



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel shifts gears

An evening torchlighting ceremony in Jerusalem marked the transition from Israel's Remembrance Day for fallen soldiers to its celebration of the 50th anniversary of its founding.

During the day, memorial ceremonies were held at some 41 military cemeteries around the country.

House adopts jubilee resolution

The U.S. House of Representatives adopted a resolution commemorating Israel's 50th anniversary.

The measure, which passed unanimously, "commends the people of Israel for their remarkable achievements" and "reaffirms the bonds of friendship and cooperation which have existed between the United States and Israel for the past half-century."

Gore heads to Middle East

Vice President Al Gore departed for a four-day trip to the Middle East. In Israel, Gore is slated to engage for the first time in direct Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and to participate as the U.S. representative in the Jewish state's jubilee celebrations.

Arafat calls for gesture

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accept a U.S. peace proposal during talks planned for London next week.

Speaking after a meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa, Arafat said he would accept the reported American proposal for an Israeli redeployment from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank, even though it falls far below his expectations.

Holocaust bill approved

The U.S. Senate Banking Committee unanimously approved a bill to create a presidential commission to examine Holocaust victims' assets in the United States.

The proposed commission would be charged with examining the fate of dormant bank accounts, artworks, insurance policies, looted gold and a range of other assets that may have arrived in the United States during and after World War II.

Advocates of the legislation say they do not expect to find much, but want to set an example for Switzerland and other nations to follow.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

U.S. Holocaust museum plans extensive educational outreach

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum opened its doors in 1993, officials held out modest hopes, but expressed quiet trepidation, about how the museum would be received by the public.

Five years and 10 million visitors later — nearly four times the number initially projected — officials are still amazed by the museum's unanticipated popularity.

"There had always been questions about how a museum dedicated to telling the story of the Holocaust would speak to large numbers of people on an ongoing basis, and I think what we have now is evidence beyond our wildest expectations," said Ruth Mandel, vice chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

Some 80 percent of the visitors are not Jewish, about 14 percent are foreigners and 18 percent have come to the museum more than once.

And in an effort to expand its outreach, the museum has developed traveling exhibitions, four of which are now touring the United States.

The founding chairman of the memorial council, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, had thought that the museum would serve as a useful, but small, memorial and educational resource. "It surpassed my ambitions," he said last week.

Despite its success, the museum's founders and others dedicated to preserving the memory of the Holocaust believe it is too soon to measure the museum's efficacy — the true test will come in 50 years time.

"Unless we start thinking today about where this museum will be 50 years from now, we are missing the point," said Miles Lerman, chairman of the council.

Given the results of a survey commissioned by the museum to coincide with its fifth anniversary, a lot of educational work remains to be done.

The survey showed that one out of five Americans don't know or aren't sure Jews were killed in the Holocaust — or that it occurred during World War II. More than 70 percent falsely believed that the United States granted asylum to all European Jews who wanted it. But four out of five Americans surveyed picked the Holocaust as one of history's most important lessons, and two-thirds said they would like to learn more about the Holocaust.

Deborah Dwork, director of the Center for Holocaust Studies at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., said she found it "appalling" that such a high number of Americans were uneducated about the Holocaust. But she said it was positive that a majority wanted to learn more about the event, calling it "a clarion call for education."

Significant majorities of Americans have heard of the museum (77 percent) and would be interested in visiting if they were in Washington (61 percent), according to the survey of 1,641 adults, which has a margin of error of 2.5 percentage points.

Dwork said the most important role the museum can play is as a "stimulus and a catalyst for further education."

The museum is already looking ahead.

To make sure that scholars who are teaching lessons of the Holocaust in 2050 are as knowledgeable as today's scholars, Lerman said the museum would facilitate the training of a new cadre of Holocaust scholars through its newly established Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. It also plans to develop an international consortium of universities with a Holocaust chair at each place, and to set up a lending library for high school teachers. While the museum's central commitment remains honoring the memory

MIDEAST FOCUS

Hamas founder backs terror

The founder of Hamas called on his followers to launch terror strikes against Israel.

Sheik Ahmed Yassin also told a London-based newspaper that Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat should open a dialogue with Hamas to "unify Palestinians against Israeli obstinacy."

Yassin, who was released from an Israeli prison last October as part of a prisoner swap, meanwhile arrived for a three-day visit to Iran, where he reportedly praised Tehran's staunch anti-Israel stance.

Peres calls for Palestinian state

Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres called for the creation of a Palestinian state by May 1999. "Otherwise, we will have a binational state or a binational tragedy," Peres said after meeting with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Foundation hosts youth summit

A U.S.-based foundation is hosting its first-ever Middle East youth summit. Under the auspices of Seeds of Peace, some 75 high school students from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and Egypt will meet May 1-7 in Switzerland to discuss ways to advance the peace process.

The summit is slated to coincide with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's planned meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat next week in London.

Israel absent from exhibition

Israeli firms were nowhere in sight at an exhibition in Jordan at which international arms manufacturers were marketing their high-tech weaponry.

Several Israeli firms attended a similar show held in Jordan in December 1996. Their absence from the latest show was attributed to the yearlong stall in Middle East peacemaking.

of those who perished in the Holocaust, some activists have underscored the importance of actively applying the lessons of the Holocaust to world affairs. Toward that end, in 1995, at a time when interethnic conflicts were raging in Bosnia and Rwanda, the museum created a Committee on Conscience to provide a collective voice to address global genocide.

The idea was first proposed in 1979 by the president's commission on the Holocaust as part of an overall vision for the institution.

"The idea that we would use the memory and the meaning of the Holocaust as a tool, as a weapon in the fight against any genocide is, in my judgment, the greatest honor we can pay the victims of the Holocaust," said Hyman Bookbinder, a founding member of the museum's council who now sits on the Committee on Conscience.

"We haven't really developed the full arsenal of things we might do," he added.

Some activists would rather the museum not venture into such territory, fearing that the politicization of such a venerable institution would betray the memory of the victims. Lerman rejects that view.

"Are we going more and more in a political direction? No. But we are going more and more in an active moral direction," Lerman said.

Those tensions collided in January when the museum became embroiled in an embarrassing public controversy surrounding an on-again, off-again invitation to Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to visit the museum. Asked by the State Department to receive Arafat for a tour, Lerman extended an invitation, retracted it, then extended it again before Arafat ultimately declined to visit.

Museum director Walter Reich, who staunchly opposed the idea of a visit and advised against it, was forced to resign as a result of the episode.

Museum officials say they have put the incident behind them, although officials have not yet started a search to permanently fill the position. Sara Bloomfield, who has been associated with planning and operations since 1986, is serving as the museum's acting director.

"We needed to just have a period of getting back to work," Mandel said. "I think it's important for things to settle down and move normally before we take this up." □

Orthodox lodge protest in latest jubilee controversy

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — There were problems even as the show was about to go on.

Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations, beset with controversies during the past year, hit another obstacle on the eve of what had been promoted as Independence Day's centerpiece event.

Officials representing the fervently Orthodox community moved to file a petition with the High Court of Justice to block a modern dance performance that they considered immodest from being included in Thursday's scheduled "Jubilee Chimes" celebration in Jerusalem. Among the dignitaries expected to attend that celebration was Vice President Al Gore.

At issue was a number by the renowned Batsheva Dance Company, during which the dancers strip down to their underwear.

Jerusalem Deputy Housing Minister Haim Miller said the performance offended the sensitivities of the fervently Orthodox, or haredi, community and should be struck from the program. Meanwhile, jubilee organizers scrambled to reach a compromise with the artistic director of the performance. An official from the Prime Minister's Office was also enlisted to try to find a solution.

While the jubilee committee adopted the slogan "Together in Pride, Together in Hope" as the motto for this year's celebrations, the 11th-hour dispute seemed to further underscore the societal rifts that have surfaced in the lead-up to Israel's 50th Independence Day. Third Way Knesset member Alex Lubotzky, who is religiously observant, said Wednesday that while he would "lie down in the middle of the road" to prevent censorship, he urged that all sides work to reach a compromise. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Two artworks pulled

Two paintings by French impressionist Pierre Bonnard were pulled from an exhibit of his works that is slated to open in June at New York City's Museum of Modern Art.

The owner of the two works said he took the action after the Manhattan district attorney earlier this year ordered the museum to retain two works by Austrian artist Egon Schiele that were said to have been looted by the Nazis.

Several museum officials warned at the time that collectors would be wary of lending their artworks to museums.

Governor curses new law

Alabama Gov. Fob James apologized for using profanity to describe the state's new "moment of silence" law.

James signed the law, which requires public school teachers to start each day with a minute of quiet reflection, but belittled it because it was not the school prayer bill he had sought.

In a conversation with the bill's sponsor that was taped by a local television station, James said the law "ain't worth the damn paper it's written on." He added, "You ain't going to require s--- until you get some relief from the U.S. Congress."

New rights center to open

The U.N. human rights commissioner announced the opening of a center in Morocco to promote human rights in North Africa and the Middle East.

Mary Robinson said Morocco had been chosen for the site of the center because of the country's efforts to improve its human rights situation. Morocco's record on rights abuses has been criticized in the past by such groups as Amnesty International.

Mayor cites best achievement

The mayor of Moscow said creating a favorable atmosphere for Jews in the Russian capital was his greatest achievement.

"An atmosphere has been created in Moscow so that Jews would not want to leave for Israel," Yuri Luzhkov said at a ceremony in Jerusalem during which a city square was named for the Russian capital.

Canadian man faces charges

A 20-year-old Canadian man faces charges for allegedly vandalizing about 40 headstones and a building Saturday at the B'nai Israel Cemetery in Ontario.

Police are investigating whether the vandalism falls under hate-crimes statutes. Samuel Walters, president of the B'nai Israel Congregation, lauded the swift action of police in making an arrest.

Emigre finds Russian Jews more open to Reform Judaism

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — When Victor Rashkovsky left the Soviet Union 25 years ago, he had, like most Soviet Jews, little Jewish knowledge.

When Rashkovsky returned to Moscow earlier this month, he did so as a changed person — and with a purpose: Now a Reform rabbi, he came for two weeks to conduct Passover seders in Moscow and to try to help build a liberal congregation of intellectuals. "There is a spiritual vacuum" in the Russian Jewish community, said Rashkovsky, "and it has to be filled."

After emigrating to the United States in the 1970s, Rashkovsky was teaching the history of Soviet film and working on a doctoral dissertation at the University of Cincinnati when, at the age of 37, he entered the Reform movement's seminary.

Although that move was atypical for recent Russian immigrants to the United States — only four such immigrants have received ordination from the liberal seminaries in the United States during the past 15 years — Rashkovsky said that it was a "natural choice" for him. Indeed, he sees events that happened in his life as examples of divine providence that led him to eventually seek ordination.

Born in Kiev in 1940, Rashkovsky's family fled the city the following year — on the train that was one of the last to leave the Ukrainian capital before the Nazis arrived.

"If we did not leave Kiev then, my life would have ended in Babi Yar," he says, referring to the mass execution of Jews on the outskirts of Kiev.

Given his lack of Jewish background, Rashkovsky had a long way to go when he entered the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1977. "When I decided to become a rabbi, I didn't even know the alef-beis," he said.

Since he received his ordination in 1983, he has been a rabbi in a small Conservative Jewish congregation in Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Rashkovsky found an evolving — and pluralistic — Jewish community in Russia.

During the Soviet era, when the Communist regime actively suppressed religious expression, Orthodox Judaism was the only option for those seeking Judaism.

Now, says Rashkovsky, "the way of Orthodox Jewry appears to be unacceptable for most Russian Jews. The second option — ethnic identity — is inevitably leading to assimilation in a few generations because it lacks spiritual roots."

He believes that Russian Jews can regain their tradition if they familiarize themselves with liberal Judaism. It's a change that appears to be already taking place.

According to a poll whose results will soon be released, 22 percent of Russian Jews said they felt closest to Reform Judaism. Some 4 percent of the respondents said they felt themselves more comfortable with Chasidism, and about 2.5 percent of Jews said they believe Orthodoxy is closer to them.

The poll of 1,300 Jews was conducted by a group known as the Jewish Scientific Center, which is affiliated with the Russian Academy of Science. It has a margin of error of 3 percent.

Despite these numbers, most of Russia's Reform synagogues have been unable to attract significant numbers of Jews — and none of them have ordained rabbis. There are 15 Reform shuls in the former Soviet Union, and seven in Russia, according to the World Union of Progressive Judaism, the worldwide body of Reform Jews.

"Non-Orthodox Judaism has not won wide recognition," said Mikhail Chlenov, president of the Va'ad, the Russian Jewish federation. "People see it as a kind of weakened version of Orthodox Judaism," he said, adding that Reform Judaism is not part of Russia's Jewish heritage.

Despite the difficulties, the leader of Russia's biggest Reform congregation, Moscow's Hineini, is still optimistic. "Contemporary Russian Judaism is just 10 years old," said Zinoviy Kogan, who also serves as executive director of the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia, an umbrella group of Orthodox and Reform synagogues.

"Russia is going to have its own version of liberal Judaism," which will have its teachers and rabbis. □

Jews in Siberia split over bid by former general to win office

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A nationalist's victory in recent regional elections highlights the complexity of Jewish issues in contemporary Russian politics.

Alexander Lebed, a retired general and former security adviser to President Boris Yeltsin, kept his presidential hopes alive by taking a surprising lead in the first round of voting for governor of Krasnoyarsk, a region in Siberia.

Lebed, who had been trailing in the polls, received 45 percent of the vote. Incumbent Governor Valery Zubov received 35 percent and will face Lebed in a runoff election scheduled for May 17.

Lebed, 48, has said he wants to become governor to gain a powerful launching pad in his bid for national office. A failure to win this post would virtually eliminate him from the presidential picture — an occurrence that would relieve the Kremlin, which is anxiously looking at the Krasnoyarsk race.

Observers believe Lebed could win the nationalist vote in the next presidential election, which is slated for the year 2000.

In 1996, Lebed finished a strong third on a law-and-order ticket in the first round of the presidential election. Most observers agree that Yeltsin won in the second round because some of Lebed's 15-million supporters voted for Yeltsin, answering the retired general's call to do so.

Only the top two vote-getters were allowed to run in the second round.

The Krasnoyarsk region, stretching from the Arctic to the Mongolian border, is one-fourth the size of the United States and is rich in natural resources and industry. Meanwhile, most of the 5,000 Jews in the region support Zubov.

"The Jewish community maintains good relations with the administration," Yakov Bril, a community leader, said in a telephone interview. According to Bril, Zubov has attended Jewish celebrations held at a local synagogue — a rare show of support for the Jewish community by a Russian governor.

Vladimir Goussinsky, president of the Russian Jewish Congress, has reportedly told friends that he would consider leaving the country if Lebed were ever elected president.

At the same time, the local media — which is controlled by Krasnoyarsk authorities — employed anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric in an attempt to turn voters against Lebed, who is supported by influential tycoon Boris Berezovsky.

One week before the Krasnoyarsk election, Berezovsky, who is Jewish, announced that he is supporting Lebed's gubernatorial bid in order to present a viable opponent to Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, who is also expected to be a candidate in the presidential elections.

Lebed received favorable coverage on national ORT television, which is partially owned by Berezovsky.

But in an interview with Newsweek magazine earlier this year, Berezovsky said Lebed could turn out to be "another de Gaulle, another Pinochet or another Hitler."

Meanwhile, Russian President Boris Yeltsin has sent a message of support to one of Russia's most extremist parties. The congratulatory letter was read at the congress of the Liberal Democratic Party, whose leader, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, was

instrumental in securing a recent victory for Yeltsin's prime ministerial candidate in the Russian Parliament.

Yeltsin's message, which was a rare show of presidential support to Russia's most famous ultranationalist, said Zhirinovsky's party "has played a significant part in the establishment of political pluralism and a truly multiparty system in Russia."

The leader of the Liberal Democrat Party is known for his support of anti-Semitism and Russian chauvinism and has close links with extremist and neo-fascist parties in other countries.

Zhirinovsky's party voted in favor of Sergei Kiriyenko's nomination for prime minister in the third and final vote in the Duma, the parliament's lower house, last Friday. □

Israel reforms economy on eve of Independence Day

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has taken another big step toward a free-market economy.

Under the sweeping reforms announced Tuesday, foreign currency restrictions on Israeli individuals and businesses would soon be scrapped. The reforms will enable Israelis to freely invest abroad in such areas as land and real estate for the first time ever.

Israeli citizens will also be permitted to open bank accounts abroad, hold foreign currency at home and take an unlimited amount of foreign currency out of the country. Previously, Israelis were only allowed to take up to \$7,000 out of the Jewish state.

Certain restrictions on investments of Israeli pension and savings funds abroad remain, but are expected to be lifted shortly.

Some financial analysts were disappointed that the government did not lift restrictions on foreign investment in shekel/foreign currency derivative transactions that extend beyond one month. These transactions are used for protection from currency fluctuations. The government said it is waiting to see the effects of the current reforms before making these changes.

"Israeli individuals are freed today from all foreign currency restrictions," said Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, speaking at a joint news conference with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Bank of Israel Governor Jacob Frenkel.

Liberating Israelis from foreign exchange controls was timed to coincide with Israel's 50th Independence Day celebrations.

The reforms — some of which will go into effect within days — are part of a move to make the shekel a fully convertible currency on world markets and integrate Israel into the global financial community. Netanyahu said the reforms would contribute to the Israeli economy's shift toward becoming "a modern free market that is free of bureaucracy."

Netanyahu said the reforms would attract foreign banks to Israel, a move that would boost efficiency in the economy by lowering costs in the financial services sector. He also expects the reforms to bring in more foreign investment.

"Investors are attracted to open markets," he said. "They stay away from centralized economies" that are controlled by the government. As Israel announced the reforms, the first-ever shekel-denominated Eurobonds were issued abroad.

Merrill Lynch launched a bond offering valued at \$47 million and the International Finance Corp. issued an offering through Deutsche Bank of Germany worth \$54 million. □