



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 49

Monday, March 16, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Vatican to release report

The Vatican is expected to release Monday a long-awaited report on the role of the Catholic Church during the Holocaust.

The report will include a clarification of the church's stance during the war as well as a statement acknowledging some guilt, a French bishop was quoted as saying. Pope John Paul II first promised to have the document drafted in 1987.

Hebron heats up

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on Hebron's settler community to "abide by the law" after settlers there claimed responsibility for smashing the windows of Arab-owned cars in the volatile West Bank town. Sunday's incident came after two days of violence sparked by the shooting deaths last week of three Palestinian workers at an Israeli checkpoint in the West Bank.

Israel beefs up security

Israeli forces beefed up security in urban centers and on the highways after two weekend bomb blasts that police blamed on Arab terrorists.

A 53-year-old Israeli man lost his hands and was blinded in one eye when a suspicious-looking package he was inspecting blew up in a park near Afula's central bus station. Five Palestinians were wounded by a bomb blast in eastern Jerusalem, which Palestinian officials said was the work of Jewish settlers.

Israeli helicopter crashes

An Israeli air force brigadier general and another officer were reported missing after their helicopter crashed during a training exercise off the coast of central Israel. The two were identified as Brig. Gen. Tal Shmuel Eldar, 45, of Kibbutz Palmachim, and Lt. Ilan Gur, 20, from Kibbutz Malkiya. [Page 2]

New plan for Lebanon withdrawal

Israeli Cabinet member Ariel Sharon, the architect of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, presented a proposal for a unilateral, phased Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai has submitted a competing proposal under which Israel would carry out a one-time withdrawal linked to Lebanese and international guarantees that there would be no cross-border attacks.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Jews in southern Russia face anti-Semitic governor

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The more things change, the more they remain the same.

That appears to be the case in the southern Russian city of Krasnodar, where officials are employing the centuries-old practices of anti-Semitism and employing Cossacks to impose law and order on the region's minorities.

Indeed, the situation has gotten so bad that an advisory body to Russian President Boris Yeltsin recently called for federal authorities to intervene.

The most recent of these practices occurred when Krasnodar authorities refused to return a building to the Jewish community that once housed a synagogue.

The city's only synagogue, built in the 1880s, was confiscated by the Communist authorities in 1936.

In a recent letter to the city's Jews, officials said Jews could not lay claim to the synagogue because the Jewish community was disbanded by the authorities in 1950.

Yuri Teitelbaum, who heads the Krasnodar chapter of the Russian Jewish Congress, said this reasoning is "ridiculous."

The real reason for the decision is that officials in Krasnodar — as both the city and region are known — do not want to return houses of worship to minority groups, Teitelbaum said in a telephone interview. He added that the Russian Orthodox Church has regained most of its properties in the city.

The move is just the latest troubling decision emanating from Nikolai Kondratenko.

Kondratenko, 58, who was elected governor of this largely agricultural region on the Black Sea in December 1996, heads an anti-reform alliance of ultranationalists, Communists and Cossacks.

The coalition has moved quickly to impose Soviet-style rule over its 5.5 million residents.

Human rights activists have charged that official racism has run rampant in Krasnodar since Kondratenko's election.

Kondratenko has adopted a new regional charter that declares Krasnodar the "place of residence for the [ethnic] Russian people."

The local government has employed some 300,000 Cossack troops to enforce law and order. The Cossacks, a group whose traditional rights and paramilitary groups have been recognized by Yeltsin, often inflict violence and intimidation against non-Russian minorities.

The Cossacks, who descend from escaped serfs, led pogroms against Jews during czarist times.

An October 1997 report by the Russian human rights group Memorial condemned Krasnodar officials for "encouraging radical nationalist groups," including the Cossacks and "inciting them to violence" against ethnic minorities.

Some 20,000 Meskhetian Turks living in the area have been among the prime targets of intimidation. Members of this historically persecuted group are denied basic rights in Krasnodar — they cannot register their marriages and are refused access to social service programs, for example.

Krasnodar's Jewish leaders say the 3,000 Jews here have received better treatment than other ethnic and religious minority groups. Several Jewish institutions have been officially recognized by the authorities and are functioning openly.

"We try not to pay attention to the rhetoric [Kondratenko] is using," says Galina

MIDEAST FOCUS

Cook visit sparks criticism

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticized a plan by the British foreign minister to visit Har Homa during his three-day trip to the Middle East.

Robin Cook plans to conduct a "low-profile" visit to Har Homa, according to a British official. The Palestinian Authority broke off negotiations with Israel last year over plans to build a Jewish neighborhood at the site in southeastern Jerusalem.

Arafat attacks Israeli 'arrogance'

Foreign ministers from the world's Islamic countries gathered in the Persian Gulf state of Qatar for a meeting dominated by discussions of the deadlocked Middle East peace process.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat told the gathering of the 55-member Organization of the Islamic Conference that Israeli "arrogance" was responsible for the faltering peace process, which he described as "almost uttering its last breath."

London Times report denied

Israeli defense officials rejected as "nonsense" a British newspaper report that Mossad agents were involved in another attempted bugging operation of an Islamic militant, this time in London.

The Sunday Times of London reported that the incident occurred before Mossad agents were caught while attempting to wiretap an apartment last month in Switzerland.

Vanunu release sought

The family of Mordechai Vanunu called for his release from an Israeli prison, saying the decision to allow him to join the general prison population after being held for 12 years in solitary confinement proved that he is no longer a security threat.

Vanunu is serving an 18-year sentence for disclosing Israel's nuclear weapons capabilities to The Times of London.



Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
Mark J. Jaffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*
Lisa Hostein, *Editor*
Kenneth Bandler, *Managing Editor*
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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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Gonik, director of the Krasnodar Jewish Culture Center. But that rhetoric is decidedly anti-Semitic.

People close to Kondratenko say he strongly believes in the existence of a Jewish conspiracy to rule the world. Addressing a recent youth conference, Kondratenko said the essence of Russian history is the Russian battle against Jewish domination.

He blamed Zionists for the recent war in the southern Russian breakaway republic of Chechnya, for the destruction of the Communist Party, for attacks on the Russian Orthodox Church and for introducing homosexuality in Russia.

He added that Jews and Zionists control the mass media and the Kremlin, and he charged that Jewish women were on a secret mission to marry Russian men to ensure that the children will be Zionists.

"Jews have not become objects of violence yet," the Jewish community's Teitelbaum said. "But anything can happen when the governor publicly incites the people to violence."

Last September, the Russian Jewish Congress sent a letter to the Kremlin denouncing Kondratenko's overt anti-Semitism. Russian officials have yet to respond.

But his comments have not gone unnoticed in Moscow. His speech at the youth conference generated front-page reports in Russian newspapers.

"The speech, which is typical for Kondratenko, was addressed to the young people and therefore poses a threat to the present and future of Russia," said Izvestia, a leading Moscow daily newspaper.

Repeated warnings from Russian, Jewish and international human rights groups about the situation have drawn the attention of the Human Rights Chamber of the Russian president's Political Consultative Council, an advisory body.

Earlier this year, the chamber organized hearings on the situation of ethnic and religious minorities in Krasnodar.

The chamber — which consists of lawmakers and human-rights activists — demanded that Russian law enforcement agencies intervene in Krasnodar and that criminal proceedings be launched against those responsible for persecuting Krasnodar's minorities.

Experts say, however, that it is unlikely the Kremlin will take these steps. The Kremlin has never criticized Kondratenko's ultranationalist views and he remains one of the strongest supporters of Yeltsin in Russia's provinces. □

Air force general missing in crash near Israeli coast

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli air force brigadier general and another officer have been reported missing after their helicopter crashed during a training exercise off the coast of central Israel.

The two were identified as Brig. Gen. Tal Shmuel Eldar, 45, of Kibbutz Palmachim, and Lt. Ilan Gur, 20, from Kibbutz Malkiya.

"Israeli air force planes, with the help of the Navy, are searching for the missing officers," an army statement said.

Israeli media reported that during the exercise, Eldar told officers in a second Cobra helicopter taking part in the exercises that he and Gur felt shaking in the tail of the helicopter. Eldar radioed that he was in control of the situation and was going to try to land at a nearby base.

Shortly after, the helicopter broke apart and fell into the sea.

The commander of the air force, Maj. Gen. Eitan Ben-Eliahu, described Eldar as one of the "leading helicopter pilots in the air force, a determined fighter who took part in many secret missions."

Eldar was part of a commission that investigated last year's collision of two helicopters on the Lebanon border, killing 73 Israeli troops.

Sunday's crash came in the wake of an accident earlier this month, when an Israeli jet hit an antenna and crashed near the West Bank town of Nablus, killing the pilot and navigator. □

JEWISH WORLD

Alleged war criminals sought

The Argentine government called on a judge to arrest three alleged Nazi war criminals who fled to the South American nation after the war.

The head of a government commission probing the whereabouts of suspected Nazi criminals said more arrest orders may be issued soon.

Bergier panel to issue report

An international panel of historians will release a report next month detailing the extent to which the Swiss central bank knowingly purchased looted Nazi gold, according to the chairman of the commission.

The report will be "published without censorship," said Jean-Francois Bergier.

The planned move comes after the panel released in December a detailed chart of how gold flowed into and out of Nazi Germany's central bank.

Two Jews suing Switzerland

Two Jewish men are bringing separate suits against Switzerland linked to the country's policy toward Jewish refugees during World War II.

Charles Sonabend, whose parents were murdered in Auschwitz after Swiss authorities deported them in 1942, is bringing his compensation claim before Switzerland's Supreme Court after the Swiss Cabinet recently rejected his claim.

Joseph Sprung is seeking compensation for having twice been turned away at the border.

Halberstam family brings charges

Proceedings began in the trial of the makers of a mail-order weapons kit used in the shooting death of an Orthodox teen-ager four years ago on the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City. The plaintiffs in the federal trial include the family of Aaron Halberstam, who was killed by a Lebanese immigrant who opened fire of a van filled with Chasidic students.

Latvian SS marks anniversary

Some 500 former members of the Latvian SS forces that fought for Nazi Germany gathered for the first of two days of controversial meetings to commemorate the 55th anniversary of the unit's founding.

The Latvian government said it was not going to participate in the events, but several high-ranking officials, including the commander in chief of the Latvian armed forces, said they would attend a rally of SS veterans.

Human rights groups and organizations representing Latvia's Russian minority had unsuccessfully tried to convince the Baltic nation's leadership to ban this week's commemorations — but the Jewish community was quiet.

Cover of Benetton catalog features Jewish-Arab kiss

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A young Israeli Jewish woman and a Bedouin man locked in a passionate kiss.

That's the cover of the latest catalog from the Italian clothing manufacturer Benetton, which takes on the stereotypes of the Middle East.

The catalog, called "Enemies," features Israelis and Palestinians happily playing and working together. The models are real people — friends, colleagues and members of mixed marriages.

The catalog is the latest brainchild of Oliviero Toscani, Benetton's controversial creative director, who has created uproars with previous campaigns featuring dying AIDS victims and a priest and a nun kissing.

The most shocking thing about Toscani's photographs, writes A.B. Yehoshua, an Israeli novelist, in an introduction to the catalog, "is that in many cases, I am unable to distinguish the Arab from the Jews."

The physical features of the Israeli Jewish models, shaped in part by the country's population of Jews of North African and Middle Eastern descent, blend almost seamlessly with the Palestinian models. Even the catalog producers got confused, mistakenly listing cameraman Issa Freij as Jewish and his colleague Nili Aslan as Arab.

By humanizing the conflict, Toscani seeks to challenge what he calls a "monopoly" on truth held by journalists, politicians and religious leaders, which he says has complicated the conflict by perpetuating stereotypes.

"Somehow, we had to come up with another angle that hits the real problem," he said.

Indeed, the photos present true stories of coexistence rarely seen by outsiders. Behind a deadlocked peace process and a seemingly endless cycle of violence, many Israelis and Palestinians live peacefully.

The catalog captures this fact in a photo of a Jewish barber shaving his Arab customer, neck trustingly exposed to the razor. Many scenes were shot in Jerusalem, the holy city that is the flash point of violence and the heart of the political conflict.

Yet while the subjects are real people, many do not live in mainstream society — some reside in Neve Shalom, or Oasis of Peace, a community in Israel near Jerusalem that is run jointly by Arabs and Jews. Toscani calls them "a minority within a minority."

Benetton described the catalog as a "realistic reportage."

But other parts of the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as supporters of radical Islamist Palestinian suicide bombers who have killed scores of Israelis, are nowhere to be found. Nor are there examples of the extremist Jewish settlers who frequent the grave of Dr. Baruch Goldstein, the Israeli settler who killed 29 Palestinians in 1994.

Underscoring this reality, several Palestinians who modeled for the catalog were prevented from reaching Jerusalem to participate in the official launch of the publication because of Israeli closures of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Indeed, the Jerusalem Link, a Palestinian-Israeli women's peace group, criticized Benetton for conveying a "simplistic, romanticized view of a reality that is complex and violent."

Despite the criticism, Toscani received support at the launch of the catalog from Jewish and Arab students who have been participating in a dialogue program. Yechiel Rechtschaffen, a young, black-kipah-wearing rabbi and a law student from Tel Aviv University, came to the launch with some Arab friends.

The real wall between Israelis and Palestinians "is what you don't know," he said. "When you never meet an Arab, you don't know what an Arab is."

For his part, Toscani is proud of the campaign's simplicity.

This "simplicity could be very subversive to those organized strengths and powers called press, politics and religion," he said.

And if the catalog does not lead to peace, he hopes that at least it will sell more Benetton sweaters. □

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 impartial parties.

"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 special 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.

Some 76,000 Jews — about a quarter of the country's Jewish population — were deported from France to Nazi death camps. Only 2,500 returned.

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. □

Israel computer hacker wanted by FBI speaks out

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli teen-ager wanted by the FBI said he breaks into computer systems just for the fun of it.

The youth, who is called the "Analyzer," is wanted in connection with the recent break-in into the Pentagon's computer system. He also is wanted for his involvement in hacking into the computer systems of other educational and military institutions.

"I don't destroy anything in them. What is important to me is just the challenge of breaking into the system," he said in a face-to-face interview with the editor of an Israeli online magazine.

Gadi Shimshon, news editor at the Israeli Internet site Walla — <http://www.walla.co.il> — explained that one week ago, prior to Israeli media reports that the youth was suspected of involvement in the Pentagon break-in, he was electronically contacted by someone who arranged for the interview between himself and the 18-year-old hacker.

Shimshon said the "Analyzer," who says he has retired from hacking, sent him some files that he claimed contained entry codes which he implanted into American military computers.

According to Shimshon, the two met for an hour near Tel Aviv. Asked about his relationship to one of the youths questioned by the FBI in connection with the Pentagon break-in, the "Analyzer" responded, "He was my student. I knew I was going to get out of this soon," he said.

"Until now, I never taught anyone what I know about hacking. 'Mack' did not stop bugging me. He had a real interest and desire to learn."

In his article, Shimshon wrote that the "Analyzer" said he had been hacking into computer systems for the past two years and claimed he could change more than 1,000 Internet sites.

The teen-ager said that he and some friends set up an "Internet underground" that entered and made changes on a number of sites, including the Knesset's. He said they also updated the Internet page of Israel's president.

These comments came as Israeli media reported that computer hackers had broken into the Web sites of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, and set up links to pornographic sites on the Internet. The two sites were closed to remove the links after surprised Web surfers contacted the Prime Minister's Office.

Asked why he had decided to retire from hacking, the "Analyzer" said, "I got sick of it. I had offers from abroad to work on the other side, as someone in charge of security for all sorts of Internet servers. I also had a few offers in Israel."

He added that he would not work for the FBI because "I can't trust the Americans not to decide to prosecute me."

In addition to the FBI, the Israeli computer firm Netvision is investigating the matter.

The Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported this week that one of the computers the "Analyzer" used to access the institutions was at a school on Kibbutz Sde Boker in the Negev. □