



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Arafat sends letter to Albright

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat asked U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to increase pressure on Israel to redeploy its troops in the West Bank. In a letter, Arafat asked Albright to publish the Clinton administration's plan that includes an Israeli pullback and reminded her that she told him last month negotiations with Israel would be finished within two weeks.

Swiss rule against survivor

The Swiss government refused to give compensation to a Holocaust survivor who says he was handed over to the Nazis by Switzerland in 1943. Joseph Spring claims that he and two cousins were turned over after they tried to sneak across the border from France into Switzerland. Spring, who ended up in Auschwitz, says he will take his case to the Swiss Supreme Court.

U.N. council asked to meet

The Palestine Liberation Organization asked the U.N. Security Council to meet to discuss an Israeli plan to expand Jerusalem's boundaries. A spokesman for the council said a decision is expected before the end of the week. The plan, which would extend the municipality's administrative authority over eight West Bank settlements, has come under international criticism.

Clinton signs food stamps law

President Clinton restored food stamps to some legal immigrants, including thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union. As a result of the law, refugees can collect food stamps for seven years instead of five. The measure also restores food stamps to children, elderly and disabled legal immigrants who were already in the United States when Clinton signed the 1996 welfare reform law. The changes will go into effect Nov. 1.

First lady to visit Chinese shul

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright are planning a brief visit next week to a recently restored synagogue in Shanghai during a U.S. trip to China. President Clinton has vowed to use the China trip to "speak as clearly as I can about human rights and religious freedom." [Page 3]

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Planned end to Ethiopian aliyah complicated by new developments

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — This week was supposed to mark the end of a glorious era in modern Jewish history.

Fourteen years after Israel launched its first dramatic rescue operation of Jews from Ethiopia, those involved in the effort had planned to close up shop, bringing the last planeload of Jews to Israel.

But efforts by the Israeli government and humanitarian groups to close down operations in the East African nation are being complicated by reports of atrocities against those still hoping to make aliyah, continuing disputes over the Jewish status of many seeking refuge and urgent pleas from those being left behind.

At the same time, there are an estimated 2,500 Jews in Kwara, near the Sudanese border, who were left off the original rescue list. Israeli government officials say their attention will now turn to them.

Also at issue is the fate of as many as 15,000 Falash Mura — Ethiopians who consider themselves Jewish but are not considered Jewish by the Israeli government. The Israeli government fears that many, if not most, will want to settle in Israel.

At the request of the Israeli government, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee will close down its compound in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa by July 1.

Recent visitors to northern Ethiopian villages report that one 6-year-old Falash Mura child was burned to death when her family's home was set on fire and that hundreds have fled from their villages. But these reports have not been confirmed by other sources and are questioned by some involved in the issue.

Meanwhile, these Falash Mura have appealed to Ethiopian Jewish activists not to abandon them. "We would like to beg of you in the name of the God of Israel to continue your assistance for us," they wrote to the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry. "Please don't abandon us at our time of need, at this time of suffering and grief. Please finish what you have already started."

Debate over the Jewish status of the Falash Mura undergirds the increasingly complex situation in Ethiopia today. The Israeli government and some Jewish humanitarian officials consider them Christians whose ancestors converted from Judaism generations ago. Others, however, say the Falash Mura didn't actually convert to Christianity, but do not live religious Jewish lives.

Three recent visitors to several northern villages report that Falash Mura are being targeted in "pogroms" and are being burned out of their homes by their Christian neighbors who want to expropriate their property.

In separate interviews from Addis Ababa and Israel, the travelers reported that Christians have set fire to the modest huts, or tukuls, of their Falash Mura neighbors in the middle of the night, waving guns and screaming at them to go to Israel.

Barbara Ribakove Gordon, the executive director of the North American Conference, who visited the village of Buchara on June 14, was told that a 4-year-old girl was rescued from the flames of a burning tukul.

Michael Schneider, executive vice president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which has spent upwards of \$10 million aiding the Jews and Falash Mura of Ethiopia, is dubious of the reports of violence against the Falash Mura in the northern villages. "There is no hard evidence to suggest that there either is, or will

MIDEAST FOCUS

Netanyahu rejects vote criticism

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected criticism of a possible non-binding referendum on a further redeployment from the West Bank. Netanyahu's remarks came a day after Israel's justice minister said he would recommend that such a referendum be held on the matter in light of the difficulties in arranging a binding vote. Meanwhile, Jewish settlers set up a tent opposite the Prime Minister's Office in the first step of a public campaign against the pullback.

Report: Palestinians abuse rights

A Palestinian human rights group said Palestinian police beat the mothers of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. A senior Palestinian official denied the report by the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, which said the mothers were beaten when they went to a Palestinian ministry to ask for financial support.

Syrian and Lebanese walk

Syrian and Lebanese officials walked out of a meeting of an international customs organization because of Israeli participation. The walkout comes after Lebanon's prime minister said an agreement on an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon could be reached in three months if Israel agreed to pick up talks where they left off in 1996.

Police probe Knesset member

Israeli police launched a criminal investigation into remarks by an Arab Knesset member that he was surprised the Palestinians don't kill more land dealers who sell property to Jews. Hadash Knesset member Saleh Salim's comments were made during a tour of Jerusalem's Old City by members of the parliamentary interior committee.

The National Religious Party demanded that Salim's parliamentary immunity be removed, and accused him of inciting violence.

be an outbreak of pogroms against either Jews or Falash Mura," said Schneider, who has sent his own team to investigate.

But several sources say that as a result of the rapidly changing situation, some Falash Mura are fleeing, which has complicated the situation in Addis Ababa, where the JDC and the North American Conference have maintained a compound, providing educational, health and other services for those waiting to immigrate to Israel.

Most of those in the compound were brought to Addis Ababa by Israeli emissaries in the process of preparing for Operation Solomon. They missed the airlift either because they didn't arrive in the capital in time or because their applications weren't processed in time.

Amid ongoing disputes over the status of some 4,000 Falash Mura at the compound in Addis Ababa, an Israeli ministerial committee last year decided to allow all of those waiting to emigrate to come to Israel and then to close down the compound.

Israel "definitely had a humanitarian responsibility for those people" because they were brought to Addis with the "belief that they are on the way to Israel" and they practiced Judaism while living in the compound, said Avi Granot, Israel's former ambassador to Ethiopia.

But Israel has no obligation to assist others, even if they have family members in Israel, because they are not Jewish, Granot said. The problem, he said, is that all of the 40 million Coptic Christians in Ethiopia — even the country's prime minister — could consider themselves to be direct descendants of Jews. Israel is concerned that if "Israel assists them, that millions of Ethiopians would turn to the Jewish state for refuge from their country's grinding poverty and escalating war with neighboring Eritrea."

When the operations close down, any who believe they have a right to immigrate to Israel will have to apply to the Israeli Embassy in Ethiopia the way any non-Jew would. Others dispute the view that the stream of Falash Mura would be endless.

A survey of the country's remaining Falash Mura in 1992 recorded about 25,000 names, said Avshalom Elitzur of South Wing to Zion, an Israeli-based advocacy group. Fewer than 15,000 remain in Ethiopia, most of whom have first-degree relatives in Israel, he said. The notion that there would be an "endless stream" of Falash Mura into Israel "is a myth cultivated in Israel by those who are trying to frighten people" who don't like the idea of more black people there, he said.

Rabbi Moshe Waldman, the representative of Israel's Chief Rabbinate who deals with the Ethiopian immigration, agrees. "It is absolutely a question of color," he said, pointing to the hundreds of thousands of people from the former Soviet Union who do not claim to be Jewish but have been permitted entry by Israel.

Granot said the charge of racism "is nonsense."

What happens next is unclear.

The head of the Immigration Ministry's Ethiopian Desk arrived last week in Ethiopia to quietly close down the camp in Addis at the end of this week. One planeload was expected to leave Thursday, bringing 200 of the 280 people still waiting to emigrate, according to the JDC. The remaining 80 will follow next week.

The Israeli government has made it clear to JDC and NACOEJ that it expects to be the only party deciding what will happen next.

Meanwhile, JDC has agreed to shut down its operations by July 1. It will close its medical clinic and cut its staff of nine down to two, and will provide temporary assistance to individuals who in the future obtain permission from Israel to emigrate.

Schneider described his organization as being "between a rock and a hard place." It is Israel's job to reassure the Falash Mura that applications to emigrate will be taken seriously, by sending emissaries to the villages to meet with them, Schneider said.

He said the JDC would not set up aid centers without Israel's approval because he is afraid that they will turn into "magnets" pulling Falash Mura and Jews to leave their villages without any promise of a future in Israel, and that the JDC will then be required to support them at great cost.

For its part, NACOEJ, which has provided a secular and Jewish education to the children in the Addis compound, as well as a livelihood to adults by setting up an embroidery handicrafts factory, has decided not to abide by Israel's instructions to shut down operations as long as people remain. But after that, said Ribakove Gordon, "I don't know yet what we're going to do. What we've just learned represents a turning upside down of everything we had expected." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Democrats want to override veto

Seven congressional Democrats promised to work to override an expected veto of a measure which would sanction foreign firms that aid Iran's missile program. Clinton objects to the measure, which passed both the House and Senate, because it tries, in his words, to micro-manage foreign policy and would halt progress the United States has made in convincing Russia to stop such cooperation, the White House said.

Supreme Court rejects challenge

The U.S. Supreme Court rejected a challenge to a federal tax law that exempts religious organizations. The court, without comment, let stand a ruling that said that states, under the Federal Unemployment Tax Act, can continue to exempt from unemployment benefits people who work for churches and affiliated religious organizations. The challenge was brought by a Rhode Island woman who contended she was unfairly denied benefits after being laid off from her job with the Salvation Army.

Lileikis trial delayed again

The trial in Lithuania of an alleged Nazi war criminal was postponed for the third time. The trial of Aleksandras Lileikis, 91, was slated to begin in late June or early July.

Jewish groups call for air strikes

Nine Jewish organizations said in a joint statement that President Clinton should provide leadership to prevent ethnic cleansing in the Serbian province of Kosovo. The letter, whose signatories included all four streams of Judaism, applauded the recent U.N. call for air strikes against Serbia.

Hadassah names new director

Hadassah-the Women's Zionist Organization of America named Laura Struminger Schor to be its new executive director. Schor, who is trained as a French historian, has been the provost and vice president of academic affairs at Hunter College in New York City since 1989.

Testimony on religious freedom

The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee heard testimony about legislation intended to restore religious freedom protections.

David Zwiebel, general counsel of Agudath Israel of America, told the committee the bill would avoid the constitutional dilemma posed by the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which the Supreme Court struck down last year.

The pending legislation, known as the Religious Liberty Protection Act, would protect religious practice from government interference.

China restores synagogue in advance of Clinton visit

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As President Clinton seeks a high profile for religious freedom issues during his trip to China, the anticipation of his arrival has already yielded one small, but meaningful, achievement.

Just weeks ago the Chinese government completed long-sought restoration work on a synagogue located in the heart of Shanghai.

The synagogue, occupied for nearly 50 years by the state Education Commission, was built by Sephardi Jews in 1929 and used during World War II by about 25,000 Jewish refugees who fled to Shanghai.

For the past 17 years, Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the New York-based Appeal of Conscience Foundation, has been pressing Chinese officials to vacate the synagogue, restore it and declare it a historic landmark.

In February, the mayor of Shanghai finally agreed after meeting with Schneier and two other clerics whom Clinton dispatched to China to help open a dialogue on religion.

At the behest of the White House advance staff, work was completed in time for the arrival of the presidential delegation this week.

Schneier said the only thing now missing is a Torah, which he and his wife were planning to bring to the Shanghai synagogue next week as a gift from Schneier's congregation, Park East Synagogue in New York.

Clinton is not scheduled to visit the synagogue, but First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright are planning a brief visit next week, possibly while Schneier conducts a ceremony to place the Torah in the ark.

Schneier hopes the restoration of the synagogue will mark a "first step in the revival of Jewish life in Shanghai" — a city where there has been a Jewish presence since the eighth century.

The Jewish population, long since dispersed, now only consists of some 200 expatriates.

President Clinton, meanwhile, last week vowed to use the China trip to "speak as clearly as I can about human rights and religious freedom."

Addressing a gathering of religious leaders at the White House, Clinton said, "Our message is clear: We in the United States believe that all governments everywhere should ensure fundamental rights, including the right of people to worship when and where they choose."

Prior to Clinton's departure, more than 250 religious leaders sent an appeal urging the president to press Chinese officials to release those imprisoned for practicing their faith and to rescind decrees limiting the free functioning of religion.

The appeal, organized by the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, said, "It is our hope that your willingness to dialogue with the Chinese leaders will include the strongest possible prodding on religious liberty in China." □

U.S. to deport Lithuanian

NEW YORK (JTA) — The United States is one step closer to deporting an 80-year-old man who served in a Lithuanian mobile killing squad during World War II.

A federal appeals court in Chicago unanimously affirmed last Friday a 1995 court decision to strip Kazys Ciurinkas of his U.S. citizenship.

The U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations charged that Ciurinkas had lied about his past when he emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1949.

Ciurinkas, who now lives in Hammond, Ind., became a citizen in 1955.

The court found that Ciurinkas was a member of the 2nd Lithuanian Battalion, a mobile killing unit allied with the Nazis that murdered thousands of civilians, primarily Jews, in Belarus and Lithuania.

Evidence was cited that he personally took part in the killing actions, and that in 1941, Ciurinkas was promoted for "conscientiously fulfilling his duties." □

Reform rabbis' convention addresses complex issues

By Tom Tugend

ANAHEIM, Calif. (JTA) — "This is not your grandfather's Reform service," observed one person who had joined 600 Reform rabbis at an hourlong prayer service opening the annual convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

A quick glance showed that a majority of the men, and many of the women, wore yarmulkas and tallitot — religious items scorned by earlier Reform leaders as outdated ritualistic accouterments.

Otherwise, the dress code varied widely, with many rabbis, far away from their congregations and seduced by the Southern California sunshine, opting for shorts, T-shirts and sneakers.

The more athletic types had already gathered at 6 a.m. for tai chi exercises and a run along the streets bordering Disneyland.

Others had stopped in an exhibit hall to admire multi-colored, hand-woven yarmulkas, tallitot and Torah covers that were on sale.

On the more formal agenda, a call by CCAR President Richard Levy in his opening address for Reform rabbis to reach out to their Orthodox colleagues, was met with some skepticism in a follow-up discussion group.

Several speakers said it was almost impossible to bring an Orthodox rabbi to the table if women or openly gay Reform rabbis were present, and attempts at outreach or unity often ended in humiliation.

Levy agreed but asked that his colleagues be aware that many centrist Orthodox rabbis, who might want to meet with Reform rabbis, "are petrified" of other Orthodox rabbis who oppose such encounters.

On Tuesday, the convention took up the highly controversial issue of whether Reform rabbis should officiate at marriages of gay or lesbian couples.

The audience heard opposing recommendations and discussed the issue in closed sessions, but avoided, by prior arrangement, a vote on the issue.

An "emergency resolution" was expected to be introduced Wednesday on pending Knesset legislation that would codify the Orthodox establishment's control over conversions. The Reform movement strongly opposes the bill.

The "emergency" was apparently triggered by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's remarks to a visiting Reform delegation, implying that Reform rabbis were liable to perform "quickie" conversions.

The remarks angered the convention, and Rabbi Charles Kroloff of Westfield, N.J., CCAR's president-designate, termed it "an outrage and insult to our integrity."

The answer to every such attack "is to build another Reform synagogue and ordain another Reform rabbi in Israel," said Kroloff.

Kroloff urged that a portion of all funds raised in the United States on behalf of Israel go directly toward strengthening the Reform movement in Israel.

On another sensitive issue, an Ad Hoc Ethics Review Committee was slated to recommend a range of penalties for rabbis found guilty of sexual misconduct and tougher conditions for suspended rabbis seeking reinstatement.

"We are responding to a different climate in our country in which sexual misconduct is unacceptable," said Rabbi Sanford Ragins of Los Angeles, a member of the committee. □

Lubavitch hopes to score kosher goal at World Cup

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Lubavitch movement hopes to score its own goal at this year's World Cup — reaching Jewish soccer fans, one kosher meal at a time.

The group's European Bureau has set up the only kosher food stand at the newly constructed Stade de France, the 80,000-seat stadium outside Paris that is the site of many World Cup games, including the championship game on July 12.

The enterprise aims to attract a broad spectrum of Jewish visitors with light snacks and cold drinks. The stand also offers more standard Lubavitch fare: directions to area synagogues and other kosher restaurants, Shabbat referrals and the opportunity to put on tefillin.

Patrons have shown little surprise at the Chasidic presence among the T-shirt vendors and Kodak film stands.

"They know I'm not here to sell sandwiches," said Rabbi Yossi Gorodetsky, who organized the stand in cooperation with the Chabad community of St.-Denis, the Parisian suburb that is home to the stadium.

The bureau made the decision to establish the stand after it received hundreds of requests for information about lodging and synagogue services in advance of the World Cup, said Gorodetsky, who admitted that he is immune to soccer fever.

Inspired by a kosher concession at a baseball stadium in Florida, he arranged to rent the 100-square-foot stand, which is sponsored by a Parisian restaurateur. Mondial Food Cacher, or World Cup Kosher Food, opened on June 15, after only two weeks of rushed planning.

Gorodetsky said he faced some difficulty in securing the space, but that stadium administrators acquiesced to his stipulations — that the stand be situated away from non-kosher vendors and that it be closed on Shabbat.

"They understood right away," Gorodetsky said with a lingering New York accent. "They see me with the long beard and the hat and they understand I'm a religious Jew."

The kosher stand is part of a "village" of temporary booths surrounding the stadium, where massive television screens play tournament footage and evening concerts attract crowds in the thousands.

Gorodetsky estimates that 200 to 300 visitors stop by the stand each day. Interested parties so far have included representatives from the French Jewish media and the mayor of St. Denis. The suburb's tourist information office also agreed to carry a brochure the Lubavitch created for the World Cup that features quotes from Rabbi Menachem Schneerson comparing a soccer game to a Jew's life.

Although he hopes such publicity will increase patronage before the stand closes in mid-July, Gorodetsky said, "We're not in it for the money. The sponsor is not in it for the money. If we break even we're happy. If we make money, great. Our main goal is to be available." □