Lebanon.

Neither Netanyahu nor Mordechai endorses the call for unilateral withdrawal — a call that is still not mainstream, but one that has been growing stronger of late, both in the Likud and in the opposition Labor Party, as the Israeli death toll has risen during the past year. But both men seem to be focusing on what the Beirut government and army might be able to do in terms of security guarantees, rather than holding out for a comprehensive peace accord with Syria.

Mordechai, who was scheduled to visit France this weekend, has signaled that he wishes to follow up on an earlier dialogue with Paris on possible French involvement, both on the ground and in the diplomatic arena, to facilitate an Israeli withdrawal.

But French officials were reportedly skeptical about achieving an understanding on southern Lebanon without Syrian agreement. A senior French official was quoted in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* as saying, "We intend to try to convince Syria and Israel to renew negotiations. This is a central condition for talks on Lebanon."

Such skepticism also was expressed by the chief of staff of the Israeli Defense Force, Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak. He was quoted as telling a Knesset committee this week that Syria was unlikely to give Beirut the go ahead to make a separate deal with Israel out of concern that it would undermine Syria's negotiating position.

On Syria, two of Netanyahu's top aides flew to Paris on Sunday for a brief visit that reportedly was linked to recent signals emanating from Damascus that Syrian President Hafez Assad was interested in resuming the peace talks with Israel that were suspended two years ago. Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh and Netanyahu political adviser Uzi Arad reportedly met with a diplomat who had conveyed the overture from Assad.

Syrian wariness over possible progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track, or over possible progress toward an Israel withdrawal from Lebanon, was a recurrent phenomenon between 1993 and 1996, when the Israeli-Arab peace process was in constant movement. To that extent, at least, the latest signals from Syria may now be promising. □