



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 74

Monday, April 27, 1998

81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israeli officials reject pressure

Israeli officials reiterated that they would not be pressured by Washington regarding the extent of a further redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank.

The comments came as U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, accompanied to the region by the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, Martin Indyk, held talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders that are intended to pave the way for separate meetings with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in London on May 4.

### Report: Ben-Elissar going to Paris

Israel's ambassador to Washington is expected to be posted to Paris this summer, according to American and Israeli sources quoted by Israel Radio.

Since his appointment to Washington, Eliahu Ben-Elissar has been viewed by some Israeli officials as having trouble getting his message across, according to the report.

Last year, he made a lightning trip to Israel to head off reported plans by the prime minister to replace him.

### Iran accused in AMIA bombing

A former Iranian intelligence agent charged that his country was behind the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community headquarters in Buenos Aires.

The Argentine judge in charge of investigating the bombing, who recently traveled to Germany to interrogate the former spy, said the testimony he provided was "very believable."

The man is seeking asylum in Germany.

The still-unsolved bombing of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Aid Association, or AMIA, left 86 dead and hundreds wounded.

### Mossad agent released on bail

An Israeli Mossad agent caught during a bungled spy operation in Switzerland earlier this year returned to the Jewish state after being released on bail by Swiss authorities.

Israeli officials guaranteed that the agent would return to Switzerland to stand trial in connection with the February attempt to bug the apartment of a suspected Islamic militant living near the Swiss capital of Bern. [Page 3]

## ISRAEL AT 50

### Israelis look beyond flags to find meaning in jubilee

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Blue-and-white flags are sprouting from the antennae of Israeli cars, just as they do every Independence Day.

But after a year of haggling over 50th anniversary celebrations, and amid mounting tensions within society, Israelis are preparing for this week's jubilee celebrations with mixed feelings.

As Yom Ha'atzmaut approaches — the holiday this year is April 30, the Hebrew day Israel was declared an independent state — pride of accomplishment coexists with fears over the divisions that fracture Israeli society.

In recent weeks, the government has been trying to rally Israelis around the celebrations with television and radio advertisements accompanied by a pop-music jingle titled "Together With Pride, Together in Hope."

But as pre-Independence Day events showed, unity cannot be artificially imposed.

On the second day of Passover, peace activists clashed with police during the event that kicked off the commemorations — a rally marking the 30th anniversary of the controversial Jewish settlement in the West Bank town of Hebron.

The event, advertised under the togetherness banner and attended mostly by Orthodox and fervently Orthodox Jews who support settlement in the West Bank, was granted more than \$80,000 by the official jubilee celebration committee.

Police arrested more than 30 Peace Now activists who were on their way to Hebron to stage a counter rally.

Leftist demonstrators were angry that the town, which symbolizes the deep divisions over Israeli policy in the West Bank and is home to some of the most extremist Jewish settlers, had been chosen by the government as the venue to launch the anniversary celebrations.

Peace Now, an activist group opposed to such settlements, has petitioned the High Court of Justice because its 50th anniversary event has been denied funding.

Such debates — over politics, religion, society — echo throughout Israeli society. At restaurants, on park benches and around family dinner tables, individuals are engaged in intense discussion regarding just what this anniversary means.

In front of a fast-food Chinese restaurant on Jerusalem's pedestrian mall, Shlomi Chen, 47, the restaurant owner, is engaged in a vocal debate over religion and state with Shraga Cohen, 18, a fervently Orthodox yeshiva student and a kashrut inspector.

Chen says Memorial Day, the day before Independence Day when Israelis honor their fallen soldiers, is a key part of the holiday for him, especially since several of his friends and relatives have died in the country's wars.

He is offended by the fervently Orthodox, many of whom refuse to observe the moment of silence when a siren sounds in memory of the fallen.

Cohen, with his thin, adolescent mustache and a black kippah, listens to Chen's complaints, but insists that the moment of silence is not a Jewish way of respecting the dead.

Studying Torah, he says, "protects the State of Israel no more and no less than the military."

The 50th anniversary, says Cohen, is important because it commemorates the birth of the Jewish state.

"But I don't like the fact that the state is being stripped of its Jewish character,

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israel goes on alert

Israeli security forces went on heightened alert to prevent possible terrorist attacks in the lead-up to Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations.

Some 30,000 soldiers and police were stationed in major cities and around sites where anniversary celebrations are planned. Independence Day ceremonies, which will be held this year for two days in honor of the jubilee, will begin Wednesday evening after Israel's annual day of remembrance for its fallen soldiers, which begins Tuesday evening.

### Premier to announce projects

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is planning to propose a package of infrastructure projects aimed at stimulating the country's economy and reducing unemployment, according to a statement issued by the Cabinet. The premier is slated to introduce the package next week, after Independence Day celebrations.

### Israelis protest annexation plan

Residents of the Jerusalem suburbs demonstrated against a plan to annex their communities to the capital. Motorists disrupted traffic, while other protesters set fire to tires.

The annexation plan is favored by some Israeli officials, who see it as a way of increasing the number of secular Jews on Jerusalem's population registry, thereby offsetting the rapid increase in the number of fervently Orthodox Jews living there.

### Mubarak, Assad meet

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak held talks with Syrian President Hafez Assad on Arab-Israeli peace moves at a resort palace near Damascus.

The two leaders were continuing lengthy talks they held in Cairo on April 15, which covered Israel's proposals for a conditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon.



## 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](http://www.jta.org).  
© JTA      Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

even though it was explicitly established as the Jewish state," he says. On Independence Day, Cohen will study at the yeshiva as usual, he says, adding that he might recite a chapter of Psalms from the Bible to honor the soldiers killed in battle.

Chen, heavyset and wearing a gold necklace, plans to celebrate the jubilee. But he is bitter at the allocation of celebration funds, which he says mostly support cultural programs that mean little to the average Israeli.

"We still don't feel anything special about the 50th anniversary," he says. "Perhaps during the holiday the feeling will come."

He also mocks the government's slogans promoting togetherness: "It's a nice slogan, but it doesn't reflect the reality. When there is such extreme polarization in Israeli society, how can you say we are together with pride?"

Down the block, four elderly men who participated in the battles that paved the way to statehood are sitting around a table in front of an ice cream parlor.

They, too, are divided over the celebrations and the significance of this year's milestone holiday.

Arye Gur, 75, was a fighter in the Palmach, which was part of the prestate militia, and later in the nascent Israel Defense Force during the War of Independence.

The euphoria that swept across Israel when the state was announced is still fresh in his memory. Gur also recalls the contrast of Israel's subdued, first Independence Day in 1949, when a battle-scarred-yet-united nation mourned 6,000 people who had died during the War of Independence.

The divisions within society today disturb him — especially the widening gap between Israel's rich and poor. "I wanted us to build a just society, and a society in which the state was above all," he says.

"It is difficult to feel that we are together with pride," he says. "Society must change if it is to be worthy of the pride that I wanted to feel so deeply. But it is difficult for a country that takes in immigration to remain cohesive."

But Gur will still celebrate Independence Day this year. "For me, it is an important holiday," he says. "Despite all the problems, we emerged victorious."

Across the table, Gur's comrade-in-arms Ya'akov Levinsky — who was severely wounded during the battle for Jerusalem in the War of Independence — is not looking forward to the holiday.

Levinsky, born in British-mandated Palestine in 1918, still exudes the physical strength of his youth, when he helped build the Jewish state by guarding fields, paving roads and working on construction sites.

"After all that, what's going on here is disappointing," he says. "Even though there is no other country that has accomplished so much in 50 years, I'm not celebrating. I have a bad feeling about what's going on here. There's no reason for such big celebrations."

He is disturbed that Israelis still do not feel secure in their own country after 50 years and is angry that Israeli governments have become "extremely partisan — they only take care of their own."

"In ancient times, we had 12 tribes and the kings tried to unite them into a nation," he says. "Today we have 12 tribes again, and each one is pulling in a different direction. If we didn't have a tough security situation holding us together, there could easily be social unrest within Israel."

Several younger Israelis interviewed — perhaps not as disaffected as those who built the state — said they are gearing up for a party.

A red-headed student of international relations at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who gave her name only as Keren, said she is ready to celebrate.

"There is tension in the air, but we've learned to live with it," she says. "Israel has achieved much more than was expected, and we shouldn't let that pass by."

Avi Minyoav, a 25-year-old Ethiopian Jew who immigrated to Israel during Operation Moses in the 1980s, says he is proud to be Israeli, even though many Ethiopian Jews believe their absorption into Israel society has been far from perfect.

"There are problems, and there is racism among Israelis," he says. "But we must deal with those issues separately."

"I feel a part of this country, and that's why I served in the army. There definitely is reason to celebrate."

## JEWISH WORLD

### Museum marks anniversary

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum marked its fifth anniversary with a black-tie gala in Washington.

Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, founding chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, said the museum had surpassed all expectations. Earlier this month, the museum welcomed its 10 millionth visitor.

### Kiriyenko's approval praised

Russian Jewish leaders praised the parliamentary approval of Sergei Kiriyenko as Russia's new prime minister. President Boris Yeltsin's nominee had been rejected twice by the Duma, the lower house of parliament.

Communist politicians had cited Kiriyenko's Jewish ancestry as one reason for their opposition.

### Judge orders deportation

A U.S. federal immigration judge ordered the deportation of a retired Pennsylvania architect accused of helping the Nazis massacre thousands of Jews.

Jonas Stelmokas, an 82-year-old Lithuanian platoon commander who was stripped of his U.S. citizenship three years ago, made no comment as he left the courtroom. He denies participating in Nazi atrocities.

### Croatia seeks extradition

Croatia demanded the extradition of a World War II concentration camp commander from Argentina. Croatia has charged Dinko Sakic, 76, with war crimes against the civilian population, for which he could be sentenced to a prison term ranging from five to 20 years.

### Poland to discuss restitution

Poland has agreed to discuss the restitution of Jewish property abandoned prior to World War II.

The decision was reached after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu raised the matter during a visit to Poland last week, when he participated in an annual march in remembrance of Holocaust victims.

During his discussions with Polish officials, the two countries also agreed to set up a joint committee to review a deal in which Israel would upgrade Polish military helicopters.

### Florida museum reopens

The Florida-based Tampa Bay Holocaust Museum reopened in St. Petersburg in a space more than six times the size of the previous facility.

The museum houses a collection of letters and photographs documenting the Holocaust, audio testimonials of survivors and a boxcar that was used to transport Jews to concentration camps.

## Jews leaving South Africa cite increasing crime rate

By Suzanne Belling

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — The Gavronsky family is one of many making the exodus from South Africa.

The family of four has one month to go before leaving for Great Neck, N.Y., and the father's excitement is palpable.

"It's an opportunity we can't miss. We have our green cards and we're going," says Ian Gavronsky. "There is no future for Jewish children growing up in this country."

Although an observant Jew with a deep love of Israel, he chose the United States rather than Israel "because of the language problem and, let's face it, it's hard there."

Among his main reasons for leaving South Africa: the crime problem.

"Thank God, my family hasn't been affected, but my children are always returning from school with stories of someone whose parents have been carjacked."

South Africa's persistent crime problem is also prompting Johannesburg dentist Clive Fisher and his family to emigrate. They are planning to leave for Melbourne, Australia, in June.

One of his patients, journalist Sandy Sher, says Fisher is the third dentist she has lost to emigration. "I have also lost two doctors and half my family to emigration. They all left because of the crime and because they did not want to raise their children in a crime-ridden society."

While Jews the world over spent Passover focusing on the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, a second exodus — that of South African Jews in recent years — was the topic of discussion at many a seder table here.

Everybody knows somebody who has left in recent years — or is planning to do so in the coming year. While there are no official figures, Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris estimates that 80,000 Jews remain from a community that numbered about 150,000 people at its peak 30 years ago. The current figure excludes Israelis, whose comings and goings have been difficult to track.

Seymour Kopelowitz, national director of the South Africa Jewish Board of Deputies, says that an average of about 1,500 members of the Jewish community left each year during the past three years.

Of those emigrating, 50 percent choose Australia, followed by North America, Israel, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

Harris says that Jewish community leaders try to encourage one of two decisions, maintaining the same motto they have used for years: "Come home [to Israel] or stay home [in South Africa]." □

## Swiss allow Mossad agent to return home pending trial

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli Mossad agent caught during a bungled spy operation in Switzerland has returned home.

The agent, identified only by his age, 44, returned to Israel on Saturday after Israeli authorities guaranteed that he would return to Switzerland to stand trial.

The agent was one of five Mossad operatives caught red-handed in February while attempting to bug an apartment near the Swiss capital of Bern. The apartment belonged to a businessman with suspected links to the Islamic fundamentalist group Hezbollah.

The other four agents were released by local police after being detained briefly.

Swiss officials issued a statement over the weekend confirming that the agent had been allowed to return to Israel "after his questioning was concluded and it was agreed that his continued detention was not required."

It was not clear when the agent would stand trial or whether the proceedings would be open or closed. The agent may face charges that include violating Swiss sovereignty and conducting foreign intelligence activities in another country. □

**FOCUS ON ISSUES****Shedding light, not heat,  
on questions about Jewish genes***By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When researchers first discovered certain genetic mutations believed to predispose some Ashkenazi Jewish women to breast cancer, fear and confusion quickly spread through the Jewish world.

While the discovery brought the promise of life-saving medical breakthroughs, it also led to a misperception that Jews are more prone to genetic defects and disease.

The findings prompted Jewish women and others who believed they had a heightened risk of developing cancer to seek immediate testing. But when it became apparent that health insurance companies or employers might use the information as a basis to deny coverage or employment, many began opting against such testing.

There are concerns not only about discrimination and stigmatization, but also about the possibility that Jewish fears surrounding genetic research may actually stem important medical progress and keep individuals from obtaining important health information.

It was with those concerns in mind that top officials of the National Institutes of Health, genetic researchers, rabbis from all denominations and Jewish officials from across the ideological gamut gathered in Washington last week to discuss genetic research and its implications for the Jewish community.

The conference, convened by Hadassah and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, launched what Jewish leaders hope will be a coordinated effort to minimize the risks of genetic research and to call for laws to protect people's privacy and to ensure that no one faces discrimination because of genetic makeup.

Genetic experts, pointing to what they said was misinformation contained in news reports in recent years, including stories carrying such headlines as "Ashkenazi Jewish Women Stalked by Second Mutant Breast Cancer Gene," sought to tone down what they see as inflammatory language and to present a more sober view of the risks facing Ashkenazi Jews.

"There is no evidence that the overall genetic burden of risk for disease is greater for one population than another," said Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Human Genome Research Institute. Although certain mutated genes have been found in the Ashkenazi Jewish population, researchers emphasize that is simply because the community has been studied sooner and more extensively than other groups.

Genetic researchers have looked to the Ashkenazi Jewish population not because the Jews have more defective DNA than any other ethnic group, but because genetic patterns are easier to spot in isolated population groups where there's less genetic variation. The high number of findings relating to the Jewish community, moreover, can be attributed in large part to Jews' long history of participation in genetic testing.

Researchers studying two known breast cancer genes have identified three specific mutations common to Ashkenazi Jews. About 2.3 percent of the group studied had one of the three mutations, which are also associated with ovarian and prostate cancer. A gene linked to colon cancer has also been found in 6 percent of Ashkenazi Jews. A woman carrying one of the mutations has a 56 percent chance of getting breast cancer, compared to

13 percent for those with no mutation. Women carrying one of the genes have a 16 percent chance of getting ovarian cancer, compared to 1.6 percent for others. And men with the mutation have a 16 percent chance of getting prostate cancer, compared to 3.8 percent of those without the mutation.

Collins emphasized, however, that only about 7 percent of breast cancer cases come from the mutated BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes. Carrying the mutated gene, therefore, creates "no perceptible difference" in risk "because most breast cancer comes about because of different reasons," he said.

Ashkenazi Jews, whose ancestors are from Eastern and Central Europe, make up the overwhelming majority of American Jewry.

Jewish community leaders hailed the conference as an important first step in dispelling misinformation about Jews and genetics and for offering some perspective on the benefits of genetic research. Marlene Post, national president of Hadassah, said the overriding goal of the Jewish dialogue on genetic research is "to ensure the continued participation by the Ashkenazi Jewish community in critical genetic research, within a framework where risks to the community are considered and minimized."

Not all segments of the community, however, agree with the way the issue is being framed.

The American Jewish Congress released a statement, signed by several leading geneticists, asserting that Hadassah and JCPA were overstating the threat to the Jewish community.

The statement says that, in fact, Jews may be among the first to benefit through early access to genetic testing and treatment.

"Exaggerated emphasis on the risk of discrimination does a disservice to those who may benefit from genetic testing by depriving them of its beneficial results," the statement says, adding that there is "little factual basis to justify such fears."

For its part, Hadassah said it welcomed the document in the spirit of open debate about the issue.

While there may not yet be concrete evidence of discrimination, Jewish leaders and bioethicists say they do not want to be in a position of waiting for data to come in. They say there is enough anecdotal evidence to justify concerns, and point to a recent study by the National Institutes of Health in which 32 percent of women who were asked to participate in breast cancer genetic mutations research declined, citing fear of discrimination and loss of privacy.

For that reason, Jewish activists and bioethicists seek to launch a "pre-emptive strike," as Karen Rothenberg puts it, to ban discrimination before it begins. Rothenberg, a law professor at the University of Maryland, is studying the effects of genetic research on Jews.

Jewish groups and genetic researchers hope to achieve that strike through federal legislation barring health insurance companies from discriminating against people on the basis of their genetic backgrounds. Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) are sponsoring bills in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate that would prohibit insurance providers from denying, canceling or varying the terms of coverage on the basis of genetic information.

The legislation would also prohibit providers from requiring an individual to disclose genetic tests or releasing genetic information without prior written consent. President Clinton has proposed similar legislation which would explicitly state that genetic information cannot be disclosed to insurers, employers or others regulated by state insurance laws. □