



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Albright to meet Syrian official

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is expected to discuss Israel's recent proposal to withdraw from southern Lebanon when she holds a scheduled meeting Friday in Washington with Syria's foreign minister, Farouk al-Sharaa. The proposal, which also calls for Lebanon to be responsible for security after Israel withdraws its troops, has already been rejected by Damascus and Beirut.

Premier calls for summit

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is seeking a summit with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, Netanyahu's spokesman said.

David Bar-Illan added that the premier wanted direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to resume after being suspended for 14 months. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat accused Israel of stalling tactics, adding, "It's time to stop this game."

Clinton vetoes voucher bill

President Clinton vetoed a bill that would have provided school vouchers to low-income students in Washington, D.C.

Under the vetoed legislation, the first school voucher initiative ever passed by Congress, about 2,000 students would have received up to \$3,200 each in federal funding to use at private or religious schools. Clinton said the bill would undercut public education and provide a "disservice to those children."

Third Way issued threat

Four moderate members of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition recently threatened to quit the government if there is no further redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The paper said the threat was kept secret in order not to limit Netanyahu's negotiating stance. The members of the Third Way Party have been meeting with the Labor Party to join in a no-confidence motion against Netanyahu if the United States announces a failure in its peacemaking efforts, the paper reported.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, May 25

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Argentina says 'new evidence' proves Iran behind 2 bombings

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Argentina is reducing its diplomatic ties to Iran to a bare minimum, charging Tehran with complicity in the deadly bombings of two Jewish sites here.

The charges have created a war of words between the two countries that will likely affect their diplomacy and trade.

And it may also finally result in convictions of at least some of those behind the March 17, 1992, bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires and the July 18, 1994, bombing of the city's main Jewish community center, known as AMIA.

The two still-unsolved attacks killed 115 people and left hundreds of others wounded.

Last Friday, saying there was an Iranian connection behind the attacks, Argentina recalled all but one of its diplomats from Tehran. It also told the Iranian government to do the same with its diplomats in Buenos Aires. Iran countered by saying it would cut its economic ties with Argentina.

Reactions to the latest developments provoked mixed reactions within Argentina's 300,000-strong Jewish community.

A lawyer for an Argentine Jewish umbrella organization, Luis Dobniewski, said he was optimistic that Argentina would finally confirm that Iranian officials had a hand in the bombings. Others were not so optimistic.

According to Laura Ginsberg, a member of the Memoria Activa group, which represents the relatives of the bombings' victims, "Jews ought to be cautious."

"Blaming it all on Iran is very convenient to the [Argentine] government," she said. "President Menem badly wants to close the case and not investigate the local connection — the local police and officials that took part in it."

"Blaming Iran," she added, will enable the government to avoid the "investigation that really bothers them: the activities of right-wing police squads."

Indeed, the investigation into the AMIA bombing has often targeted members of the Buenos Aires police.

A former police commissioner in charge of the grand auto theft division of the Buenos Aires provincial police was arrested in 1996, along with 10 other police officers on charges that they had sold terrorists the van used in the AMIA attack.

Jewish leaders here and abroad have long cited incompetence, corruption and anti-Semitism among police and government officials as causes of Argentina's inability to solve either bombing. For their part, Argentinian investigators have claimed that there was an Iranian connection, and the government has previously downgraded its diplomatic relations with Iran.

Argentina only had a vague basis for its accusations, but now the Foreign Ministry is speaking of "new, conclusive evidence" indicating that Tehran was behind the bombings.

Early in April, the Argentine official in charge of the investigation of the AMIA bombing, Judge Juan Jose Galeano, went to Germany to interrogate a former Iranian official described as "an Iranian dissident." Galeano never disclosed his findings, but a source close to him said there was "a new sense of excitement" after the interrogation.

According to the source, the judge is gathering information to issue an international arrest warrant against a former Iranian diplomat, Moshen Rabbani. Expelled from

MIDEAST FOCUS

Netanyahu to visit China

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is slated to visit China next week. His Chinese counterpart, Zhu Rongji, is eager to discuss the stalled Middle East peace process, according to a spokesman. Meanwhile, Singapore, citing the deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, rejected a request for Netanyahu to visit in August, an Israeli official said.

Charges dropped against soldiers

An Israeli judge decided against bringing charges against soldiers who opened fire in March at a van carrying Palestinian workers from Israel to the West Bank, killing three of them.

The van had overtaken a line of cars waiting to go through a checkpoint near Hebron and veered toward the roadblock. The incident, which provoked violent Palestinian demonstrations, was later found to be caused by the van's accidentally going out of control.

Israeli jets strike in Lebanon

Israeli jets wounded two members of Hezbollah during a raid in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. The attack occurred near the site where a Lebanese civilian was killed earlier this week by a booby-trapped car bombing planted by Hezbollah.

Russians deny MIA report

Russian officials assured visiting Israeli Trade Minister Natan Sharansky that a tank on display in Moscow did not contain the remains of three Israeli MIAs. Media reports originating from Moscow had suggested that the tank was from the 1982 Lebanon War and held the remains of Zechariah Baumel, Yehuda Katz and Zvi Feldman. According to Israeli officials, the three were taken prisoner during the war and were subsequently declared missing. Their families have since launched an international effort to obtain information regarding their whereabouts.



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Argentina in December, Rabbani was the cultural affairs secretary in the Iranian Embassy.

Last week, Galeano took a decisive step based on the information he gathered in Germany. On May 14, he ordered the arrest of Imaam Koshrow, an Iranian national who has been living in Argentina for several years. The next day, police teams arrested seven other Iranians living in the country.

A source close to the judge said in an interview that all eight Iranians were "connected to the Iranian Embassy here" and worked for the embassy or its cultural centers "on an irregular basis." At least one of the Iranians was arrested while police raided the premises of the South Beef Eximport Co., where an undisclosed number of passports bearing forged Argentine visas were seized, the source said.

After Argentina recalled its diplomats and carried out the arrests, Tehran announced it would impose economic sanctions against Argentina if "the unfounded harassment of our diplomats and nationals does not cease at once."

Last year, Argentina exported to Iran \$640 million worth of grains, cars, farm machinery and pharmaceuticals. Its imports totaled \$1.6 million, mostly in fabrics and carpets.

On Saturday, the Iranian charge d'affaires in Buenos Aires, Abdoirajim Sadatifar, insisted that Iran had "nothing to do with the bombings" and blamed Argentina for "giving in to international pressure."

Tehran lost no time in spelling out what it meant by the word "international."

The official Iranian news agency, IRNA, referred to the "interference of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires" in a threat to cut off relations with Argentina.

On Sunday, a newspaper in Tehran quoted the Foreign Ministry's director-general of American affairs, Mohammad Reza Bakhtiari: "It seems that the Argentine judicial system is under the influence of Zionist elements trying to blame their domestic problems on Iran." □

Lithuanian judge delays trial of alleged Nazi war criminal

By Lev Krichevsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — A Lithuanian judge has postponed the trial of an alleged Nazi war criminal for the second time.

The trial of Aleksandras Lileikis, 91, was slated to begin this week in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius. But a judge in the case granted an adjournment of one month to allow investigators to finish examining recently obtained documents.

The documents include originals of orders allegedly signed by Lileikis at the time he was head of the Saugumas, the Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian security police during World War II. In one of the documents, Lileikis allegedly handed over 75 Jews jailed in a Vilnius prison to Nazi death squads.

During the Nazi occupation of Lithuania from 1941 to 1944, approximately 94 percent of Lithuania's prewar Jewish community of 240,000 died in the Holocaust.

Lileikis is accused of having given Jews over to Nazi death squads during the war.

Lileikis denies the charges of genocide, saying his case was fabricated using documents forged by the Soviet KGB after World War II.

His trial was adjourned in March, just one day after it began, to enable the defense to gather additional testimony and documents.

Earlier this month, a Holocaust survivor now living in the United States told a newspaper that Lileikis had saved her life during the Nazi occupation of Lithuania.

Shifra Grodnikaite, who lives in an old-age home in Denver, said Lileikis had risked his own life to save hers.

A Lithuanian prosecutor said that anything Grodnikaite had to say about Lileikis "neither strengthened nor weakened the position of the prosecution."

Lileikis is being tried in absentia. Earlier this year, he reportedly had a stroke, and Lithuanian officials said it would be difficult for him to attend court sessions.

The case is the first trial for Holocaust crimes in any of the three Baltic states since they gained their independence from the Soviet Union seven years ago. □

JEWISH WORLD

Dutch to widen art probe

Dutch officials announced they were widening their investigation into the ownership of thousands of artworks recovered from the Nazis.

At issue are some 4,000 artworks — including paintings by Rembrandt and Vincent van Gogh — that are either on exhibit or in storage and whose original ownership will be studied during the next three years. Pressured by Jewish groups to determine the artworks' provenance, an investigating committee has already studied 113 works, 14 of which were traced to Jewish families.

Insurer denies responsibility

An Italian insurance company said it was not responsible for settling insurance claims opened by Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe.

Assicurazioni Generali said its assets in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and other countries were seized during Communist takeovers after World War II and that those governments were now responsible for dealing with the claims. Generali executives made the comments in testimony before Florida's state treasurer about thousands of insurance claims that have gone unpaid since the end of the war.

Mengele film planned

A German film production company announced plans to go ahead with a film that gives Auschwitz butcher-doctor Josef Mengele a chance to return to life and defend himself.

The plot of "After the Truth" has Mengele appearing in the present and demanding his day in court. To make sure that the film would not be seen as anti-Semitic, the producers said they had received script approval from Michel Friedman, the deputy chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

Kissinger honored in Germany

Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger received honorary citizenship from the German town that he and his family fled when the Nazis were in power. Germany's foreign minister, Klaus Kinkel, joined the mayor of the town of Fuerth in honoring Kissinger's contributions as a diplomat. Kissinger described the ceremony as a "very emotional experience."

Kosher dogs unleashed at Shea

A kosher food stand opened at Shea Stadium, home of the New York Mets. The stand at the baseball park serves, among other snacks, glatt kosher hot dogs, corned beef sandwiches and knishes. A similar stand is slated to open next month at Yankee Stadium in New York, adding to the increasing number of major league ballparks serving kosher food.

Clinton raises neo-Nazism in visit with Germany's Kohl

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — The threat of increased racism in Germany has caught the attention of President Clinton.

Clinton reportedly discussed the issue when he met last week with Chancellor Helmut Kohl during a two-day state visit to Germany.

The president was said to have questioned Kohl closely about rising neo-Nazi violence and the recent success of a far-right party in state elections held in eastern Germany.

There was no official confirmation of the discussion, but Clinton's concerns about racism were widely reported in the German media.

During a speech delivered last week in Berlin, Clinton made it clear that the issue was on his mind when he called for the United States and Europe to work together to combat racism and intolerance.

Earlier this month, a right-wing extremist party captured nearly 13% of the vote in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. The German People's Union — which Jewish officials say is anti-Semitic — is headed by Gerhard Frey, Germany's largest publisher of hate literature.

Statistics released by the German government last week show a distinct increase in far-right violence as well as rising numbers of neo-Nazis prepared to commit crimes.

The statistics indicated that there were 790 acts of right-wing motivated violence last year, a 25 percent increase from 1996 levels.

For the first time, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, which collects crime statistics, did not list anti-Semitic crimes separately from other racist crimes.

But the agency provided a breakdown upon request, and, after several years of a decline in such statistics, it showed an increase last year — 965 — compared to the 817 incidents reported to authorities in 1996.

The vast majority of the incidents involved the publication or distribution of anti-Semitic literature.

The number of cemetery desecrations remained constant at 40; the number of bodily assaults declined from 29 to 11.

Fears of a resurgence of the extreme right, stoked by the showing of the German People's Union in the Saxony-Anhalt election, were heightened when thousands of neo-Nazis held a May Day rally in Leipzig.

The protesters blasted Chancellor Helmut Kohl for not doing enough to fight unemployment.

The leader of Germany's Jewish community, Ignatz Bubis, criticized a German court for allowing the May 1 demonstration by supporters of the National Democratic Party.

Other critics of the court's refusal to forbid the neo-Nazi march included the mayor of Leipzig and the national president of Germany's police union.

Officials in Leipzig — located in eastern Germany, where high unemployment has fanned anti-foreigner sentiment — banned the march three times, claiming that expected clashes between marchers and left-wing opponents would present a danger to the public order.

The evening before the march, however, a Leipzig court said the city administration could not ban the march because the National Democratic Party is a legally registered political party.

A leading member of the opposition Green Party, Werner Schulz, has called for a ban on the National Democratic Party, which has a platform based on xenophobia, racism and ultranationalism.

Although a large proportion of racist crimes take place in the formerly Communist eastern part of the country — where high unemployment has fanned anti-foreigner sentiment — the problem is widespread in western Germany as well.

In Frankfurt, for example, city officials say the number of prosecutions involving far right-wing defendants has gone up 10 times during the past year. □

Republican-led group's links to Netanyahu raises questions

By Ellen Friedland

New Jersey Jewish News

NEW YORK (JTA) — Questions are surfacing regarding the close links between members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's inner circle and a new American group promoting Israeli diplomatic policies.

The Princeton, N.J.-based Committee for a Secure Peace is led almost exclusively by Republicans whose views on Israel's security mirror those of Netanyahu. The committee has raised enough money to launch an unprecedented television ad campaign targeting what it refers to as the "Clinton-Gore administration's" policies toward Israel.

Arthur Finkelstein, the brains behind successful political campaigns by Netanyahu and a host of Republican conservatives, is one of the organization's advisers, according to former Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, the committee's honorary chair. Finkelstein — who continues to advise Netanyahu — also worked for Boschwitz, a Minnesota Republican.

"Art sometimes has his hand in what we do," Boschwitz said. "We bounce things off him; he's a player in these kinds of things; he's very astute. Who can we ask about these things? We can't ask the government of Israel."

U.S. Rep. Jim Saxton (R-N.J.), the committee's co-chair, said he has also "been in touch with Dore Gold, David Bar-Illan and certain other members of the Knesset, like Uzi Landau, about these issues," referring to, respectively, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, a top Netanyahu adviser and a hawkish Likud member of Knesset.

Saxton admits that the group's beliefs "are more along the line of Netanyahu than the more liberal" Israeli views.

Asked whether he was in contact with the committee, Gold told a reporter he is frequently asked by pro-Israel groups to review their ads and discuss their ideas. "I talk to them," the Israeli envoy said, "but not more than I talk to anyone else."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, is charging the group with endangering the bipartisan tradition of pro-Israel advocacy.

"I am uncomfortable with that kind of relationship," Foxman said last week. "It goes to the edge of the line of interfering in the domestic politics of the United States."

"It's not illegal," he said. "It's not outrageous. But I'm just not comfortable."

It is "a long tradition" for Israeli politicians to seek advice and support from American consultants, Foxman noted. But the current effort has "crossed lines that make me uncomfortable," Foxman said. "The success of American support for Israel has been its bipartisan character. Administrations come and go. The bedrock is the bipartisan Congress."

The committee, formed last summer, recently began attracting attention after the group ran a 30-second advertisement on prime-time television in Washington, D.C. Larry Weitzner, the committee's political and public policy consultant, won't say where the money originates, claiming that his donors have requested anonymity. Weitzner declined to produce lists of contributors, saying that such information is confidential.

Its publication timed to coincide with Netanyahu's meetings

with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the ad depicts a Palestinian girl, about 8 years old, standing in front of a teacher and a class of children.

In an adamant and passionate voice, she shouts in Arabic with English subtitles running across the screen: "When I wander into the entrance of Jerusalem, I'll turn into a suicide warrior in battle dress! In battle dress! In battle dress!" The teacher and children applaud and yell, "Bravo!"

In white letters highlighted against a black background, the viewer reads: "Only Israel can determine its own security. The Clinton/Gore Administration should pressure the PLO, not Israel."

Broadcast on CNN, and the Washington, D.C., affiliates of CBS, ABC and FOX, the committee believes the ad has been "influential," according to Weitzner.

"I think the Clinton-Gore administration has overplayed its hand; we never saw an ultimatum of a fixed figure — 13 percent — made public like this," Weitzner said in an interview, referring to the percent of land Israel is being asked to redeploy from in the latest U.S. proposal.

The committee's voice appears to be largely driven by conservative, pro-Likud Republicans laying the groundwork to attack Gore as a potential presidential hopeful in the 2000 elections.

Weitzner claims the organization is "nonpartisan and not trying to promote any particular agenda other than security and peace for Israel," but its key leaders are all Republicans. Other members who appeared at a May 12 Washington, D.C., news conference are also Republican: Sens. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.). The sole Democrat publicly identified with the organization is actor Ron Silver.

"We asked some Democrats to join us," Weitzner said, "but they were concerned about the politics because we criticize Clinton, and they declined."

Boschwitz said he became involved because other groups focusing on the Israel agenda, such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Zionist Organization of America, "have far different motives and goals than do we. They are large organizations, not very flexible or quick, with large boards of directors. We believe, and all our ads address, the fact that this administration has the feeling it can push the Israelis around, that the Israelis should be the negotiating ones. It's hard to think what concessions the Palestinians have made."

In addition to the television ad, the committee has been running print ads in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times and a number of Jewish newspapers, Weitzner said. The group's op-ed pieces have appeared in the Wall Street Journal and Jewish newspapers.

Some of the ads seem to be designed for shock value. In one ad, the viewer sees the back of Clinton's head and torso, with the adjacent words: "Why do so many respected voices say Bill Clinton has turned his back on Israel?" On the bottom of the page are the words: "Because it's true," with various quotations from leading publications.

In a recent alert, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee has called the committee's television ads "blatantly racist" propaganda that "must be removed from the air."

The ADC, urging supporters to protest the ads, says that the ABC affiliate took the ad off the air last week and that CBS was considering doing so as well. □