



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 46

Wednesday, March 11, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Palestinians killed at roadblock

Israeli troops opened fire on a van at a roadblock near the West Bank town of Hebron, killing three Palestinians.

The army said the troops opened fire after the vehicle tried to run over soldiers at the checkpoint, lightly wounding one of them. Palestinians rioted at the site after news of the incident spread. [Page 3]

Egyptian magazine lambasted

Egyptian officials in Washington condemned an article in an Egyptian magazine that accused the U.S. ambassador to Egypt of being a "Jewish rabbi disguised as a diplomat." An Egyptian official called the magazine, *Ros el-Yusuf*, "scummy" and said he shared Daniel Kurtzer's view of the "offensive" article, which included a doctored photo of Kurtzer dressed as a Chasidic Jew. [Page 4]

Clinton, Blair confer on Mideast

President Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair agreed to coordinate efforts to revive the stalled peace process, according to a spokesman for Blair.

The two leaders agreed during a telephone call on the necessity for "rapid progress" in the deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the spokesman said.

Netanyahu, Hassan meet

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan held talks aimed at restoring Israeli-Jordanian relations, which were strained by a failed Mossad attempt last September to assassinate a Hamas leader in Amman.

The prince also met with Israeli defense officials to discuss deepening security ties. They discussed the renewal of relations between the Mossad and Jordanian security services. [Page 3]

Terrorist cites Barak comment

A Palestinian terrorist currently on trial in Israel justified his actions by citing Labor Party leader Ehud Barak's recent remark that he been born a Palestinian, he probably would have joined a terrorist organization. The remark set off new round of demands from the governing Likud Party that Barak apologize. Barak in turn accused the Likud of entering into a "bizarre" alliance with terrorist groups to get political mileage out of his remark.

NEWS ANALYSIS

New hurdles mark double blow for non-U.S. citizen immigrants

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Immigrants to America took a double hit from Washington last week when a plan to restore food stamps hit a snag in Congress at the same time that the Clinton administration erected new hurdles in the citizenship process.

In an effort to eliminate fraud in the citizenship process, the Immigration and Naturalization Service announced that it would no longer allow independent groups to administer the written civics test required of many would-be citizens.

For tens of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union, the change will complicate their efforts to achieve citizenship, immigrant activists say.

Without citizenship, immigrants cannot vote or participate fully in American society. In addition, the desire for citizenship has intensified over the past few years in the wake of the 1996 welfare reform law, which cut off access to many social services for non-citizen immigrants and refugees.

Since that time, there has been a huge flood of citizenship applications from all immigrant groups.

Jewish organizations in virtually every community with an immigrant population administer the test — to both Jews and non-Jews — in an effort to ease the process.

Starting in September, only the INS will be authorized to give the civics test, which evaluates basic knowledge of American history and laws.

More than 1.7 million immigrants are awaiting action on their applications in a backlog that has reached up to two years in many cities, according to INS figures.

Although the number of Jews fleeing to the United States from the former Soviet Union has dropped — from a peak of 46,000 annually in 1992 to an estimated 12,000 in 1998 — the pool of applicants for citizenship continues to increase.

Since many of the Jewish applicants are frail and elderly, Jewish social service agencies have labored to make the citizenship process as easy as possible. The process is easier, experts say, if applicants only have to go to the INS for their final interview and can take the test elsewhere.

Immigrant advocates fear that the change could stop many refugees from working toward citizenship.

Most Jewish emigrants from the former Soviet Union come to the United States as refugees, which enables them to receive special benefits, because they are assumed to be fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution.

But these benefits eventually run out. And there is concern that local Jewish communities would have to step in to provide basic needs and services that refugees would be eligible for if they became citizens.

No national statistics exist on the number of tests given by Jewish agencies, but officials estimate that Jewish agencies administer tens of thousands of such tests each year.

"Nobody knows what the impact of this will be," said Gary Rubin, assistant executive vice president for public policy at the New York Association of New Americans.

NYANA, which helps process the largest number of immigrant Jews from the former Soviet Union, is one Jewish agency that no longer will be able to administer the civics test.

"Will people be going to a place where they are welcomed or where people suspect

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel mulling amnesty

Israeli authorities are making preparations for a widespread prisoner amnesty that may be issued for the Jewish state's 50th anniversary.

While the criteria for granting amnesty have not yet been set, there is a proposal that the amnesty would apply only to prisoners who have not committed serious offenses.

Comptroller criticizes Nativ

Israel's state comptroller issued a report critical of Nativ, a little-known Israeli agency that gathers intelligence in the former Soviet Union.

Officials at Nativ, which reports to the Prime Minister's Office, squandered public funds and operate without any outside supervision, the report said.

Court orders detention

An Israeli military court ordered that a resident of eastern Jerusalem remain in detention until the end of proceedings against him. Mohammed Anati, who is being charged with transferring funds raised in the United States to the families of Hamas suicide bombers and prisoners, has denied the charges against him.

High court defines harassment

In a precedent-setting ruling, Israel's Supreme Court set wide-ranging definitions for sexual harassment. The court defined sexual harassment as any act which generates a "hostile environment" that interferes with the workplace or classroom and causes physical or emotional stress.

Suspected car thieves arrested

Israeli security forces raided an Arab village in the West Bank in a sweep intended to round up suspected Palestinian car thieves. Palestinian officials complained that they were not informed in advance of the sweep, which involved about 1,000 Israeli police, undercover soldiers and members of the border patrol.



Daily News Bulletin

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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.
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you of being here illegally?" he said, referring to the fear immigrants have of INS offices.

"This is a huge problem for us," said Diana Aviv, director of the Washington Action Office of the Council of Jewish Federations.

Both Aviv and Rubin also expressed concern that the backlog of applications would increase as a result of the INS having to administer all the civics tests.

With new hurdles facing those applying for citizenship, Jewish activists are continuing to focus their efforts on restoring welfare benefits for non-citizens.

Against this backdrop, the food stamp battle has taken on renewed importance. The 1996 welfare reform law eliminated food stamps for all non-refugee, legal immigrants. In some cases, states have stepped in to fill the void.

More than 150 leaders from local federations and their social service agencies came to Capitol Hill last week to press their lawmakers to return food stamp eligibility to poor immigrants and refugees affected by the 1996 law.

President Clinton and some members of Congress have proposed using part of the \$1.8 billion saved over five years by a more efficient administration of the food stamp program to return food stamps to some immigrants whose benefits were eliminated.

Under the proposal, refugees who do not become citizens could collect food stamps for seven years, up from the current five years.

After seven years, refugees who do not become citizens are treated like other legal immigrants.

Clinton's proposal, found in his recent budget, also would restore food stamps to all needy legal immigrants with children. It also would restore food stamps to disabled and elderly immigrants who were in the country prior to August 1996.

If successful, the plan would restore the last remaining major welfare benefit to some 700,000 of the most vulnerable legal immigrants who were in the United States when welfare reform became law in August 1996.

Some tens of thousands of Jewish newcomers would be expected to benefit from the proposed changes.

During their lobbying visits last week, Jewish federation officials met with every key player in the effort and "found very broad support" for efforts to restore food stamps, Aviv said.

But the group was unable to convince any lawmaker to take the lead in an upcoming meeting between House and Senate negotiators on the issue. That was a "great disappointment to us" and leaves uncertain the fate of the proposals, said Aviv.

The agriculture committees in Congress oversee the food stamp program and must approve any additional funding for immigrants and refugees.

The lawmakers, for the most part, have proposed spending the savings from the food stamp program on crop insurance, agriculture research and rural development. □

Newspaper admits story was hoax

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli newspaper has admitted that its report on an incident in an Orthodox community was fabricated — and the reporter who wrote the story has resigned.

Yediot Achronot published a retraction Monday, admitting that rumors were the source of its story about a religious court in Bnei Brak forcing a man to divorce his wife because she was raped.

The story, denounced last week by a Bnei Brak rabbi as a hoax, had caused an uproar among Orthodox Jews. It also drew protests from Israeli women's groups.

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

An investigation by another Israeli newspaper, Ha'aretz, found the story to be untrue.

The Ha'aretz 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. □

JEWISH WORLD

Report: Red Cross helped Nazis

Nazis fleeing war crimes charges after World War II arrived in Argentina using passports issued in their real names by the Red Cross, according to Argentine researchers. The government-appointed commission's conclusions contradict previous findings that Nazi officials fled to Argentina under false names in passports issued by the government of Argentine leader Juan Peron.

Court hears voucher case

Vermont's Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a legal challenge to a school voucher program utilized by the state. Under the program, students living in rural school districts that have opted not to construct public schools may use state dollars to attend a public or private school of their choosing.

But students who attend parochial schools are barred from participating in the funding program — a practice that some religious advocates, including the Orthodox Union, say violates constitutional rights.

Exhibit flap resolved

Jewish American and Japanese American leaders reached an agreement regarding the use of the term "concentration camp" in an exhibit at Ellis Island about the involuntary incarceration of Japanese Americans in the United States during World War II.

Under the agreement, the term will remain in the title of the exhibit and a footnote will be added to the museum display and exhibit booklet distinguishing concentration camps from Nazi death camps. The exhibit is scheduled to open next month.

Final arguments in Papon case

Lawyers for the plaintiffs in the war crimes trial of Maurice Papon began their final arguments.

One of the 24 lawyers, a Jew who had lived through the Nazi occupation, said Papon knew what his job would be when he accepted a senior post in the collaborationist Vichy government. Papon stands accused of ordering the arrest for deportation of 1,560 Jews while serving as a high-ranking Vichy official.

Pulpit appointment in doubt

The appointment of a New York rabbi as senior rabbi of Britain's largest Reform congregation has been thrown into doubt following a dispute within the congregation.

After Mark Winer, 55, was appointed to the position by a council of the West London Synagogue, a growing number of congregants threw their support to Rabbi Jacqueline Tabick, the first female rabbi to be ordained in Britain. The council agreed to allow all 2,500 members of the congregation to cast ballots to approve Winer's appointment.

Israel, Jordan take steps to repair strained relations

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel and Jordan appear to be engaged in some serious fence-mending.

A series of meetings this week — capped by a session in Tel Aviv between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan — showed that the two countries are trying to end some five months of strained relations.

The breach, perhaps the worst since the two countries signed their 1994 peace treaty, opened last September, when a group of Mossad agents flubbed an attempted assassination of a Hamas leader on the streets of the Jordanian capital.

Jordan's King Hussein ended security cooperation with Israel and was reported as telling Israeli officials that there would be no improvement in relations until the head of Mossad, Danny Yatom, was removed from the post.

Yatom recently resigned and was replaced by Ephraim Halevy, Israel's ambassador to the European Union.

Halevy, who enjoys a good relationship with Hussein, had been instrumental in restoring ties between the two countries in the wake of the Mossad fiasco.

His appointment as Mossad chief, according to observers, had much to do with assuaging Hussein's anger at Israel.

The Netanyahu-Hassan meeting came after Cabinet members Natan Sharansky and Ariel Sharon visited Jordan this week for talks on joint development projects.

Mundhir Hadadin, Jordan's water minister, said Israeli-Jordanian relations were "back on track" after he met with Sharon.

Sharansky's trip culminated with an agreement for the two countries to expand business ties and joint ventures.

Sharansky and his Jordanian counterpart, Hani Mulki, also signed a letter calling on the European Union to provide tax exemptions to joint Israeli-Jordanian products.

The two trade ministers also exchanged copies of an agreement, recently ratified by their respective countries, to have jointly operated factories in the northern Jordanian city of Irbid produce goods that will be exempt from U.S. tariffs.

After Netanyahu and Hassan met Tuesday, the two pledged at a news conference to increase bilateral ties and to advance regional peace efforts, particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

Their statements came shortly after three Palestinians were killed by Israeli army fire at a checkpoint in the Hebron area. The army said the soldiers opened fire when a Palestinian vehicle approaching the roadblock veered toward them, causing them to suspect that it was trying to run them over. One soldier was lightly hurt.

Palestinians rioted at the site following the incident. There were also reports of rioting in Hebron. Palestinian Cabinet Secretary Ahmed Abdel Rahman called the incident a "new Israeli massacre," and other Palestinian officials warned that it could spark a new Palestinian uprising.

At their news conference, Netanyahu and Hassan appealed for a spirit of good will and cooperation to get past the day's events.

Hassan, who met a day earlier with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, told Netanyahu that Arafat was willing to meet with him, the premier said.

Netanyahu, who has called for a summit with the Palestinian leader, said the coming days would prove whether Arafat was serious about such a meeting.

He added that the deepening ties between Jordan and Israel should serve as an example for what can be achieved between Israel and the Palestinians.

Hassan said he came away from the meeting with a feeling of "cautious optimism," adding that it was important for the two countries to do "good things in hard times, at the regional level, and not wait for initiatives by the United States and Europe."

In addition to Netanyahu, Hassan met with Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, Sharansky and Sharon. Among the topics they discussed was the deepening of security ties — particularly the need to renew relations between the Israeli and Jordanian intelligence agencies. □

Egyptian tabloid mocks U.S. ambassador as 'rabbi'

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — This time the notoriously anti-Semitic Egyptian press went too far.

A government-supported tabloid magazine accused the U.S. ambassador to Egypt, Daniel Kurtzer, of masquerading as a "Jewish rabbi disguised as a diplomat." Kurtzer, an Orthodox Jew who took up his post in mid-January, had flown a rabbi in from Washington to kasher the embassy's kitchen.

The Ros el-Yusuf magazine based its article on a Washington Jewish Week story on the rabbi, Moshe Schreiber. The Egyptian magazine, known for its anti-Israel bias, published a caricature of Kurtzer as a Chasidic Jew alongside an article titled, "Jewish Purification of the American Ambassador's Kitchen."

In letters to the editor published in Tuesday editions of Egyptian newspapers, Kurtzer wrote that he is "appalled and hurt."

"This is no way to treat a friend, a guest in your country, a foreign ambassador, and one who has dedicated his entire life to improving U.S.-Egyptian relations," the letter said.

"It is also no way to treat a human being who tries to observe his faith with the same dignity and respect that Muslims and Christians observe in practicing their religions."

The State Department amplified Kurtzer's criticism.

"This is an unacceptable and outrageous attack on our very fine ambassador in Cairo," said Martin Indyk, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs. Indyk made his comments before the House International Relations Committee.

The Kurtzer article is the latest of a growing number of anti-Semitic articles and cartoons printed in the government-supported Egyptian press. The flap could not come at a worse time for Egyptian interests in Washington. Many members of Congress are expressing increasing frustration with Egypt's policies in the Middle East, including its refusal to back the United States during its recent confrontation with Iraq. It also comes as U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has called on Egypt to offer a cut in its \$2.1 billion U.S. foreign aid package. When asked whether the sentiments of the government-sponsored publication represented the government's views, a spokesman for the Egyptian Embassy in Washington condemned the article.

"I wouldn't take anything written by Ros el-Yusuf seriously. It's scuzzy, almost like the National Enquirer," said Abdul Aleem el Abyad, press counselor at the Egyptian Embassy.

"Kurtzer is absolutely right. I'm offended," he said.

El Abyad said the editor of the magazine, Adel Hammouda, was transferred to another publication within the last two weeks "because he has gone too far in trashing people's reputations."

Many observers believe Hammouda's transfer is proof that the government runs the magazine, a charge that Cairo denies.

Meanwhile, critics of the Egyptian press want to hear directly from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. "This is a continuous pattern. Nothing short of denunciation by Mubarak is acceptable," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League. Last year, the ADL presented its study of anti-Semitism in the Egyptian press to Mubarak at a meeting in Washington. At a Cairo meeting, Mubarak privately denounced the anti-Semitic and anti-Israel writing in his country's press, Foxman said. □

France expands efforts to find Nazi-looted assets

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — France has adopted new measures to track down millions of dollars worth of bank accounts and other financial assets looted from Jews during the Nazi occupation of the country.

A "surveillance committee" will be created to oversee the work of banks and other financial institutions in exploring their archives for evidence of such assets, according to an announcement by Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Bank of France Governor Jean-Claude Trichet.

The committee will have oversight responsibilities, but it will be up to bank employees to plow through their archives to uncover the assets, which were either abandoned by Jews fleeing persecution or seized by France's collaborationist Vichy regime.

"It will be a long and difficult task, but I am not at all worried about the banks' willingness to cooperate with the state," said Strauss-Kahn, who is Jewish.

But French Jewish leaders disagreed, charging that the committee is not an independent body and that the actual sifting through bank archives will not be done by outsiders.

"What you have is a group of former banking officials looking into French banks," said Henri Hajdenberg, president of CRIF, the umbrella group of secular Jewish organizations in France.

He added that the inquiry should be led by an independent investigative body, pointing to what is being done in Switzerland, where a commission headed by the former chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker, is searching for missing Jewish assets deposited in Swiss banks during the World War II era.

The surveillance committee will report to a state commission that was appointed a year ago to investigate the extent of Jewish property stolen by the Vichy government or by the Nazis.

The commission plans to make an inventory of such goods — ranging from jewelry and bank accounts to artworks and real estate — and suggest ways to compensate the rightful owners.

That commission, headed by Jean Matteoli, a concentration camp survivor and former Resistance fighter, said in a report issued in January that it still had the daunting task of going through hundreds of thousands of files and documents before it could track down all the property and put a price tag on it.

But it said that France should not wait until its work was completed to begin compensating the rightful owners of confiscated property.

Much of the stolen assets were confiscated from Jews as they entered the Drancy detainment camp outside Paris — the last stop before Auschwitz.

Recently opened archives from the camp indicate that French police meticulously listed all the valuables they stripped from Jews before deporting them to their deaths.

The archives show that millions of dollars in jewelry, stock and bond certificates, gold pens and other valuables were systematically deposited into state banks and credit institutions.

For decades, hundreds of thousands of documents from the period were kept locked by state laws, prompting Jewish leaders to charge that government ministries were dragging their feet in confronting the extent of the looting. □