



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 56

Wednesday, March 25, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu cited Hebron deal

The Clinton administration should respect an American addendum to the 1996 Hebron Agreement that said Israel has the right to decide the size of any further redeployments from the West Bank, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a closed session of delegates to the United Jewish Appeal Young Leadership Conference.

According to a tape of the speech obtained by JTA, Netanyahu said the view of Israel's security is different from the banks of the Potomac River in Washington than from the banks of the Jordan River. Netanyahu spoke immediately before the group of some 3,000 activists visited Capitol Hill to lobby their legislators.

Britain goes on alert

Britain is on high alert after intelligence agents warned that Iraq may try to launch a chemical and biological attack on the country.

The warning came after Britain learned that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein may try to smuggle bottles of the biological agent anthrax into the country. Iraqi officials called the allegations "silly and baseless."

Holocaust films win Oscars

Two films about the Holocaust won Academy Awards. "The Long Way Home," a film about the lives of Holocaust survivors immediately after the war, won best documentary feature. The film was produced by the Simon Wiesenthal Center. "Visas and Virtue," about a Japanese diplomat who saved thousands of Lithuanian Jews, won the Oscar for best short film.

Bank merger opposed

The New York State Banking Department announced opposition to a proposed merger between two of Switzerland's largest banks.

In a letter to Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, the acting superintendent of the New York State banking department, Elizabeth McCaul, said Swiss Bank Corporation and Union Bank of Switzerland had shown "seemingly inattentive regard for the depositors who fell victim to the Holocaust."

Meanwhile, a poll released by the American Jewish Committee found that 72 percent of American Jews believe Switzerland is being "uncooperative" in providing an accounting of its dealings with the Nazis.

Jewish Agency seeking \$60 million emergency aid

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Reeling under a mountain of debt, the Jewish Agency for Israel has turned to North American Jewry for emergency assistance.

At a closed-door meeting in Washington this week, Jewish Agency leaders implored top officials of about a dozen large federations to send an emergency advance of \$60 million to the organization whose historical mission has been the rescue and resettlement of Jewish immigrants in Israel.

An immediate cash infusion would require a substantial outlay by local federations around the country. But if the agency doesn't get the money, its ability to function could be crippled.

"It's not about do or die," but without the \$60 million, "we will have to cut core services" for those in need, said Shoshana Cardin, who chairs the United Israel Appeal, which serves as the Jewish Agency's operating agent in the United States.

Jewish organizational officials say the agency has reached the end of its borrowing rope and cannot continue to operate without the multimillion-dollar advance.

"We're at our borrowing limits from the banks and can only go one place, and that's to the federations," Cardin said. "We haven't paid most suppliers for the first quarter of this year, and we're barely meeting payroll."

For decades, the Jewish Agency has been the principal recipient in Israel of funds raised by the annual campaigns of local federations in conjunction with the United Jewish Appeal.

The UIA administers the transfer of those funds, which total about half of the agency's \$400 million budget.

The plea for assistance comes as the agency is undergoing a massive reorganization. Under pressure from local federations, the agency began implementing a restructuring plan on Jan. 1 aimed at streamlining and depoliticizing the organization.

The agency is well known for bringing hundreds of thousands of immigrants to Israel, but it is still struggling to shake off its image as a bureaucratic behemoth.

JAFI, according to officials, has already dramatically cut staff — from more than 1,600 in 1996 to fewer than 1,000 by the end of this year — and has moved toward a balanced budget.

To reduce redundancies in the system, the World Zionist Organization has been brought under JAFI's roof as of January. The Joint Authority for Jewish and Zionist Education, which had operated outside the agency, has followed the same path.

The agency also has eliminated politically appointed department heads, which Diaspora leaders have long considered wasteful.

Federation officials, including those who have been most vocal in pushing JAFI to restructure, appear to have embraced the idea of helping bail out the agency, which is suffering from an accumulated \$400 million debt, according to Yossi Shturm, a spokesman for JAFI in Jerusalem.

In fact, while prior to Monday's meeting some federation officials were discussing whether the Jewish Agency should be shut down altogether, by the end of the day most had agreed that it was necessary to find a way to support the agency.

"Nobody wants the Jewish Agency to go into default. We have to help," said Barry Shrage, president of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston.

"The question is what is the best way to be helpful," said Shrage, who recently proposed a re-examination of the whole system of channeling funds from local

MIDEAST FOCUS

Annan, Netanyahu meet

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan met with top Israeli officials in a bid to advance peace talks. At a news conference with Annan, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated his stance that Israel alone would determine the extent of its withdrawal from the West Bank.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said after a meeting with Annan that the secretary-general appeared to support in principle Israel's plan to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon.

Alleged terrorists arrested

Israeli officials arrested two alleged members of a terrorist cell believed to have been responsible for a shooting attack on two yeshiva students in Jerusalem's Old City last year.

One of the students, Gabriel Hirschberg, was killed, and the other, Benjamin Gil, was seriously wounded.

German candidate visits Israel

The opposition candidate for German chancellor said during a visit to Israel that he would continue to underscore German responsibility for the Holocaust if elected to the post in September.

Recent polls indicate that Gerhard Schroeder will win the German elections and end Chancellor Helmut Kohl's 16 years in power.

Israeli boy to see 'Seinfeld'

A dream has come true for a 12-year-old Israeli leukemia patient, who will get the chance to watch the taping of the penultimate episode of the highly popular "Seinfeld" television sitcom.

A foundation that attempts to fulfill the dreams of sick children reportedly got the show's producers to allow Eyal Bir and members of his family to observe the taping.

The family left for Los Angeles this week.

communities to Jewish needs abroad. The Jewish Agency's emergency plan, which was presented by Charles "Corky" Goodman of Chicago, chairman of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors, and Avraham Burg, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, is still subject to the approval of local federation boards. The urgency of the plan was communicated in a memo to Jewish federation and UJA leaders.

The plan will help "stabilize JAFI so that the vital strategic plan can be implemented and so that human services can continue unhampered," the memo said.

Agency officials blame the debt on the cost of the mass exodus of Jews to Israel during the last 10 years from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

The agency has brought more than 700,000 immigrants to Israel, most of them from the former Soviet Union, which opened its gates to emigration as communism collapsed.

A special fund-raising campaign, Operation Exodus, was launched, but it did not keep pace with the cost — and unanticipated scale — of absorption, officials said.

The original Exodus campaign to raise \$420 million estimated the need to absorb 250,000 people over five years, according to Rabbi Daniel Allen, UJA executive vice chairman. Instead, 320,000 immigrants arrived from the former Soviet Union in two years. When asked how he would respond to critics of the plan, Burg said, "For 30 years, we held vigils and cried, 'Let my people go.'"

Now "you have aliyah fatigue?" he asked rhetorically. "Who do you punish? The olim from Azerbaijan."

While officials trace the overall problem to the special campaigns to bring in Jews from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, the immediate problem, they say, stems from dramatically declining contributions from Keren Hayesod, which raises funds in 47 countries outside the United States. But federations in the United States have also been decreasing their overseas allocations in recent years.

The emergency assistance plan that is emerging in the aftermath of Monday's three-and-a-half-hour meeting in Washington includes these elements, according to sources at the meeting:

- Federations would send a combined total of \$10 million a month for six months, beginning in July.
- Each federation, which already designates a portion of its annual campaign to overseas needs, would determine its fair share.
- This amount would then be deducted from future allocations, but not for at least two years, with the option to extend it for another two years. For example, if Boston paid \$1 million over the six-month period, it could reduce its allocation destined for Israel by \$1 million in two years.

Officials said Goodman vetted his original plan with the New York, Chicago and Detroit federations before presenting it this week.

Goodman was scheduled to meet with San Francisco and Los Angeles federation leaders later this week and host another large meeting in Chicago on April 2.

At the request of local communities that wanted to be involved in the process, the plan now includes a fiscal oversight committee, Goodman said in an interview.

There can't be any additional debt, Shrage said, and "I'd like to see some understanding that the future will be very different from the past."

But in an emerging point of contention, several federations said the agency must accelerate the liquidation of some of its assets.

"When businesses have difficult times, sometimes the best way to deploy assets is to divest them," said Ivan Michael Schaeffer, president of the United Jewish Appeal Federation of Greater Washington. "It's going to have to happen" in order to get full federation approval for the emergency plan.

But Burg, when asked about the demand on liquidating assets, said he was "not ready to negotiate" about such particulars. "Responsibility is responsibility," he said, referring to the federations.

Goodman agreed. "We can't accelerate the sale of assets," he said.

One executive of a large federation who has been critical of the agency, said that while he still had many questions, he predicted that his federation, like most, would support the plan. "We do not want to be the community that topples the apple cart," said the official, who asked not to be identified.

(JTA correspondent Avi Machlis in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)



Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
Mark J. Joffe, *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.

JEWISH WORLD

German bank donates \$3 million

Germany's largest bank donated some \$3 million to two Jewish organizations.

The money came from the sale of a gold reserve traced to World War II. Deutsche Bank said internal research showed the gold was possibly stolen from Jews during the Holocaust.

The money will be divided between the World Jewish Restitution Organization and the March of the Living, which sponsors trips for Jewish youths to former concentration camps.

Meanwhile, Germany transferred some \$111 million to the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel as an initial payment to help locate Nazi war criminals who are receiving pension benefits from Bonn, according to Israel Radio.

Germany recently passed a law canceling pensions to those veterans believed to have been war criminals.

Chirac lashes out at Front

French President Jacques Chirac promised on national television that he would seek to change the country's electoral laws in an effort to diminish the political influence of the extreme-right National Front.

Calling the Front "racist and xenophobic," Chirac said the anti-immigrant party was at the center of a political crisis that could "damage France, its values, its image." His comments came after six rightist politicians were elected regional presidents last Friday after receiving the Front's support.

Caves massacre remembered

Italy's highest government officials joined hundreds of Romans and representatives of the Jewish community to mark the 54th anniversary of Italy's worst wartime Nazi atrocity.

President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro and Rome's chief rabbi, Elio Toaff, were among the officials who placed wreaths at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome, scene of a 1944 massacre of 335 Roman men and boys, including about 75 Jews.

An appeals court in Rome earlier this month handed down life sentences to two of the Nazi SS officers involved in the killings, Erich Priebke and Karl Hass. Both men are in their 80s and are being held under house arrest.

Parliament backs convention

The upper house of the Russian Parliament recently voted unanimously to approve the European Convention on Human Rights.

The move by the Federation Council comes after the Duma, the lower house of parliament, gave its backing to the document, which guarantees human rights in post-Soviet Russia.

New campaign exhorts Israelis to donate funds

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In a television advertising campaign launched this month, Israelis are being asked for the first time to donate to a program for elderly Jews run by the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The Israel campaign, hopes Avraham Burg, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, will eventually become the Israeli counterpart of the United Jewish Appeal.

It's a conceptual shift aimed at forging a more equitable partnership between Israeli and Diaspora Jews, who provide more than half of the agency's \$400 million annual budget.

Citing the organization's restructuring that went into effect at the beginning of the year, Burg and other JAFI officials hope that the campaign will boost Diaspora backing for the agency at a time when campaigns have been lagging and support for Israel has been hit by the still-unresolved crisis over religious pluralism issues.

"The rationale is that the public in Israel should join their sisters and brothers overseas who have been included in fund raising for so many years," said Joe Dushansky, executive director of the Israel campaign. "It means we are now going to have a relationship among equals."

But some skeptics say it will take some time before the effects of the reforms on the Jewish Agency's day-to-day operations can be seen or evaluated.

"The Israel campaign is designed to create an Israeli partner," Burg said in an interview here. He said he would like to see 50,000 Israeli households raise \$5 million to \$8 million within five years. According to initial figures provided by Dushansky, that goal may be reached much sooner. Some 450 Israeli individuals have already donated more than \$3 million in a face-to-face campaign launched last January. Most have asked to remain anonymous. □

Vatican document focus of Catholic-Jewish talks

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — A Jewish leader who played a key role in rescuing Jews during the Holocaust has denied Vatican claims that the wartime pope, Pius XII, saved hundreds of thousands of Jews.

Gerhart Riegner, honorary vice president of the World Jewish Congress, spoke Monday at talks between the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations and the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

Riegner, who was one of the first individuals to inform the world of the Nazi attempt to annihilate the Jewish people, was responding to a claim made in a controversial document on the Holocaust prepared by the Vatican commission and released last week. The document, "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah," repented for individual Catholic failings during the Holocaust, but absolved the church itself from any responsibility and defended Pius XII.

Jewish leaders around the world have expressed disappointment at the document, but this week's four-day meeting represented the first full give-and-take encounter between Jewish leaders and the senior Vatican officials who prepared it.

"No individual person or institution can be credited with saving hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives," said Riegner.

He also criticized the document's attempt to "exempt the church from any blame" and for its failure to clearly address the issue of centuries of Christian teaching of contempt for Jews. He called for establishing a bilateral Catholic-Jewish committee to examine the issues that the document has raised.

The Jewish delegation was scheduled to have an audience with Pope John Paul II on Thursday. According to the World Jewish Congress, the group planned to express Jewish disappointment over the Vatican document directly to the pope. □

Rabbis join opposition to 'partial-birth' abortion

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In a departure from the prevailing Jewish stance on late-term abortion, a group of Reform, Conservative and Orthodox rabbis have joined the movement to eliminate the controversial procedure.

While Catholics and Christian fundamentalists have traditionally led the battle against abortion in all forms, some 70 rabbis from around the country are urging lawmakers to override President Clinton's veto of legislation banning what opponents call partial-birth abortions.

Congress passed a ban on the late-term procedures last year, but Clinton vetoed it because he believed it did not go far enough in protecting a woman's health.

The bill, which would make it illegal for doctors to perform the procedure, only makes an exception to protect a woman's life.

The House of Representatives passed the legislation by the necessary two-thirds margin needed to override the president's veto, but the Senate came up three votes short, passing it 64-43.

Now the Senate is seeking another vote to override the veto.

If the bill becomes law, it would mark the first time that a specific abortion procedure was made illegal. The Supreme Court ruled in 1973, in *Roe vs. Wade*, that women have a legal right to have an abortion.

Supporters of the partial-birth abortion ban, however, were dealt a setback this week when the Supreme Court left intact a ruling that struck down as unconstitutional an Ohio state law banning the procedure.

Jewish abortion rights advocates said they hoped the ruling would discourage Congress from attempting to enact the federal ban.

The rabbis' effort marks the first organized campaign in the Jewish community to advocate for legislation designed to reduce abortion, said Chris Gersten, president of the Institute for Religious Values, a one-man operation that organized the campaign.

"This statement is designed to tell politicians the Jewish community is split on abortion," said Gersten, who is hoping to take out ads in Jewish newspapers around the country as part of the campaign.

Gersten, a former head of refugee resettlement in President Bush's administration, said the statement was intended to communicate to Jewish senators, among others, that the Jewish community is not monolithic on the issue, while also demonstrating to Christian abortion foes that they have allies in the Jewish community.

In their letter to senators, the rabbis wrote: "According to Jewish law, once the head of the baby emerges, or the majority of the baby's body emerges, the child is considered a person equal to the mother and cannot be aborted, even to save the mother's life."

"Since partial-birth abortion involves the delivery of most of the baby's body before it is aborted, Jewish law prohibits this procedure except in the rarest of circumstances."

One of the signatories to the letter, Rabbi Steven Kapnick, chaplain at the Jewish Home for the Elderly in Fairfield, Conn., described partial-birth abortion as "a barbaric form of population control, parental preference and gender control. We're dealing with

something morally repulsive. Everything in God's world has a place, but this does not."

Another signatory to the document, Reform Rabbi Clifford Librach of Temple Sinai in Sharon, Mass., said, "Those abortions are not necessary to save the life of a mother and, by their grotesque nature, violate the principles of life which govern — even dominate — Judaism."

Rabbi Moshe Tendler, professor of talmudic law and chairman of the biology and medical ethics departments at Yeshiva University, agreed that "there is never a situation in which the life of the mother would be preserved by this procedure."

"The president wants to fudge the issue by allowing for consideration of the health of the mother, which can mean anything from physical to psychological to economic health," he said.

"The decision usually involves a falling out between parents who no longer want a child, a birth defect or to avoid pregnancy."

He added: "None of these excuses are justified to allow this procedure, which is not only contrary to Jewish ethics but universal ethics."

Despite the views of individual rabbis, the Reform and Conservative movements as a whole are on record as opposing the ban.

Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, director of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations' Mid-Atlantic Council, said she sees the rabbis' argument as flawed because Jewish law — as the rabbis point out in their own letter — can permit the procedure in rare circumstances.

"What those circumstances are is what we, the religious community, have to be able to interpret and decide — not the government," said Landsberg, the Reform movement's spokeswoman on reproductive rights.

(John Woods of the Connecticut Jewish Ledger contributed to this report.)

'Hate capital' bans meeting

TORONTO (JTA) — A Canadian businessman whose company provides Internet sites to neo-Nazis is claiming that his right to free speech is being violated.

Bernard Klatt made the charge after the town council of Oliver, British Columbia, withdrew permission for him and his supporters to meet at the local town hall.

The council cited the potential for violence.

Adolf Hitler is portrayed as a hero on one of the sites hosted by Bernard Klatt's Fairview Technology Center.

Klatt made headlines recently after a dozen skinheads in Britain and France were charged with uttering threats and using material posted on Internet sites rented from Fairview.

Sol Littman, director of the Canadian arm of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, called Oliver the "hate capital of Canada" when he first heard about the proposed meeting.

He later congratulated town officials for the cancellation.

Former newspaper columnist Doug Collins, a Holocaust denier, held an impromptu news conference with Klatt outside Oliver's town hall after the meeting of their Canadian Association for Free Expression was canceled.

The two men and a handful of their supporters were outnumbered by more than 100 protesters, who demonstrated peacefully nearby. □