



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 96

Thursday, May 28, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Gingrich, Arafat meet

U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) described a meeting with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat as "very honest" and "positive." But Arafat did not appear with Gingrich in front of reporters after their meeting. Meanwhile, Gingrich lashed out at U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin for condemning as "appalling and outrageous" a comment Gingrich made earlier this month calling U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright an "agent for the Palestinians." [Page 1]

State Dept. slams Orthodox group

The U.S. State Department spokesman criticized a nationalist Orthodox group that sparked violent Israeli-Palestinian confrontations when they erected temporary structures in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City.

James Rubin said members of the Ateret Cohanim group are "consciously trying to prevent genuine reconciliation and to inflame an already intense situation."

Meanwhile, members of the movement agreed to remove the structures after Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert warned that municipal officials would take them down. Students from the movement's yeshiva said they nonetheless intended to maintain a presence at the site.

Ukrainian Jew granted asylum

The U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals agreed to grant asylum to a Ukrainian Jewish father and son who claimed they were victimized by anti-Semitism.

The decision upheld an immigration judge's ruling that the two did, in fact, have a "well-founded fear of persecution" based on conditions in the former Soviet republic.

Meanwhile, Russia cleared the way for one of a small number of remaining Jewish refuseniks to emigrate to Israel. [Page 3]

Knesset votes on election law

A bill to cancel the Israeli law for the direct election of the prime minister passed its first Knesset hurdle by a vote of 51-45.

Supporters of the bill included National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon, despite the governing coalition's official opposition.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Gingrich visit does little to alter political realities

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The rhetoric that emerged from a visit to Israel this week by an American congressional delegation did little to alter the political realities of the peace process.

To be sure, the comments by U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and others provided a morale boost for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been under attack from opposition members accusing him of sabotaging the peace process and from right-wing coalition members charging him with capitulating to Palestinian and American pressures.

But beyond the welcome words of support, the congressional visit appeared to do little to change the fact that the Israeli government must still wrestle with the U.S. demand that it pull back from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank in exchange for concrete Palestinian steps to crack down on terrorism.

Gingrich clearly dominated the delegation, which traveled to Israel to honor the Jewish state on its 50th anniversary.

The comments of Gingrich and his House colleagues, including House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), drew the ire of Palestinian officials, who said the legislators have no place in the peace process and charged that their statements were only aimed at winning Jewish votes back home.

Whether he was aiming for Jewish votes or the next Republican presidential nomination, Gingrich's remarks clearly had much to do with American politics — some Democrats and Republicans have distanced themselves from what they view as the Clinton administration's unwarranted pressure on Israel.

This resulted in a veritable war of words, with angry barbs traded back and forth this week between the Potomac and the Mediterranean.

On Tuesday, U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin lashed out at Gingrich, condemning as "appalling and outrageous" a comment Gingrich reportedly made earlier this month calling U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright an "agent for the Palestinians." The same day, White House spokesman Mike McCurry described Gingrich's comment about Albright as "highly offensive."

McCurry also suggested that Gingrich's outspoken disagreement with administration policy could have a detrimental effect on the peace process.

"Impromptu cheering from the sidelines, when it's designed to affect some of the critical decisions that either party has to make, has got to have something other than a beneficial impact on the process," said McCurry.

Rubin also took up the cudgel on the same point: If reports about Gingrich's "willingness to provoke the Israeli government to disagree with his own government" are true, he said, those "would be rather stunning comments that would undermine the efforts we're trying to make to advance America's national interest."

On Wednesday, after meeting with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, Gingrich lashed out at Rubin, saying he was outraged that Rubin would attack him while he was "overseas trying to be helpful."

Gingrich described his meeting with Arafat as "very honest" and "positive." But Arafat, who aides said had considered canceling the meeting because of the House speaker's pro-Israel comments, did not appear with Gingrich in front of reporters after their meeting. Gingrich has frequently criticized the Clinton administration for putting

MIDEAST FOCUS

Premier seeks China's help

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he hoped China would use the influence it has "in certain quarters" of the Middle East to help promote peace. Along with meeting government leaders during his four-day visit to Beijing, the premier is also promoting bilateral trade and Israeli expertise in agriculture and medicine.

Conservative programs launched

Israel's Conservative movement launched two new programs to boost Jewish identity in the Jewish state.

The Jerusalem-based Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies inaugurated the Center for Ethics, Social Concern and Public Policy, which will use Judaic sources to promote humanistic values. The institute also launched a master's program in Tel Aviv that will train 25 secular educators each year to teach Judaic studies in secular public schools.

Saudis, Iranians sign pact

Saudi Arabia and Iran signed a cooperation agreement aimed at ending nearly two decades of animosity. The agreement, signed in Tehran, calls for increased trade, academic exchanges and technological cooperation.

Bilateral relations soured after Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution, but there has been a gradual thawing since Mohammad Khatami, considered a relative moderate, was elected Iranian president last year.

Palestinian woman arrested

A 26-year-old Palestinian woman from the West Bank was arrested in the stabbing death of a Jewish teenager four months ago in Jerusalem.

Residents of the village where the woman lived said she did not have a nationalist motivation for the attack.

pressure on Israel to accept its proposal aimed at breaking the impasse in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. During his visit, he reiterated the view — one also espoused by Gephardt — that Israel alone should determine its security needs.

But despite Gingrich's rhetoric of support — and the importance of the U.S. Congress in the foreign policy debate — it appears that most Israelis understand that whatever Gingrich may say, it is still the Clinton administration that Netanyahu has to contend with. Beyond the rhetoric, Gingrich did not detonate any diplomatic land mines issues during the visit.

Rubin was referring to this Tuesday, when, beyond his various criticisms of the speaker, he acknowledged that Gingrich's trip had gone "reasonably well."

Last week, before he departed for Israel, the lawmaker said he would visit the site of the future U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, provoking criticism from Palestinian officials who said the visit would undermine their efforts to secure part of the city as the capital of a future Palestinian state. They also said it could prompt Palestinian violence.

But prior to his departure last Friday, Gingrich backed off from his vow to visit the embassy site, citing a request from the administration.

When he arrived in Israel over the weekend, Gingrich reaffirmed his support for moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. But touring Jerusalem with Mayor Ehud Olmert, he drove by, but did not stop at, the proposed location for the embassy. Gingrich's statements regarding Jerusalem extended beyond his call for moving the embassy.

During a speech to the Knesset on Tuesday, Gingrich drew applause when he declared Jerusalem the "united and eternal capital of Israel." The same words are often enunciated by administration officials, but the United States' official position is that the future of the city should be determined in final-status talks with the Palestinians.

Gingrich, who supported a nonbinding congressional resolution to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, recalled the visit several years ago of then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to mark Jerusalem's third millennium.

"We in Congress stood with him then, and stand with you today, in recognizing Jerusalem as the united and eternal capital of Israel," Gingrich told the Knesset.

His remarks drew applause — though from a less-than-full house. He was boycotted by some Israeli Arab legislators who walked out of the Knesset before he began his address. While much of the controversy surrounding his visit had to do with Jerusalem, Gingrich also tackled a different aspect of the peace process, saying the U.S. Congress would consider giving Israel \$1 billion in emergency aid to help cover the costs of a further Israeli redeployment in the West Bank.

"I think that on the basis of an emergency situation, I would certainly consider it. If we reach a peace agreement, most Americans would want to be supportive and helpful," Gingrich told the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Last week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told his Cabinet that he had asked the United States for the money, which would be used to build bypass roads and finance the dismantling of army bases in the event of a further redeployment. □

2 justices don't need lottery tickets

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Looking at the net worth of each of the nation's nine top jurists, this much can be said with certainty: You won't find Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg or Justice Stephen Breyer lining up for Powerball tickets anytime soon.

President Clinton's two Jewish appointees to the Supreme Court are far and away the richest justices, according to financial disclosure forms released this week. Ginsburg listed assets in a range of \$5.9 million to \$24.1 million for her husband and herself, and Justice Stephen Breyer's family assets range between \$4.3 million and \$15.9 million.

The justices are required to report family assets within broad ranges of estimated worth, as are other federal judges and high-ranking officials. They also must list gifts and other reimbursements. Ginsburg's disclosure showed she received a \$10,000 honorarium from Smith College, half of which she donated to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and half to the Women's Law and Public Policy Fellowship Program.

She also gave a \$2,000 law school honorarium to the Holocaust museum. □



Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
Mark J. Jaffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*
Lisa Hostein, *Editor*
Kenneth Bandler, *Managing Editor*
Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

JEWISH WORLD

High court rules on Ellis Island

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that most of Ellis Island, the historic gateway for millions of Jewish immigrants and others, belongs to New Jersey, not New York.

In a 6-3 decision, the court settled a 160-year-old border dispute by declaring that all the land added to the island to create the landmark U.S. immigration processing center from the 1890s until 1954 belongs to New Jersey.

The ruling allows New York to keep the island's original three acres.

New UJA chairman installed

Carole Solomon was installed as national chairman of the United Jewish Appeal.

The first woman to head the Jewish community's chief fund-raising body, Solomon assumes the leadership of UJA as it enters into a partnership with the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Israel Appeal.

Solomon succeeds Richard Wexler, who will become president of UJA.

Gold revaluation bill approved

The Swiss government approved a bill that would allow the country's central bank to revalue its gold and sell half of its reserves.

The move would enable the country to create the \$5 billion Foundation for Solidarity, announced last year to deflect criticisms that Switzerland profited from its financial dealings with Nazi Germany.

The revaluation plan requires approval by a nationwide referendum.

After saying last year that the referendum would take place during 1998, the government is now expecting it to take place next year.

Legislature to consider pardons

The German Parliament is expected to consider legislation that would grant a blanket pardon to hundreds of thousands of Germans believed to have been wrongfully convicted of crimes against the Nazi regime.

If enacted, the law would rehabilitate people, such as Jews and Resistance fighters, who were jailed or ordered executed by Nazi courts.

Literacy program planned

A Jewish group that seeks to engage the unaffiliated in Jewish life plans to launch a nationwide Hebrew literacy campaign.

The National Jewish Outreach Program said it expects to attract some 35,000 people to learn Hebrew at 2,000 locations across the United States and Canada during the month of November.

U.S. asylum panel recognizes anti-Semitic threat in Ukraine

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In an important development for Jews fleeing persecution in the former Soviet Union, a U.S. immigration panel agreed to grant asylum to a Ukrainian Jewish father and son who were victimized by anti-Semitism.

The decision by the Board of Immigration Appeals last week upheld an immigration judge's earlier ruling that the two did, in fact, have a "well-founded fear of persecution" based on the conditions in Ukraine.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society commended the decision, saying it reconfirms the fact that life for Jews and other minorities in the former Soviet Union "remains precarious."

Under U.S. immigration law, those seeking asylum in the United States must prove a well-founded fear of persecution in their country of origin.

The burden of proof is more difficult for those already in the United States seeking asylum than for those remaining in the former Soviet Union and seeking to enter the United States as refugees.

Under legislation known as the Lautenberg Amendment, Jews and evangelical Christians from the former Soviet Union can be granted refugee status if they show a "credible basis for concern" about the possibility of persecution.

The Lautenberg Amendment is named after its sponsor, Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.).

Because the immigration board found that there are indeed such fears in Ukraine, the decision is expected to make it easier for other Jews to seek asylum in the United States.

While living in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv in 1992 and 1993, the father — whose name was withheld by immigration officials — suffered repeated beatings and received handwritten anti-Semitic threats.

He also had his apartment vandalized by anti-Semitic nationalists, according to the immigration board's decision.

In addition, his son was subjected to degradation and intimidation on account of his being Jewish.

A federal judge initially found that the two had suffered persecution in Ukraine — a decision that the Immigration and Naturalization Service appealed to the Board of Immigration Appeals.

The INS argued that they only experienced "isolated acts of random violence perpetrated by unknown individuals."

The INS also said they did not have a well-founded fear of persecution because anti-Semitism had ceased to be government policy in Ukraine.

The immigration board disagreed, finding no evidence that conditions had changed in Ukraine, and clear evidence that the two suffered persecution based on their Jewish nationality.

"This was an important decision by the government decision-making body on immigration affairs, and it was a recognition on their part that Jews and other religious minorities continue to have a well-founded fear of persecution," said Leonard Glickman, executive vice president of HIAS.

Meanwhile, in another move welcomed by Jewish immigrant advocates, Russia cleared the way for one of a small number of remaining Jewish refuseniks to emigrate to Israel.

Gregory Schtutman worked in connection with the Russian military and had long been denied permission to leave on secrecy grounds.

The decision will allow Schtutman and his mother to join his wife and two daughters in Israel.

Mark Levin, executive director of the Washington-based National Conference on Soviet Jewry, said the move by Russia is a hopeful sign that underscores the need for "ongoing vigilance" and assistance from immigrant advocacy groups to free remaining Jewish refuseniks. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Report on Swiss-Nazi gold trade fuels demands for compensation

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A long-awaited report examining Switzerland's hand in the Nazi gold trade is fueling Jewish demands for more Swiss compensation and accountability.

The report, commissioned by the Swiss government and issued by an independent panel of historians, concludes that during the war, Swiss National Bank officials knew they were buying looted gold from Nazi Germany, but turned a blind eye and went ahead with "business as usual."

That charge has been put forth — even documented — by the U.S. government and Jewish officials before, but this marks the first time a study sanctioned by Switzerland has reached that conclusion.

The report of the so-called Bergier Commission once again throws the spotlight on Switzerland's wartime role, even as the United States is preparing to issue its own report that some observers say is intended, in part, to underscore the fact that other countries were involved in wartime transactions with the Nazis.

The U.S. report, on gold transactions between Nazi Germany and other wartime neutrals, is a follow-up to a report last year that focused largely on Switzerland's World War II-era financial dealings.

Like last year's U.S. report, this week's Bergier Commission study criticized Switzerland for its extensive financial dealings with Nazi Germany.

The Bergier report specifically targeted the Swiss National Bank for following an "ethic of the least effort" to trace the origins of the looted gold during the war, even though bank officials "became increasingly aware that Jews and other persecuted groups were being robbed."

The study by historians from Switzerland, the United States, Israel, England and Poland also confirmed that Switzerland was the leading center of German gold transactions and that the Swiss National Bank was the biggest client.

Overall, the report estimates, Switzerland's central bank bought \$280 million worth of gold from the Nazis, which would be valued at \$2.5 billion today.

Switzerland has defended its wartime purchases of gold from the German Reichsbank as necessary for maintaining the country's economic stability.

Jewish officials immediately seized on the report's findings as they renewed calls for Switzerland to agree to be part of a global settlement of all Holocaust-era claims stemming from Swiss actions during World War II.

The World Jewish Congress, lawyers representing Holocaust victims and Switzerland's three largest private banks have been holding settlement talks in recent weeks under the aegis of the U.S. State Department.

But the Swiss government has so far refused to join the commercial banks in the talks.

Thomas Borer, Switzerland's point man on Holocaust restitution issues, said this week as the Bergier report was released that his government "won't take part in any settlement that involves taxpayers' money."

The World Jewish Congress, for its part, called on Switzerland to provide compensation for all looted gold it took in during the war — not just the \$58 million it turned over to the Allies in accordance with a 1946 accord reached in Washington.

Under the terms of that agreement, the Allies agreed to drop all claims for looted gold bought from Nazi Germany.

The Swiss government, however, said this week that there were no grounds for any reparation by the government or the Swiss National Bank.

"The report provides no new basic facts and offers no basis for new demands, specifically regarding renegotiating the Washington Agreement," a Swiss government statement said.

Although the government criticized the central bank's wartime managers for lacking "the necessary sensitivity for moral and political considerations," it said the bank had already made a sufficient gesture by contributing \$68 million last year to a humanitarian fund set up to benefit Holocaust victims.

The World Jewish Congress said Switzerland's refusal to provide additional restitution "desecrates the memory of the victims of the Nazis" and is a "moral stain on Switzerland."

"In effect, they have ignored the findings of their own commission," said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJC. "Why appoint a commission if you are not going to act on its findings?"

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, called the Swiss government's reaction "an exercise in damage control rather than full commitment to the truth."

He said Switzerland must follow up on the report by directly confronting the basic moral issues and come clean with all relevant historical facts if it wants to attain closure.

"If it's a first step, then it's a very important first step," Cooper said of the report. "If this is the extent that they're going to do, then the very diligent work by this commission ends up being a manipulation by the Swiss government."

In Israel, Avraham Burg, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, said the findings in the Swiss report underscore the need for a "comprehensive global settlement."

"As long as we don't have this, we will have an ongoing process of torturing each other, which I think is a waste," Burg said. □

Golan campaign launched

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Jewish residents of the Golan Heights have launched a campaign to settle more Israelis in the region.

Yehuda Wollman, head of the Golan local council, said the purpose of the campaign was to change the demographic balance of the region, currently home to some 15,000 Israelis and 18,000 Druse.

Some 380 homes are in various stages of construction in 14 Golan communities. Supported by state subsidies, some of the homes are being offered for \$47,000, a low price by Israeli standards.

Syria condemned the campaign, saying it was further proof that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not interested in peace.

Israel captured the Golan from Syria during the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed the region in 1981.

Syria has demanded the return of the Golan as part of any peace package with Israel. □