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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Neutrals' wartime trade probed

Switzerland and other neutral nations engaged in banking and war trade with Nazi Germany that "helped to sustain the Nazi war effort," according to a new U.S. State Department report.

The report, the second issued by the State Department on the Nazi gold issue, details how Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and Argentina provided materiel that the Nazis used to keep their military effort alive.

AIPAC welcomes court decision

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee welcomed a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that leaves to the Federal Election Commission the determination of whether the pro-Israel lobbying group is a membership organization. [Page 1]

Conservatives claim victory

Conservative Jewish leaders in Israel claimed victory after Israeli police provided protection from fervently Orthodox Jews who protested mixed-gender services near the Western Wall over Shavuot.

The decision to allow the worshipers to continue this year stood in contrast to their actions during Shavuot last year, when police ordered the group to leave the site. After services, some fervently Orthodox Jews walked through Jerusalem's Old City, vandalizing Palestinian shops and stoning local residents.

Mordechai: 'The time has come'

Israel's defense minister believes the Jewish state can no longer delay a decision on a further redeployment from the West Bank. "The time has come to make decisions. We cannot delay this any longer," Yitzhak Mordechai said Tuesday after talks in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on the stalled Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Netanyahu has so far resisted an American proposal, aimed at ending the 15-month-old stalemate, which calls for Israel to hand over another 13 percent of the West Bank in exchange for Palestinian security guarantees. [Page 3]

Argentina plans anti-racist thrust

Argentina announced the creation of a task force to combat racist groups. According to the plan, the Argentine Federal Police will "study all racist and authoritarian groups" active in Argentina. [Page 3]

AIPAC claims a victory in Supreme Court ruling

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The American Israel Public Affairs Committee claimed victory this week in a 9-year-old legal standoff with several staunch critics of U.S. policy toward Israel.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in a 6-3 ruling issued Monday, made it highly unlikely that the pro-Israel lobby will have to disclose information about its membership and expenditures — a goal sought by six former politicians and diplomats.

Alleging that AIPAC made campaign contributions and expenditures on behalf of political candidates, the plaintiffs have been urging the Federal Election Commission to regulate AIPAC as a political committee — a designation that would force the organization to file public reports about all of its receipts and expenditures.

But in a case being closely watched by groups that lobby in Washington, the high court chose not to rule on the status of AIPAC and instead sent the case back to the FEC.

Thus the battle is not necessarily over, and the plaintiffs have vowed to press ahead with the case.

AIPAC, for its part, defines itself as a membership organization and registered lobby on behalf of legislation affecting U.S.-Israel relations — with complete freedom to communicate with its members on politics and elections.

The plaintiffs in the case included James Akins, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and former U.S. Rep. Paul Findley (R-Ill.), who has referred to the federal government as "Israeli-occupied territory" and blamed AIPAC for defeating his 1982 re-election bid.

Akins, Findley and four other former government officials who have worked to undermine U.S. support for Israel filed suit in 1989 in an effort to convince the FEC to scrutinize AIPAC's finances.

In 1992, the election commission found that AIPAC spent money in an effort to influence congressional elections. But it decided not to designate AIPAC as a political action committee because it said that was not the group's "major purpose."

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia rejected the FEC's major purpose test in 1996 and held that AIPAC should be classified as a political committee because it spent more than \$1,000 a year on campaigns.

According to law, a political committee is defined as "any committee" that receives or spends more than \$1,000 per year for the purpose of "influencing any election for federal office." This definition includes political action committees, which raise funds to support political candidates.

AIPAC officials say the group does not make political contributions.

In its Supreme Court appeal, FEC vs. Akins, the FEC argued that the plaintiffs did not have standing to bring the case; the commission argued that they had not suffered some "injury in fact" that the court could remedy.

The justices, however, ruled this week that the plaintiffs were entitled to bring the lawsuit — a move that opened the door to future lawsuits against the FEC by voters who claim the commission has not adequately enforced the financial disclosure requirements imposed by federal law on certain political groups.

But the court did not rule on the merits of the claim against AIPAC, instead sending the dispute back to the FEC. In doing so, the justices left undecided the core issue that spawned the lawsuit: whether AIPAC should be considered a political committee

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel reassures Pakistan

Israel's ambassador to the United States phoned his Pakistani counterpart to reassure Islamabad that Israel has no intention to destroy Pakistani nuclear sites, according to an Israeli news report.

The phone call from Elisha Ben-Elissar came amid unconfirmed reports that Israel planned to carry out such strikes in cooperation with India. India and Pakistan have both carried out underground nuclear tests in recent weeks.

Israelis seek bomb shelters

Residents of northern Israeli communities sought safety in bomb shelters amid fears of possible rocket attacks from across the Lebanese border. The fears arose amid intensified fighting between Israel and Hezbollah gunmen in southern Lebanon.

Israel awaiting U.S. initiative

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Cabinet ministers that Israel is waiting for an initiative from Washington to jump-start the moribund peace talks.

Israel reportedly believes that the United States should support a smaller third pullback from the West Bank in exchange for a larger Israeli redeployment this time around. Meanwhile, the Clinton administration has been working to lower Palestinian expectations regarding the pullbacks, according to the Israeli daily newspaper Ha'aretz.

No-confidence vote passes

A no-confidence vote against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu passed in the Knesset by a vote of 41-6. But it fell short of the 61-vote majority needed to bring Netanyahu's government down.

Two parties belonging to the governing coalition, the National Religious Party and the Third Way, boycotted the vote, sending warnings to the premier about their disagreements with his policies.



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subject to federal campaign regulations on spending and reporting.

The FEC will now decide that question based on new developments in election law and new regulations for distinguishing political committees from membership organizations.

AIPAC was not a direct party in the case before the court, but the group filed a friend-of-the-court brief asking that the complaint be dismissed or that the case go back to the FEC.

"We're very pleased that the Supreme Court agreed with our view of the case," said Thomas Hungar, a lawyer representing AIPAC.

"We think" the FEC "will be forced to recognize what AIPAC has argued all along — that it's a membership organization" that has the constitutional right to communicate with its members on any subject, he said.

Justice Stephen Breyer wrote the majority opinion for the court, which was joined by Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justices John Paul Stevens, Anthony Kennedy, David Souter and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Justices Antonin Scalia, Sandra Day O'Connor and Clarence Thomas dissented.

In sending the dispute back to the FEC, Breyer said, "The FEC should proceed to determine whether or not AIPAC's expenditures qualify as 'membership communications' and thereby fall outside the scope of 'expenditures' that could qualify it as a political committee."

He said new FEC rules defining membership organizations "could significantly affect" that determination.

In explaining the decision to return the case to the FEC, Breyer said, "If the FEC decides that AIPAC's activities fall within the membership's communications exception, the matter will become moot."

A spokesman for the FEC had no comment on the court's ruling or what action the FEC might take, saying the commission's attorneys were still studying this week's decision.

One of the plaintiffs, Andrew Killgore, said his group does not plan to give up.

"We still hope that AIPAC will eventually have to reveal its finances as all political committees have to. That's the goal we had from the beginning," said Killgore, former ambassador to Qatar and the publisher of the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, a publication that is highly critical of U.S. support for Israel.

Some legal observers, meanwhile, say the issue of AIPAC's status remains wide open because the FEC has yet to finalize its new regulations for membership organizations.

In addition, these observers say, any decision the FEC makes could now be subject to further litigation.

"As much as I hate to rain on AIPAC's party," said Marc Stern, a lawyer with the American Jewish Congress, "it may not be tomorrow or the next day or even the next month before this matter is out of the way." □

Committee approves El Al sale

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli Knesset committee has approved the sale of 49 percent of Israel's national airline.

Transportation Minister Shaul Yahalom, who said he expected the sale to take place within the next year, said that despite interest from major investors, shares in El Al would be offered publicly over the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange.

The sale is part of the Israeli government's plan to privatize a large part of the state industrial sector, but it would leave the government as the majority shareholder in El Al and El Al planes would still be banned from flying on Shabbat.

The decision must still be approved by the Cabinet and the Knesset Finance Committee.

Meanwhile, El Al has joined other airlines in declaring all of its flights smoke-free.

The new policy went into effect this week and will apply to all flights on the airline's routes.

Airline officials decided to adopt the no-smoking policy after a poll of passengers showed that 89 percent were interested in having smoke-free flights. □

JEWISH WORLD

Court to hear deportation case

The U.S. Supreme Court said it would hear an appeal from the Justice Department, which seeks to deport seven Palestinians and a Kenyan linked to an alleged terrorist group. The high court agreed to review a federal appeals court ruling that prevented the government from deporting the eight, who are allegedly affiliated with the Damascus-based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Prayer amendment faces vote

The U.S. House of Representatives is expected to vote this week on a school prayer amendment to the Constitution.

The measure, known as the "Religious Freedom Amendment," must be approved by two-thirds of the legislative body. Jewish groups urged lawmakers to reject the measure, and President Clinton used his weekly radio address to argue that such an amendment would be counterproductive.

Israel to close consulates

Israel announced that it would soon close four of its consulates around the world. The closings, which were attributed to budget cuts, are slated to take place in Philadelphia; Atlanta; Marseilles, France; and Minsk, Belarus. The Israeli consulate in Montreal and one in South America might also soon be shut down.

Better climate cited in Ukraine

Anti-Semitic articles in Ukrainian newspapers declined by 25 percent last year, according to a recent report. Ukrainian Jewish leaders say that the study conducted by the Kiev-based Institute for Jewish Studies is just one indication of an improving climate for Jews in the former Soviet republic.

Jews, bishops met in Australia

A delegation representing the official organization of Catholic bishops in Australia met for the first time with leaders of the country's Jewish umbrella group.

The two groups met in Sydney's Great Synagogue to discuss ways in which the recently released Vatican document "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah" could be used to further Catholic-Jewish understanding in Australia. The document has come under criticism from some Jewish leaders for failing to condemn Pope Pius XII's silence in the face of the Holocaust.

Agency apologizes for Hitler ad

An international advertising agency apologized for using an image of Adolf Hitler to sell potato chips in Thailand. The ad was "never intended to offend," the Bangkok office of the Leo Burnett agency said after Israeli diplomats complained.

Israeli defense minister says decision time is now

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's defense minister believes the Jewish state can no longer delay a decision on a further redeployment from the West Bank.

"The time has come to make decisions. We cannot delay this any longer," Yitzhak Mordechai said Tuesday after talks in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on the stalled Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

A moderate in the governing coalition of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Mordechai was optimistic that the second phase of the further redeployment would soon be carried out.

Netanyahu has so far resisted an American proposal, aimed at ending the 15-month-old stalemate, which calls for Israel to hand over another 13 percent of the West Bank in exchange for Palestinian security guarantees.

The defense minister's trip to Cairo came as Arab leaders considered convening a summit to address the impasse in talks, and a day after the Israeli Cabinet again failed to reach a decision on the U.S.-proposed plan.

A sign of the division within Netanyahu's coalition was apparent Tuesday, when members boycotted Knesset votes of no-confidence.

The Third Way Party stayed away to protest the government's failure to implement the second phase of the further redeployment.

Meanwhile, members of the National Religious Party boycotted to protest any plans to hand over more territory.

During the vote, some members of the NRP toured Har Homa, the controversial housing site in southeastern Jerusalem, to demonstrate their dissatisfaction that building has not started there yet.

The no-confidence motion passed 41-6, but fell short of the 61-vote majority needed to bring down the coalition. □

Argentina announces task force to combat racism and neo-Nazism

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Argentina has announced the creation of a task force to combat racist and neo-Nazi groups.

According to the plan, the Argentine Federal Police will "study all racist and authoritarian groups" active in Argentina.

The creation of the task force, whose mandate includes locating war criminals living in Argentina, comes amid other anti-Nazi moves in the country.

The effort will be coordinated by officials belonging to the Interior Security Secretariat and the National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism. Government officials have invited Argentine Jewish organizations and human rights groups to help with the task force.

"This initiative will make it possible to fight against racist groups on a nationwide basis and to detect who the leaders are and how those groups are financed," said Jorge Brostzein, assistant secretary of the Argentine Jewish umbrella organization DAIA.

Human rights groups, however, were less enthusiastic.

"We'll wait and see," said Alfredo Bravo, a member of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights.

The assembly is Argentina's oldest and most prestigious civil rights organization. "We do not want to endorse blindly any police group unless we can monitor what they do," Bravo said.

Argentina recently prosecuted the first suspects under its hate-crimes law.

The country is also in the process of extraditing Dinko Sakic to Croatia.

Sakic was a commander at the Jasenovac concentration camp in the Central European country between 1942 and 1944. □

Conservative Jews claim win in wake of protection at wall

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Conservative Jewish leaders in Israel are declaring victory after a group of 250 worshipers completed prayers on Shavuot morning at the Western Wall under police protection — despite attempts by hundreds of fervently Orthodox Jews to stop the service.

Last year, non-Orthodox Jews who prayed near the Western Wall plaza were attacked by fervently Orthodox Jews who objected to men and women worshipping together because they say it defies Jewish tradition.

At that time, the police told the Conservative worshipers to leave the area, saying they could not assure protection. This time, police provided the protection that the Conservative movement had demanded.

"We purposely set ourselves up so that we would interfere with as few people as possible," said Rabbi Andrew Sacks, director of the Rabbinical Assembly of Israel.

"I never dreamed we would be able to get through the entire prayer service," he said.

But asked whether this year's police protection represented a new policy, a spokesman for the Jerusalem police said it did not.

It was easier to protect the non-Orthodox this year because the Orthodox "were less violent," the spokesman said.

The events on Shavuot mark the latest battle between the Orthodox and liberal streams of Judaism, which are seeking legal recognition for their movements in Israel.

Though the Reform movement was not officially part of the mixed prayer service on Shavuot, a delegation of Reform Jews from the United States is planning to hold a mixed-gender service at the Western Wall when it travels to Israel next week.

The "leadership pilgrimage" of leaders from Reform congregations around the country will be going to Israel to learn more about issues of religious pluralism, said an official from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Reform umbrella body organizing the trip.

"Part of the motivation for this whole trip is that the denial of full access to the wall is representative of denial of full rights of non-Orthodox Jews in Israel in general," said Rabbi Daniel Freeland, an executive with the UAHC.

According to participants in Sunday's service, the non-Orthodox worshipers arrived at the Western Wall on Shavuot morning at about 4:45 a.m.

Shavuot, which began Saturday night, celebrates the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people.

Although they gathered near the Western Wall parking lot — far from the prayer plaza — it did not take long for fervently Orthodox, or haredi, men to crowd around. When the first haredim arrived, the police did not react.

Conservative worshipers demanded protection and agreed to move the minyan a few feet away, as the police requested.

Dozens of police then formed a ring around the group, separating the worshipers from a crowd that swelled to hundreds of fervently Orthodox men who shouted, hissed and sang.

"We did not respond to the shouting," said Gad Lewin, 18, an Israeli who is doing community service for the Conservative

movement before joining the army. "We came to pray. It was the haredim who came to make trouble, and their behavior was certainly not befitting the holiday."

Orthodox groups, which want to uphold the tradition of separate prayer at the wall, had appealed to the non-Orthodox not to be "provocative" with mixed worship this year.

Some haredim threw bottles, eggs and bags filled with water and chocolate milk at the worshipers. Police pushed back any haredim who tried to break the police ring.

The worshipers paid no attention. They continued the service, and called women up to the Torah as planned.

"I couldn't be happier that it went smoothly," Sacks said. "I hope it will become a precedent."

A day after the holiday, Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of Masorti, as the Conservative movement is called in Israel, praised the police for providing protection.

"It is their duty to keep the peace and defend the right to freedom of worship at the Kotel," he said, using the Hebrew word for the Western Wall. "I am very pleased that this time, the police did not give in to explicit threats by the Orthodox chief rabbis who wanted to prevent us from praying."

Bandel was referring to reports that before the holiday, Israel's chief rabbis sent a letter to the office of the Israeli rabbi responsible for holy sites. According to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, the rabbis requested that the Conservative service be stopped because it would "severely undermine everything that has been customary and accepted throughout the generations."

An official at the Chief Rabbinate would not confirm the letter, but said "it was likely" that such a letter was sent because the chief rabbis sent a similar letter last year.

The chief rabbis made no comment on the events at the Western Wall.

After the haredim failed to thwart the Conservative service, many turned their anger against Palestinians in the Old City, according to officials. In a series of scuffles, nine Palestinians, four haredim and two policemen were injured. □

(JTA staff writer Debra Nussbaum Cohen contributed to this report.)

Man sues after racial slur

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — An Argentine Jewish bus driver has suffered a nervous breakdown and attempted suicide after he said he was called a "shitty Jew" by his boss.

For the past four years, Eduardo Goesman has worked as a driver on the 111 bus line here. Late in April, he asked to have a day off to have some medical tests done.

But his boss refused permission. He went on to tell Goesman that his problem was that "like all Jews, you have poison in your blood."

After the incident, Goesman reported what happened to the Argentine Jewish umbrella organization DAIA. But in the following days, he tried to slit his wrists. Goesman was rushed by his family to a local hospital and was committed to a psychiatric facility.

The Goesman family filed charges against the bus company for racial discrimination and mental cruelty. A judge is currently investigating the case. □