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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Albright reiterates U.S. stance

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright reiterated the Clinton administration's view that the future of Jerusalem should be decided in final-status negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Albright made the statement after being asked in front of a Senate subcommittee whether the United States considers that Vice President Al Gore was in Israel when he delivered a speech last month in Jerusalem celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Jewish state. [Page 3]

Redeployment aid opposed

The Senate subcommittee chairman responsible for writing the foreign aid bill expressed opposition to an Israeli proposal for an additional \$1 billion in U.S. foreign aid to help fund security arrangements if the Jewish state agrees to redeploy troops from the West Bank.

Speaking to U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright before she began testimony before a Senate appropriations subcommittee hearing, Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said he hoped no promises had been made to this effect "because many people will be very disappointed."

Religious freedom act scrutinized

A U.S. House panel heard testimony from legal experts about legislation intended to restore protections for religious freedom.

Like the Religious Freedom Restoration Act that was struck down last year by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional, the proposed Religious Liberty Protection Act would protect religious practices from government interference.

The legal experts offered widely different views of the measure, with some arguing that it would pass constitutional muster and others calling it a misguided effort to change the First Amendment.

Anti-Semitic wave in Switzerland

Swiss newspapers have been flooded with anti-Semitic letters to the editor as a result of ongoing pressure on the country to confront its wartime past. The Swiss daily *Blick* said the country's more than 100 newspapers have received hundreds of anti-Semitic letters, the majority of them far too insulting ever to reach print. [Page 2]

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Reform rabbis to re-examine controversial 'patrilineal' policy

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Fifteen years after adopting one of its most controversial policies, the Reform movement is taking another look at "patrilineal descent."

But rescinding the policy is not on the agenda.

Instead, a task force of Reform rabbis mandated to investigate the ramifications of the 1983 policy has recommended that the term be renamed "equilineal descent" or "Jewish descent."

The 11-rabbi task force of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, created two years ago, is also recommending that the organization develop "clear guidelines" for applying the policy, which is interpreted in a range of ways by Reform rabbis.

Patrilineal descent, which has been deeply controversial both within the Reform movement and even more so outside of it, recognizes as Jewish the children of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother as long as they are educated as Jews and engage in "appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification," such as Bar or Bat Mitzvahs and confirmations.

Traditional Judaism recognizes as Jewish a child whose mother is Jewish.

Despite the need to re-examine how the decision is interpreted, there does not appear to be any move to rescind it. A report on the issue has been mailed to all Reform rabbis and is slated for discussion at next week's CCAR conference in Anaheim, Calif.

The recommendations of the task force do not require a vote, but are up to CCAR officials to implement.

Patrilineal descent was adopted by the Reform rabbinate as a way to cope with increasing rates of interfaith marriage and the need for rabbis to find a way to integrate into congregational life growing numbers of children whose fathers, but not mothers, were Jewish. It has been embraced by the vast majority of Reform rabbis and congregants in the United States.

As a result of the policy, "the only place an intermarried couple can find a fully welcoming environment is in a Reform congregation," said Rabbi Samuel Stahl, chairman of the task force that has made the recommendations.

The policy itself is "totally accepted" by Reform congregants, said Dru Greenwood, director of outreach for the Reform movement's congregational arm, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

The problem is, say Reform rabbis, there is no consistency about what it means to be educated Jewishly. While a Reform rabbi in Albuquerque, N.M., may accept as Jewish a teen-ager with a non-Jewish mother and Jewish father who has had little Hebrew school education and never had a Bar Mitzvah ceremony, another Reform rabbi, say, in New York, might require that same teen to have celebrated all of the available Jewish rites of passage in order to be considered Jewish.

If that family then moves from Albuquerque to New York and the teen wants to join a Reform temple youth group, he may not be considered Jewish.

Or later, when he approaches a Reform rabbi to officiate at his wedding to a Jewish woman, he may not be considered Jewish then, either, and he may be told that he has to convert to Judaism even though he grew up considering himself part of the Jewish people. The problem grows even more acute when American Reform Jews move to Canada, where almost unanimously, Reform rabbis reject the entire concept of patrilineal descent.

"It is totally unworkable for someone to be a Jew in New York and not a Jew in

MIDEAST FOCUS

Premier says he won't be rushed

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is reportedly angry at his defense minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, for pushing him to reach an agreement regarding a further West Bank redeployment. The premier said he would not be rushed into a decision, telling Army Radio, "We don't point a pistol at our own forehead."

Meanwhile, an Israeli government official was quoted as saying a redeployment agreement would have to include a letter of assurance from Washington that it would oppose any unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood until the peace process is completed.

Clinton, Hariri meet

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri told President Clinton during a meeting in Washington that a peace agreement with Israel could be negotiated in three months if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu resumes negotiations where they left off with Syria.

Hariri later met with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to discuss U.S. calls on Lebanon to discuss what Israel says are necessary security arrangements in order to withdraw from southern Lebanon.

Israel rejects extradition

Israel rejected Germany's request to extradite Stephen Smyrek, a German citizen charged with planning to help Hezbollah militants carry out a terrorist attack in Israel.

A representative from the state attorney's office stated in court that Israel wanted to try Smyrek, who was arrested at Ben-Gurion Airport when he arrived in Israel in November.

Smyrek's lawyer accused Israel of holding onto his client to use him as a possible bargaining chip in a future prisoner exchange with the Islamic fundamentalist group Hezbollah.



Daily News Bulletin

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Cincinnati" or some other place, said Greenwood. There is no available estimate of the number of Reform Jews who are defined as Jewish by the patrilineal policy, and the percentage of congregants in Reform temples who are intermarried ranges from as low as 5 percent to as high as 70 percent, Greenwood said.

The patrilineal policy — which is also in place in the Reconstructionist movement — has been blasted by Conservative and Orthodox leaders since its implementation as an unacceptable break with the historical Jewish transmission of Jewishness through the mother. Even among Reform rabbis it has not been universally welcomed.

"It creates further schisms from the non-Reform community," said Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, the director of Kolel: Center for Liberal Jewish Learning in Toronto.

In part as a result of the patrilineal descent policy, "I don't know what 'klal Yisrael' [the people of Israel] is anymore," said Goldstein, the only one of 11 members of the Task Force on Patrilineal Descent who disagrees with the policy altogether.

Stahl, the task force chairman, said he hopes that the CCAR will develop a set of clear guidelines for rabbis to follow when it comes to applying patrilineal descent, or "Jewish descent," as he prefers it be called.

Stahl said that while he expects the CCAR to accept the recommendations, he does not think all Reform rabbis will adopt them.

The notions of "standards" and "expectations" are deeply controversial within the Reform movement, where "we worship autonomy," said Stahl, the rabbi at Temple Beth-El in San Antonio, Texas.

"But I think it's very desirable. It's going to be the only way we're going to get through this issue." □

Swiss papers see increase in anti-Semitic letters to editor

By Fredy Rom

BERN (JTA) — Swiss newspapers have been flooded with anti-Semitic letters to the editor as a result of ongoing pressure on the country to confront its wartime past.

The Swiss daily Blick said this week that the country's newspapers have received hundreds of anti-Semitic letters, the majority of them far too insulting ever to reach print.

There have been previous anti-Semitic backlashes during the past years, as revelations surfaced about the Swiss banks' role in financing the Nazi war machine and about their unwillingness to return dormant bank accounts opened by Jews during the war years.

The efforts of the Volcker commission, a panel led by former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker investigating the extent of the dormant accounts, were targeted this week by a newspaper in the canton, or state, of Ticino. Referring to members of the commission, the paper Il Mattino della Domenica reported that "emissaries of the Jewish lobby" were sending "blackmailers" to a luxury hotel.

The paper suggested that the commission members would be better off if they went to the "Hotel Buchenwald in Dachau." Swiss police officials in Bern called on authorities in Ticino to launch an investigation of the newspaper's publisher, Giuliano Bignasca, who is a well-known right-wing figure.

The latest anti-Semitic backlash came in the wake of a report published last week by the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center which charged that Switzerland was "thoroughly saturated" with pro-fascist groups that influenced the country's wartime government to support the Nazis. The report was criticized by Swiss Jewish leaders and political figures, some of whom have threatened to bring a class-action lawsuit against the center for defaming Switzerland.

Among those contemplating the suit are Sigi Feigel, the honorary president of the Zurich Jewish community, and Francois Loeb, a Jewish lawmaker from Bern.

Swiss President Flavio Cotti, who called the report an "insult," told Parliament on Tuesday that the government would not participate in the suit.

Rolf Bloch, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Switzerland and another critic of the report, also indicated this week that his group would not participate in the suit. □

JEWISH WORLD

Volkswagen latest German firm targeted by Holocaust survivors

By Deirdre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Volkswagen has joined the growing list of German companies resisting pressure to pay back wages to Holocaust survivors who worked as forced laborers during World War II.

A Volkswagen official rejected demands this week by 30 former Jewish slave laborers for compensation.

The Hungarian-born survivors, who were taken from Auschwitz to work at VW headquarters in Wolfsburg, Germany, between 1944 and 1945, plan to sue the car company, according to their spokesman, Klaus von Muenchhausen, who has represented other groups of forced laborers.

VW repeated the standard argument made by German industry since the end of the war — that the German government is responsible for settling such claims because it is the legal successor to the Nazi regime.

Historian Hans Mommsen, who has published a study of VW's role during the war, estimates in his book that roughly two-thirds of Volkswagen's workforce during the war were forced laborers, including more than 1,500 Jewish workers.

Forced laborers were chosen by the SS from concentration camp inmates and loaned to German industry; companies paid minimal wages for the workers to the SS.

A few German companies have settled such demands out of court with one-time compensation payments, but none have agreed to accept legal responsibility for their use of slave labor. Earlier this month, the Nuremberg armament company Karl Diehl agreed, under political pressure, to pay \$552 for each month of forced labor to its former slave workers.

Last year, 21 Holocaust survivors who were forced to work during the war for the firm Weichsel Metall Union lost their legal battle to obtain wages because of compensation they had received from the German government. One plaintiff who had never received any compensation payment, however, was awarded money for a year of forced labor.

In March, a Russian woman who was forced to work at Ford's German subsidiary in Cologne sued Ford in a federal court in New Jersey for back pay and punitive damages.

The opposition German Green Party has demanded a central compensation fund for survivors of forced labor, funded with money contributed by all German companies that profited from slave workers. The increased attention paid to the role of German industry during the war has prompted several companies to hire historians to examine their actions during the Nazi regime. □

Did Gore visit Israel?

WASHINGTON (JTA) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright faced off with a senator this week over a long-running dispute with Capitol Hill regarding U.S. policy toward Jerusalem.

When asked by Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) at a hearing Tuesday whether the United States considers that Vice President Al Gore was in Israel when he delivered a speech last month in Jerusalem celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Jewish state, Albright said, "Jerusalem is a final-status issue."

In 1995, Congress overwhelmingly passed a law declaring that the United States "should" recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move its embassy there from Tel Aviv. The Clinton administration has refused, citing Israel's willingness to discuss the status of Jerusalem in the final-status talks with the Palestinians.

Speaking before the Senate appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, Albright told McConnell, "I think it's not appropriate for us to offer our views. And this is going to be a permanent-status issue."

The briefing book for Gore's trip, however, said his visit was to "Jerusalem, Israel." □

Synagogue to be rebuilt

A private foundation said it will rebuild a synagogue in the town where the Auschwitz death camp is located. A group called the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation is planning to restore the Lomdei Mishnaot Synagogue, which was used as a carpet factory after the war, for an estimated \$5 million to \$10 million. The building in the town of Oswiecim was the first property returned to a Jewish community in Poland under a government restitution program.

Jewish women air abortion views

More than 30 professional Jewish women sent a letter to members of the U.S. Congress to voice opposition to the practice known as partial-birth abortion.

The letter, organized by the Maryland-based Institute for Religious Values, urges lawmakers to override President Clinton's veto of legislation banning the late-term procedure to end pregnancy. Earlier this year, the institute sent lawmakers a similar letter signed by some 70 rabbis from all denominations.

KKK plans Texas rally

Two factions of the Ku Klux Klan said they want to hold a joint rally in the Texas town where a black man was dragged to his death behind a pickup truck earlier this month.

Both groups said they wanted to use the rally to disavow any involvement in the killing of James Byrd Jr. A local sheriff said he expected some 15 Klan members, dressed in white hoods, to attend the rally.

O.U. submits testimony

In testimony submitted to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, the Orthodox Union opposed organized prayer in public schools but supported taxpayer funding of religious schools.

The commission is holding a series of hearings around the country about religion in schools.

Israel to keep consulates open

Israel decided to keep open 15 overseas diplomatic offices that had been slated to be closed for budgetary considerations.

Consulates in Philadelphia and Montreal were among the offices originally slated for closure.

Firm plans to pull offensive ad

A Finnish mobile telephone company said it would cancel an advertising campaign that uses a slogan Jewish groups found offensive. The American Jewish Committee had complained about advertisements in Germany for Nokia phones that used the phrase "Everyone Gets His Due." The same slogan appeared above the entrance to the Buchenwald concentration camp.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Hamas unwilling to join new Palestinian Cabinet***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Yasser Arafat is seeking a new partner, but the group he is courting is playing hard to get.

Early this week, the chairman of the Palestinian Authority invited Hamas to join his Cabinet as part of a reshuffle.

The offer came on the eve of a Palestinian legislative council session that was expected to focus on alleged corruption in Arafat's government. It also came just days ahead of the expected return to the Gaza Strip of Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, who this week completed an extensive Middle East tour, collecting some \$50 million for the fundamentalist Islamic group.

These two developments appear to be behind Arafat's decision to extend the offer to Hamas, despite the group's opposition to the peace process.

The move by the leader of the Palestinian Authority was at least partially successful.

On Monday, the legislature granted Arafat the 10-day extension he requested to make the Cabinet changes — and to continue his talks with Hamas.

Whether Hamas would eventually join the Palestinian government — and thus for the first time give formal recognition to the Palestinian Authority that was established as a result of the Oslo process — remains doubtful.

A Hamas spokesman in Jordan immediately spurned Arafat's offer, but a leader of the group in Gaza said a final decision would await Yassin's return.

Some analysts said there was little doubt about the outcome of that decision.

"Hamas has no interest in joining Arafat," said Yosef Ginat, an expert on Palestinian affairs at Haifa University.

"Yassin has just returned from his Middle East tour with a bag full of money.

"He will funnel the money to develop social causes, such as kindergartens and clinics, and thus strengthen Hamas' hold in the territories even further."

Ginat, who served as an adviser on Arab affairs to Prime Minister Shimon Peres in the 1980s, said high-ranking sources in Egypt told him that Hamas did not intend to make life easy on Arafat.

But at least in one area Hamas appears to be cooperating with the Palestinian Authority.

For nearly a year, Hamas has refrained from terrorist attacks in Israel.

But whether the Palestinian Authority has urged Hamas to halt such attacks is up for debate.

"Arafat has threatened Hamas that if they renew the terrorist attacks, all hell will break lose," said Ginat.

According to this rationale, Arafat, fearing an all-out military conflict, does not want to give Israel a pretext to end peace negotiations.

But Yuval Steiniz, an Israeli observer of Palestinian affairs, gave another explanation of why there have not been any recent attacks.

"Arafat and his allies decided already two years ago that a major military confrontation with Israel is getting close. They agree that the right political strategy is to minimize terrorism in the period prior to that confrontation, so that responsibility for the flare-up will lie on Netanyahu's intransigence and not on the terrorist attacks," he said.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, meanwhile, charged that the very thought of offering the fundamentalist Islamic group seats in the Cabinet amounted to a serious violation of the Oslo peace accords.

"Arafat's invitation to a terrorist group to participate in Palestinian governmental activity without demanding that it renounce terrorism and disarm its military wing makes a mockery of the Palestinian Authority's promises to wage a systematic campaign to uproot the terrorist infrastructure," the Netanyahu government said in a statement.

Israel was not pleased with Yassin's regional tour. The crippled Hamas leader had ostensibly left Gaza to seek medical treatment, not to raise funds.

The Israelis discussed banning Yassin's return this week, but eventually decided that it was better to have him within the self-rule areas.

Yassin was released from an Israeli jail last October in exchange for two Israel agents held by Jordan after the botched assassination attempt last September on Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal.

The sheik's triumphant return to Gaza last fall strengthened Hamas as a political force poised against Arafat.

Now, after leaders in Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and Iran feted him — Saudi King Fahd's brothers reportedly gave Yassin \$25 million — Yassin was coming back again even stronger.

"His position will certainly be strengthened in comparison with other Palestinian leaders," Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli Arab aide to Arafat, said in an interview.

And that will make Arafat's attempt to co-opt the Islamic group by bringing it into his government even harder. □

Extremists make gains

SYDNEY (JTA) — A far-right party has earned a quarter of the vote in an Australian state election — despite efforts by Australian Jewish groups.

According to preliminary results, the One Nation Party will earn 12 of 89 seats in the Queensland legislature.

One Nation ran on an anti-immigrant and anti-welfare platform.

Led by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Jewish groups publicly urged voters and mainstream political organizations to stop One Nation, whose leader, Pauline Hanson, is based in Queensland.

The party opposes multiculturalism and all programs of assistance to indigenous Australians, and portrays itself as the defender of "Christian Australia."

The president of the ECAJ, Diane Shteinman, said the party is similar to European far-right-wing parties such as the National Front in France.

In Australia, voting is compulsory in all federal, state and local elections. □