



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 44

Monday, March 9, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Ex-Nazis get life

A military appeals court in Rome sentenced former Nazi officers Erich Priebke and Karl Hass to life for their part in Italy's worst World War II massacre.

The ruling came as a stunning revision of earlier verdicts regarding the two men's participation in the 1944 massacre of 335 men and boys at the Ardeatine caves near Rome. About 75 of the victims were Jews. [Page 2]

Premier drafts peace plan

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu drafted a four-point peace plan for presentation to British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Some Israeli media reports were skeptical about the plan, suggesting that the premier's weekend trip to Europe was intended to deflect possible American pressures on Israel.

Mordechai meets French officials

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai held talks in Paris regarding an Israeli proposal to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon in exchange for a security guarantee from Lebanon to maintain quiet in the area. French officials were reportedly pessimistic about the feasibility of implementing the arrangement outside any agreement that includes Syria.

Russian decision sparks criticism

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu strongly criticized a Russian decision to build two more nuclear reactors at a plant near the Iranian city of Bushehr.

The Russians have "all kinds of explanations for these reactors," the premier said after a meeting with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. "I am not convinced that it satisfies us."

Exhibit title sparks controversy

Some Ellis Island officials and some Jewish groups are objecting to the term "concentration camp" being part of the title of an exhibit about the involuntary incarceration of Japanese Americans in the United States during World War II.

Jewish American and Japanese American leaders are slated to meet to discuss the title of the exhibit, which is scheduled to open next month at the Ellis Island Museum.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Czech synagogue renewal key part of communal revival

By Randi Druzin

PRAGUE (JTA) — It is a tale of two synagogues.

One is being restored to its former glory; the other is being rebuilt on the ashes of one of Central Europe's largest synagogues.

Closed for decades since World War II, the Great Synagogue of Pilsen was rededicated earlier last month after undergoing some \$1.7 million in renovations.

"It was incredible," said Arnost Bergmann, leader of Pilsen's Jewish community. "It was like a dream come true. I couldn't believe it."

The synagogue, which has two 150-foot towers, can seat more than 200 people — almost double the number of the city's small Jewish community.

Participating in the Feb. 11 ceremonies were the chief rabbi of the Czech Republic, Karol Sidon, and Israel's ambassador to Prague, Raphael Gvir, who carried a Torah to the synagogue from the head office of the Pilsen Jewish community.

The speakers included the mayor of Pilsen, Zdenek Prosek, who commemorated the 3,000 local Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

The synagogue, which was built at the end of the 19th century, was saved from destruction during World War II because the Nazis used it as a storehouse for looted Jewish property. About 15 years ago, the local Jewish community began raising funds for its renovation.

"We approached companies and Jewish communities all over the world," said Bergmann. "But we couldn't raise more than \$3,000."

Then, in 1991, the Czech government designated the synagogue a historical site and earmarked \$1.7 million for its renovation. The Pilsen municipal government also contributed to the effort. An additional \$2.9 million is needed to refurbish the frescoes, organs and rabbi's quarters.

Bergmann said the synagogue — which he described as one of the world's largest — will not only be used for worship, but also for concerts and cultural events, which he hopes will cover operational expenses.

In the northern Czech town of Liberec, the local synagogue needed far more than a renovation.

When Nazi troops stormed through Liberec in November 1938, demolishing Jewish shops and homes, they intended to crush Jewish life in the northern Bohemian town forever. The local synagogue, which was built in 1889, was destroyed.

"There was nothing but ruins," said Samuel Gutman, head of Liberec's Jewish community. "The Germans did a thorough job."

But now construction crews are busy erecting a building that will house a synagogue and research library whose collection will reflect its location in the former Sudetenland, which lies at the crossroads of three cultures — Czech, German and Polish.

Hitler annexed the Sudetenland in 1938 after signing the Munich Pact with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, whose widely criticized policy of appeasement was intended to prevent the recurrence of a world war.

"We got the land back through restitution and were deciding what to do with it," said Gutman. "We wanted to pay tribute to those who perished in the Holocaust and decided this undertaking was worthwhile." The project was launched in October 1995

MIDEAST FOCUS

Letter makes peace plea

More than 1,500 Israeli reserve officers and soldiers urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to pursue peace with the Palestinians rather than expand West Bank settlements.

A government policy aimed at settlement expansion at the price of peace "will arouse doubts in our hearts about the justice of our course," they wrote in a full-page advertisement published in the Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot*.

Bugging target linked to attacks

The reported target of a botched Mossad bugging operation in Bern was linked by Israeli intelligence to bombings in 1992 and 1994 of Jewish targets in Argentina that left more than 100 dead, according to the Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot*.

Five Mossad agents were caught last month while attempting to bug the apartment of Abdallah El-Zein, who was linked in the Israeli media to Hezbollah — a connection El-Zein has denied.

Barak apology sought

Members of the Likud Party demanded that Israeli opposition leader Ehud Barak apologize for his comment in a television interview that were he a Palestinian youth, he would probably join a terrorist group.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Barak's remarks "deplorable," adding that it "could be interpreted among Palestinian youths as approving or encouraging their joining terrorist organizations."

Settlers move into mobile homes

Jewish settlers moved into 11 mobile homes near the West Bank settlement of Eli.

The settlers claimed they were creating a new neighborhood of Eli, but Israeli peace activists claimed they were attempting to establish a new settlement.



Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
 Mark J. Jaffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*
 Lisa Hostein, *Editor*
 Kenneth Bandler, *Managing Editor*
 Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
 © JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

under the patronage of Czech President Vaclav Havel and his German counterpart, Roman Herzog.

They had hoped it would promote good relations between the two countries, both of which have pledged to cover the construction costs.

The new synagogue's sanctuary will seat 120 people — more than ample space for the 84 members of the town's Jewish congregation.

The building will also house a lecture hall and the administrative offices of Liberec's Jewish community, which consists of 30 families. Gutman said the synagogue, which is slated to open in the spring of 1999, is the first in the region in 60 years.

The new building will also house an extensive library that will include more than 200,000 volumes of non-fiction in Czech and other languages.

The library's vice director, Hana Opatra, said the collection would be unique.

"It has a lot of material from the second half of the 19th century and from the first four decades of this one," she said. "Much of the material deals with issues connected to the Sudeten region."

Authorities anticipate visitors not only from the Czech Republic, but also from Poland and Germany. Certainly, some of the material in the library will touch on what curators refer to as the "sometimes tense and awkward relations" among the three nations bordering the Sudeten region.

It is an uncomfortable subject for some — but one that is being given some attention. □

Court: Harsher sentences for convicted war criminals

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — In a stunning revision of earlier verdicts, a military appeals court in Rome has sentenced two former Nazi SS officers to life for their part in Italy's worst World War II massacre.

Relatives of victims killed during the 1944 Ardeatine Caves massacre burst into applause Saturday as former SS Capt. Erich Priebke and Maj. Karl Hass were sentenced.

Prosecutors said Priebke would be held under house arrest, while Hass would remain free pending an expected appeal to Italy's highest court.

Priebke was also quoted by Italian Television as saying he would appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

The new sentences are just the latest act in a legal drama that began when Priebke was discovered living in Argentina in 1994 and extradited to Italy 18 months later.

A military court convicted Priebke in 1996 of having participated in the massacre, but did not sentence him to any jail time.

After a public outcry, the verdict was annulled and a new trial ordered.

Priebke, 84, then received a 15-year sentence last year for his role in the massacre, which killed 335 men and boys, about 75 of them Jews.

This sentence was reduced to five years because of extenuating circumstances — and because of time already served, Priebke faced less than a year in jail.

He had launched his appeal largely to clear his name. Prosecutors also appealed to try to get a harsher sentence against Priebke.

At last year's trial, Hass, who was a prosecution witness in the first trial, was sentenced to 10 years and eight months for his role in the massacre, but was set free immediately due to extenuating circumstances.

Before the verdict was announced, Priebke read a 50-minute statement claiming he was being prosecuted as a symbol "of all the evils" of World War II.

"I have been chosen to keep the memory of all the evils of that time alive," he said. "It doesn't really matter who Erich Priebke is and what he has done."

"Even Argentina, to which I gave 50 years of my life, has issued an expulsion order and doesn't want me any more. Even Germany, where I was born, took away my passport and now wants to put me on trial for the things that it ordered me do 50 years ago," he said. □

JEWISH WORLD

Jewish sites targeted

Three members of a white supremacist group arrested last month by the FBI were planning to bomb the offices of the Anti-Defamation League in New York and the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles along with other buildings around the United States, an FBI agent said at the men's bail hearing.

The suspects were also charged with planning to rob banks to finance the bombings and hatching a scheme to contaminate a city's water supply with cyanide.

The judge at the hearing ordered the three men held without bond. He also set a trial date for April 27.

France to search for assets

France appointed a committee to search for millions of dollars in Jewish assets that were confiscated by the state during World War II.

The committee will investigate French banks and credit agencies that held the assets during the war.

French Jewish officials criticized the move, saying the committee was made up of former banking officials who were not objective.

They also called for the creation of an independent body that would employ private auditors.

New Moscow shul completed

A new synagogue that was built with a bequest from a Moscow-based Muslim charity was dedicated in the Russian capital.

Including the new Darchei Shalom Synagogue — Hebrew for Ways of Peace — there are now four synagogues operating in Moscow.

The three-story synagogue, decorated with a big, stained-glass Star of David on the front, stands next to a Russian Orthodox church and a mosque.

Australian Jews describe 'rift'

Australian Jewish leaders sent a strongly worded letter to the speaker of Israel's Knesset calling for the establishment of a legislative committee to probe the events surrounding last July's bridge collapse at the Maccabiah Games in Ramat Gan.

Five Australian athletes died and dozens more were injured in the tragedy, which created a "rift between Australian Jewry and Israel," according to the letter.

Austria to hold commemoration

Austria will hold its first annual "Remembrance Day for the Victims of National Socialism" on May 5.

The announcement was made in New York by Holocaust survivor Leon Zelman, director of the Jewish Welcome Service Vienna, a private organization that helps finance trips for Jews who fled Vienna during the World War II era but now wish to return for a visit.

Maryland prosecutors reject Israeli deal on teen who fled

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — An American teen-ager who fled to Israel after allegedly committing a brutal murder in Maryland will remain, for now, in the Jewish state.

Maryland prosecutors last week rejected a compromise offered by an Israeli judge that would have brought Samuel Sheinbein back to the United States to stand trial.

Under the deal, which Sheinbein had accepted, any jail time would have been served in Israel.

Sheinbein, who after the murder of Alfredo Enrique Tello claimed Israeli citizenship, contends that his father's status as an Israeli extends to him. Israeli officials say otherwise. While they have not questioned the elder Sheinbein's citizenship, Israeli officials, including the attorney general, say the youth is not an Israeli because his father, born in pre-state Palestine, left the country at a young age.

Sheinbein's attorney, former Justice Minister David Libai, has argued in Jerusalem District Court that Sheinbein is an Israeli citizen.

The Israeli Supreme Court is expected to have the final say in the extradition matter if the lower court rules that Sheinbein is not an Israeli citizen. The recommended compromise was intended to head off appeals that could take up to two years.

The deal with Maryland prosecutors would have afforded Sheinbein the arrangement for jail time contained in an international treaty signed by most United Nations member states.

The treaty allows for criminals convicted in foreign courts to serve their sentence in their country of citizenship.

Although Maryland officials have rejected the compromise as unworkable because of potential loopholes, they have not ruled out an arrangement that would have Sheinbein serve a prison sentence in Israel as long as the American courts would have a say in any parole considerations.

Israeli officials are quick to point out that Sheinbein will face prosecution in any event. Israel has vowed to prosecute him in the Jewish state if the courts rule that Sheinbein cannot be extradited.

Reports that Sheinbein tried to avoid the death penalty by accepting the compromise proved to be unfounded because Maryland does not execute criminals who were under the age of 18 when the crime was committed. □

Orthodox Jews in uproar over news report

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Orthodox Jews have been in an uproar over what they charge was a fabricated story in a major Israeli newspaper.

Now, another Israeli newspaper's investigation of the incident appears to lend credence to that charge. The mass-circulation Yediot Achronot reported last month that a religious court in Bnei Brak forced a man to divorce his wife because she was raped.

A Bnei Brak rabbi last week denounced the story as a hoax. A Ha'aretz reporter, attempting to verify the Yediot report, said the story was untrue.

The reporter, appearing on Israel Television, said she tried for a week to locate the woman referred to in the Yediot report and learned that a rumor about a similar incident had been circulating for some time.

The original story also drew protests from Israeli women's groups after it was published.

A group called Manof — the Center for Jewish Information has filed a complaint with a journalists association against the reporter who wrote the original story, saying he acted on rumors that were not thoroughly checked.

Officials at Yediot said in response that the story was based on sources who stood by their word. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Religious pluralism crisis not felt on college campus***By Susan Jacobs*

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla. (JTA) — The religious pluralism issue that is so divisive elsewhere does not seem to be much of a factor on the American college campus.

"There's a strong sense of the Jewish community being a pluralistic community," said Aaron Benson, a senior at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "There are students who actively consider themselves Reform, Conservative or Orthodox but there's a sense they can all work together for the benefit of the community."

Controversy over religious pluralism issues in Israel have generated a crisis in Israel-Diaspora relations and strained relations between the Orthodox and liberal movements in the United States.

But religious pluralism was not addressed in any of the sessions at the recent Charlotte and Jack J. Spitzer B'nai B'rith Hillel Forum on Public Policy, an annual conference for Jewish college students, that was held in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., last month.

"If you set up a session to talk about the divides in the Jewish community, people will be divided," said Richard Joel, president and international director of the Hillel — the Foundation for Jewish College Life.

"The safest place in terms of the pluralism issue is on the campus," Joel said.

Students attending the conference seemed to have found ways of dealing with the issue on a practical level on their campuses.

"We don't discuss it so much," said Jessica Schoengold, a senior at Boston University. The university's Hillel holds separate Shabbat services for each of the denominations, but the students convene for a common kiddush on Friday nights.

"On the whole, I think we approach it well. It doesn't get argued about," Schoengold said.

Sarah Radin, a sophomore at the University of Texas said, "Our campus is pretty unified. Everyone respects each other's levels of observance."

On her campus, Orthodox students usually attend services at the Chabad house, a practice common at several schools, while Reform and Conservative students go to Hillel for services.

Some Jewish communal observers say the issue does not resonate among college students because the nature of campus life is different from the broader Jewish community.

"The college campus is the place where people of different ideologies interact. They have operational pluralism even if they don't have ideological pluralism," said Steven Bayme, the American Jewish Committee's national director of Jewish communal affairs.

Larry Sternberg, director of the Perlmutter Institute for Jewish Advocacy at Brandeis University, said issues related to pluralism "manifest themselves differently on campus."

"The conflicts are more around the issues of space. That's a good conflict; it means they're all doing well," said Sternberg.

When Lauren Mogul began attending the City University of New York's Baruch College, the campus had separate organizations for Russian Jews and Orthodox Jews in addition to the Hillel that attracted Conservative and Reform Jews. The groups have since merged with Hillel.

"There's no reason why we can't celebrate together," she said. "There is a sense that Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jews are different, but at the same time, we're all Jews."

Jason Stein, a sophomore at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, said, "We respect each other. We embrace the differences." □

Netanyahu taps military officer to head — and overhaul — Mossad*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The newly appointed head of Mossad will have some daunting work ahead of him.

Ephraim Halevy, a former deputy head of the foreign intelligence service, will oversee an overhaul and rehabilitation of the organization.

Mossad's vaunted image has been tarnished over the past several months, which saw the bungled attempt last September on the life of a Hamas leader in Jordan, the arrest of a senior Mossad officer suspected of feeding false information to his superiors and a botched bugging attempt last month in Switzerland that led to the arrest of a Mossad agent.

Along with announcing Halevy's appointment Wednesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also named Maj. Gen. Amiram Levine, the head of the Israel Defense Force's northern command, to serve as Mossad's deputy director.

The premier acknowledged that there had been damage to the agency as a result of recent "malfunctions" as well as "unnecessary and irresponsible" leaks to the media.

Halevy, who enjoys a good relationship with Jordan's King Hussein, helped restore ties between the two countries after a botched Mossad assassination attempt on Jordanian soil last September threatened Israeli-Jordanian relations.

The failed attempt on a Hamas leader in Jordan was a major factor in Danny Yatom's recent decision to resign from Mossad.

There were media reports suggesting that Netanyahu would have Halevy serve as Mossad director for a transitional period until Levine was ready to take over.

But at the news conference, Netanyahu stressed that Halevy would be taking over the intelligence agency for a significant amount of time.

Netanyahu said he would present the new appointments before the government for approval, and that he expected Halevy to take up the new post in the coming weeks.

Yatom agreed to stay on until Halevy assumed the post, Netanyahu said.

In a separate development, the chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Uzi Landau of the Likud, dismissed as "nonsense" a British newspaper report regarding a failed Mossad operation in Bern.

According to the report, a team of Mossad agents was sent to Switzerland last month to assassinate two businessmen — not to bug an apartment, as had been widely reported — who intended to purchase biological and chemical weapons in eastern Europe for Hezbollah.

Interviewed on Israel Radio, Landau termed the report the result of a damaging — and ridiculous — leak that could prove harmful to state security. □