



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Hamas calls for attacks on Jews

Hamas militants issued a statement calling on Muslims around the world to attack "Jewish and Zionist interests which have been spreading all over the world." The group dismissed a Palestinian Authority investigation indicating that Hamas' chief bomb-maker was recently killed by other Hamas members as a "fabricated tale" and said "revenge is coming" for the death of Mohiyedine Sharif.

Israel complains to U.N.

Israel complained to the United Nations that Syria is violating a 1974 cease-fire agreement by building fortifications near the Golan Heights.

The construction includes some 30 miles of embankments leading from the heart of Syria to the Golan, Israel's Channel Two Television reported.

Nazi in Argentina disappears

A former commander of a Croatian concentration camp who is living in Argentina disappeared.

Jewish groups called for the arrest and deportation of Dinko Sakic after a television expose aired this week. From December 1942 until October 1944, Sakic headed the Jasenovac camp.

U.S. calls for Israeli privatization

The United States is recommending that the Israeli government sell by the end of the year a controlling stake in El Al Airlines, the Bezek telephone company and either or both Israel Discount Bank and Bank Leumi. Stuart Eizenstat, assistant secretary of state for economic affairs, released the annual report of the U.S.-Israel Joint Economic Development Group.

The report also recommended that Israel cut government spending, reduce its budget deficit and cut taxes. Eizenstat hailed Israel's economy as being "on the cusp" of that of a developed nation, but cautioned at a roundtable briefing that the impasse in the peace process could hurt Israel's overall economic health.

Because of the Passover holiday and renovation work at JTA headquarters, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, April 13 and Wednesday, April 15 through Monday, April 20.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Jewish split over policies spills over to public arena

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — An aggressive lobbying campaign to warn against American pressure on Israel has led to an unusually bitter and public split in the American Jewish community over both policy and tactics.

The effort, which resulted in a recent flurry of congressional letters, has also sent competing signals to the Clinton administration as it grapples with what to do next to revive Israeli-Palestinian talks.

Following a lobbying blitz by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, 81 senators last week sent a letter to President Clinton, siding with Israel's effort to prevent an American peace plan. More than 150 members of the House signed a similar letter.

The letters came after U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had specifically urged American Jews to stop "portraying us as if we are shoving something down Israel's throat" and had promised not to go public with an American plan to revive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

The letter campaign prompted an angry response from the Clinton administration, members of Congress and some in the Jewish community.

The latest activity shifted the focus back to Washington amid efforts to find the seemingly elusive formula to restore Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

In their first meeting after returning from separate journeys abroad, Clinton and Albright met at the White House on Tuesday to be briefed by Dennis Ross on his recent visit to the Middle East.

No details of the discussion were released. But Clinton has decided to send Ross, the administration's point man on the peace process, back to the region when Passover concludes later in the month, U.S. officials said. It is at this critical juncture, with the administration running short on patience and also grappling with what to do next, that Jewish activists stepped up their efforts to be heard.

While divisions in the Jewish community about the flagging peace process and the proper U.S. role are not new, it is against this diplomatic backdrop that the debate over the congressional letters became especially significant.

Testifying to the lack of consensus in the Jewish community over the issues, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, in a heated meeting last week, did not endorse the Senate letter opposing pressure on Israel.

The letter, which evolved from an initiative by the Republican-aligned National Jewish Coalition, was sponsored by Sens. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) and Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.).

But the Conference of Presidents, in an effort to strike a middle ground, decided this week to take action.

Without endorsing the Senate letter, the umbrella organization decided to thank the senators for standing up for Israel. At the same time, the group decided to send a letter to Clinton, supporting the administration's continued role in the peace process and accepting the administration's assurances that there will be no ultimatum, formal plan or effort to "second-guess Israel's security," according to a Jewish official involved in the process. But the letters are likely to do little to quiet a growing anger on Capitol Hill and a sense of embarrassment among many in the organized Jewish community.

The embarrassment was stoked even further by a New York Times article Tuesday under a headline that declared, "Jewish Groups Go to Capitol Squabbling Among

MIDEAST FOCUS

Ross meets Israeli in London

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sent a senior adviser to London to discuss advancing the peace process with U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross.

The meeting came in advance of a return trip to the Middle East by Ross, who is slated to arrive in Israel after Passover.

The two reportedly discussed bridging proposals aimed at closing the gaps in the Israeli and Palestinian positions regarding a further Israeli troop redeployment in the West Bank.

Israel to unveil reforms

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said there would be no delay in the government's plans to unveil foreign currency reforms at the end of the month.

Analysts believe some of the key reforms will include ending restrictions on the ability of Israeli banks to buy shekels with foreign currency from overseas and raising the ceilings on institutional investments abroad and on the amount of money Israelis are allowed to send abroad.

Halevy takes helm

Efraim Halevy formally assumed the top position in Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service.

Halevy, who was named to the post last month, was previously Israel's ambassador to the European Union.

Zoo to enforce Passover diet

Animals at Jerusalem's biblical zoo will not be given bread during Passover.

Although the Jewish prohibition against eating bread during the holiday applies only to humans, zoo officials thought visitors might be offended watching animals eat bread.

Instead of matzah, however, the animals will be given hay.



Daily News Bulletin

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Themselves." The push for the Senate letter marked the first time that AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobby, has launched a major lobbying effort on the peace process since the Clinton administration came up with a plan to ask Israel to withdraw from a further 13 percent of the West Bank.

The proposal, though never formally announced, makes Israel's withdrawals contingent on concurrent Palestinian steps to crack down on terrorism.

AIPAC's effort followed intense lobbying on the part of the Israeli government to enlist U.S. Jewish support to thwart any U.S. pressure.

At least six senior Capitol Hill staffers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, lamented what several termed the "disgusting" lobbying display over the U.S. role in the peace process.

"It's OK to have a difference of opinion in the Jewish community," said one Jewish staffer. "But the competing letters have taken our internal politics and made them public," said this aide, who, like most on Capitol Hill, urged his boss to sign the AIPAC-endorsed letter but then complained about it privately.

This can only result in "a less effective pro-Israel strategy," said another aide who is sympathetic to the position of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobby, had sent out three action alerts, including one on March 26 that urged Jewish activists to line up congressional support for the Mack-Lieberman letter.

"The problem now may not be so much the details of the 'American plan.' The real problem is danger: It is the very idea that the Government of the United States rather than the Government of Israel would decide Israel's destiny," the alert said.

In a move that angered some in the State Department, the alert quoted Martin Indyk, a former AIPAC official who now serves as U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs. In June 1988, Indyk said he opposed U.S. pressure on Israel because "it provides an incentive for Israel's adversaries to wait for the United States to deliver Israel."

For its part, the Mack-Lieberman letter said, "It would be a serious mistake for the United States to change from its traditional role as facilitator of the peace process to using public pressure against Israel" particularly because "Israel has kept the promises it made at Oslo" and because Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat "himself repeatedly threatens renewal of widespread violence and continues to withhold full security cooperation with Israel."

The Israel Policy Forum, an organization founded to support the peace policies begun by Israel's former Labor government, directly challenged AIPAC on Capitol Hill by lobbying members to sign a different letter more supportive of the Clinton administration.

Sponsored by Rep. Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.) and signed by 33 House members, including 15 Jewish representatives, the letter says, "American leadership in the peace process could once again prove decisive. That's why we support your current effort."

"It would be one of the great failures of American Jewry in our time" if the peace process collapsed "in part due to the administration backing away out of fear of political retribution from our community," said Tom Smerling, IPF's Washington representative.

For its part, AIPAC says its efforts represented the consensus position in the Jewish community. "You do not get 81 senators in three days when there's a disagreement in the community," a senior AIPAC official.

But many on Capitol Hill and in the Jewish community do not support AIPAC's claim that "U.S. pressure is far from imaginary."

Indeed, Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) was so angered by the critical tone of the Mack-Lieberman letter that he scribbled his own letter last week on the back of an envelope while on the Senate floor.

Albright answered Levin's letter within 24 hours.

"The administration remains determined to pursue those negotiations and to do so privately without public disclosure of details of proposals while we are in the process of exploring them with the parties," Albright wrote. As for withdrawing from the process if no progress is made, Albright wrote, "we would have to make a judgment about how to proceed."

In addition, Ross, in response to a question at an Anti-Defamation League conference here this week, said the administration "respects the opinion" of the Senate, but "at the end of the day, we have to make the decisions" on how to proceed. □

JEWISH WORLD

China hails relations with Israel

China's president told a visiting delegation of Israeli and political leaders that relations between the two countries are "strong and friendly."

Jiang Zemin said he was studying the Old Testament to learn about the "wisdom and unity" of the Jewish people.

He added that he dreams about "coming to Israel and being a guest on a kibbutz."

Swiss president to visit Israel

Switzerland confirmed that its president would go ahead with his previously scheduled visit to Israel next month.

Flavio Cotti's trip had been thrown into doubt after a botched Mossad operation in Switzerland in February, but a Swiss spokesman said an investigation suggested that the operation was simply an isolated incident.

Hass freed from house arrest

An Italian sentenced to lifetime in prison last month for his role in Italy's worst World War II massacre was freed from house arrest, according to his lawyer.

SS Maj. Karl Hass is appealing his sentence for his role in the 1944 Ardeatine Caves massacre, which killed 335 men and boys.

Seventy-five of the victims were Jews.

Israeli groups blame Netanyahu

Nine Israeli peace groups sent letters to leaders of the United States, United Nations and European Union urging them to step up their involvement in Middle East peacemaking.

The groups — which included Peace Now, Rabbis for Human Rights and the women's group Bat Shalom — blamed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Germany reopens probe

Germany's reopened investigation into the 1996 burning of a refugee home is targeting four neo-Nazis.

The case was dismissed last June by a judge who criticized prosecutors for their sloppy work.

Clinton honors Schneerson

President Clinton proclaimed April 7 as "Education and Sharing Day" in honor of the late Lubavitcher rebbe's birthday.

For 20 years, U.S. presidents have designated Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson's birthday, the 11th of Nissan, as a day to mark the educational commitment and vision that he embodied.

Ukraine's Jews remain calm after apparent Communist victory

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Ukrainian Jews are reacting calmly to the preliminary results that predict a victory for the Communist Party in last week's parliamentary elections.

Although official returns of the elections are not expected to be announced until later this month, it is already clear that the Communist Party and its left-wing allies will form the biggest bloc in the new Parliament, with 180 out of 450 seats.

Experts and Jewish officials say that the Communists' good showing does not mean Ukraine will return to the Soviet past.

But one Jewish official, Iosif Zisels, chairman of the Va'ad of Ukraine, the country's oldest Jewish umbrella group, said he fears that the weakness of the pro-reform forces in the new Parliament could further hinder President Leonid Kuchma's economic plans.

Despite the large gains made by the anti-reform forces, Kuchma pledged to continue with the country's reform program and he vowed not to let the former Soviet republic return to its Communist past. Commentators have interpreted the leftward swing as a vote against the poor economic conditions of Ukraine's 52 million residents.

"People voted not for something, but rather against current difficult situation," said Zisels.

Twenty Jews apparently earned seats in Parliament — a fivefold increase from the current number. Anti-Semitism played a role in the election campaign. However, several Jewish candidates whose opponents were prominent in using anti-Semitic rhetoric nonetheless emerged victorious in the campaign. □

Israeli Arabs hold strike after Bedouin, police clash

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A violent confrontation between Israeli security forces and Israeli Arabs has created bitterness on both sides.

Israeli Arabs held a general strike to protest what they said was police violence against Bedouin demonstrators near the town of Shfaram in the Galilee.

Clashes erupted Saturday night when Israeli police tried to break up protests against the demolition of three homes in Umm Sakhali, a Bedouin village near Shfaram.

At least 20 Israeli police, and approximately the same number of protesters, were hurt during the confrontations. The clashes broke out when Israeli Arabs from surrounding villages arrived to try to rebuild the structures.

Local residents said the demolished homes had been standing for more than 40 years. The Interior Ministry, which requested the demolition orders, said they were recently built without permits.

Salakh Salim, head of the leftist Hadash Knesset party, said police used "brutal measures" against the demonstrators, including "tear gas and even live fire."

"We will not agree to this sort of humiliation and opposition," Salim told Israel Radio. "It is as if we are in occupied territory. We are Israeli citizens, with Israeli identification cards."

Israel's police commissioner, Yehuda Wilk, charged that Bedouin community leaders were using the situation to create a political football.

He added that there was no justification for the violence directed at the police — he said they were enforcing court orders.

"It is inconceivable that a police officer should go to carry out an order, and be met by a hail of stones or end up in the hospital," Wilk said.

The violence prompted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to plan a visit to meet with Bedouin leaders in the Galilee, his office said. Even while seeking to defuse the situation, Netanyahu said the police had his full backing to enforce the law throughout Israel. □

PASSOVER FEATURE**Use of 'shmurah matzah' spreads beyond Orthodox***By Debra Nussbaum Cohen*

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Harriet Schachter goes to her friends' home for Passover seder in Milwaukee, she's not certain how many of her four young adult children will be coming with her.

But one thing she knows for sure she'll be taking along: a large, cardboard box filled with six flat circles of matzah, each the size of a small pizza.

"We always take our 'shmurah matzah,'" says Schachter, who describes herself as a Reform Jew and who does not currently belong to a synagogue.

The matzah is called "shmurah" because all its components are "guarded" by a Jew from the moment the sheaves of wheat are sown until weeks or months later, when the finished product rolls slowly out of the oven, 18 minutes or fewer since water first touched flour.

While all matzah, including the more familiar square variety, is required to be completed within that 18 minutes, extra care is given to ensure that no stringency is spared with the shmurah kind.

Mixing and rolling utensils are cleaned after each use with shmurah matzah to ensure that no moisture from a previous batch touches flour later.

This way, no batch is mixed for longer than the prescribed time.

Human eyes watch over the entire shmurah process carefully, while a machine monitors most other matzah varieties.

Shmurah matzah is prized by its devotees, the bulk of whom are Orthodox but whose numbers include a growing number of non-Orthodox Jews, for its ritual and esthetic purity.

And because it is made by hand, by people doing it with the intention of fulfilling the commandment to eat matzah on Passover, some view it as a more exalted way to fulfill the mitzvah.

While it has always been used by the fervently Orthodox, in recent years it has become widely used by modern Orthodox Jews as well.

While some use it throughout the eight days of the festival, others use it only for the seders and rely on conventional matzah for the rest of the holiday.

Some claim that it tastes better than the square kind sold in supermarkets, though many others say that it tastes more like cardboard than the typically eaten matzah.

Some shmurah aficionados even say they can distinguish between the taste of matzot made by different bakeries.

"It has to do with the fineness of the flour, the gluten content and also the thinness of the matzah," said Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, the creator and director of the National Jewish Outreach Program, which sets up basic Hebrew courses and Shabbat experiences in synagogues of every denomination.

Buchwald, who is Orthodox, takes his extended family to visit the matzah bakery run by Popov Chasidim in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, N.Y., a few weeks before Passover each year.

There, in the bakery crowded with 50 or 60 people, each person mixes, shapes and bakes his or her own matzah.

Down the street is a bakery, run by the Satmar Chasidim, which is packed with as many as 200 people, Buchwald said. And in another Brooklyn neighborhood populated primarily by the

fervently Orthodox, Borough Park, even more bakeries run at their highest capacity to meet the growing demand.

The Lubavitch community's shmurah matzah bakery in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn is small by comparison.

Yet the Lubavitch may have had more to do with the growing popularity of shmurah matzah than any other group.

In the weeks before each Passover, 3,500 Lubavitch emissaries around the world distribute packages of shmurah matzah to people in their communities, generally not asking for money in return — even though the matzah sells for about \$13 per pound.

Last year they handed out 3.5 million pounds of the ritual cracker, said Rabbi Zalman Shmotkin, a spokesman at Lubavitch headquarters in Brooklyn.

It has been a priority for the emissaries since 1954, when the late Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Schneerson, instructed his followers to bring other Jews closer to their tradition by sharing the matzah with them.

Many of the emissaries also run model matzah bakeries in their community to which they invite Jewish children of all affiliations.

For Schachter, as for many of those who use shmurah matzah, the connection is more emotional than halachic — or according to Jewish law.

"Even though the Lubavitch shaliach had a sense my seder wasn't exactly like theirs, they wanted me to have shmurah matzah, wanted me to celebrate the holiday in solidarity with other Jews.

"I really felt a connection to ahavat Yisrael [love for fellow Jews] by this gesture," she said.

"It has also provided all sorts of interesting things to talk about, since many of the people at our seders had never seen shmurah matzah. They always ask what it is, why it is, and it opens lots of interesting discussions."

Shmurah matzah "is like fruitcake," said Rabbi Debra Orenstein, who is affiliated with the Conservative movement and based in Los Angeles.

"There are lots of jokes about breaking teeth on it, but at the same time there's a lot of affection for it. This is one of the few times that my ultra-Orthodox cousins in Borough Park send us anything. It's one of the few points of connection."

At Reform Congregation Beth Elohim in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, N.Y., a member of the congregation was raised in a Satmar Chasidic family and her brother is one of that community's shmurah matzah bakers.

When the Hebrew school committee was trying to come up with new fund-raising ideas about six years ago, she asked her brother to send some over.

That first year, the dozen pounds he sent over "was gone in two seconds," said Randi Jaffe, the congregation's religious school administrator.

Now the 530-family congregation sells about six dozen boxes each year.

"Most Beth Elohim members don't care that it's shmurah" or ritually perfect, Jaffe said.

"It's the fact that it's round and bumpy and doesn't look like the square, perfect ones.

"It's a much more palpable connection to the ancient tradition" that makes it so appealing, she said.

"You can really imagine it going on someone's shoulder and baking in the desert sun" as the biblical Exodus story tells us the original matzah did while our ancestors fled their slavery in Egypt, heading for a new world. □