



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 117

Tuesday, June 30, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu dismisses calls

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed calls made by Israel's president for early elections. Ezer Weizman had said Netanyahu should call for elections before their scheduled date in the year 2000 because of an impasse in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

Report: Palestinians reject talks

Palestinian negotiators rejected an Israeli proposal to modify an American plan regarding Israel's further redeployment from the West Bank, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. The talks would have reportedly included Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's idea to give Israel veto power over planning and construction in 3 percent of the land that is slated to be turned over to the Palestinians.

Vandals desecrate cemetery

Vandals ransacked some 14 graves at a Jewish cemetery near Moscow. The cemetery is run by the Moscow synagogue, Marina Roscha, that was bombed last month.

Meanwhile, the New York Board of Rabbis presented the chief rabbi of Moscow, Pinchas Goldschmidt, with \$3,600 last week to help rebuild the shul. [Page 4]

Israeli general blasts security

A top Israeli general said Israel's security system "probably doesn't provide answers to threats" against the Jewish state.

Matan Vilnai, who was passed over for the position of army chief of staff earlier this month, said Israel could not defend itself against surface-to-surface missiles that had been developed by countries in the Muslim world. Israel's defense minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, responded by saying that Israel was working on a new security approach. [Page 2]

Jewelers sue American Express

A New York jewelry company owned by Chasidic Jews sued American Express for discriminating against the company, according to a news report.

In the suit, York Gem Co. says that American Express' Travel Related Service unit "excluded, boycotted and refused to do business with all Chasidic Jews" in its catalogs.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israeli gays march with pride, bolstered by religious opposition

By Avi Machlis

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Amid fluttering flags and a festive atmosphere, Or Marouani-Panner, a heavyset woman in a baseball cap, is barking orders through a megaphone to gay groups gathering in Tel Aviv's central square.

Marouani-Panner, a lesbian and a professional events organizer, is running Israel's first-ever gay and lesbian parade. The rainbow-colored flags and banners, international symbols of gay pride, may be familiar sights at similar events around the world. But participants said last Friday's march, which capped Israel's observance of gay pride week, was no ordinary display.

"This is a historic event," says Marouani-Panner. "People are willing to come out and march. We've had several victories in recent years and feel the time is right."

Marouani-Panner had estimated that about 1,000 Israeli homosexuals would attend the parade. Israeli news reports put the turnout as high as 3,000, a clear sign that Israeli gays are more self-confident than ever before.

At the march, gay couples openly embraced and lesbians walked hand in hand, their fears of aversion to their lifestyle disappearing in the company of their peers.

They were joined by eight Knesset members, including Yael Dayan, the Labor lawmaker who has long lobbied for gay rights, and Modi Zanberg, from the Tsomet faction, who is believed to have become the first right-wing member of Knesset to attend a gay event.

"It's been a very good year for us," says Amnon Rahav, 35, a graphic designer with a shaved head and sunglasses.

"Dana International has created a very strong momentum," he says, referring to the transsexual Israeli singer who recently won the Eurovision international song contest on Israel's behalf and was given a heroine's welcome by Israel's secular activists upon her return.

Rahav says the current Israeli government, and its outspoken fervently Orthodox partners, has actually helped the gay cause. It has created sympathy for gays among heterosexuals who despise anti-gay statements from religious leaders, he says, and has prompted the homosexual community to stand up for its rights with more determination.

In addition, several homosexuals interviewed at the parade say Israeli gays enjoy a more favorable status than might be expected in a country with such a strong religious presence in politics.

Steven, an immigrant from Hoboken, N.J., who has been a gay rights activist both in Israel and the United States, confirms that "it's good to be gay in Israel."

"In many ways, Israel is way ahead of the U.S.," says Steven, who like many interviewed gave only his first name. "You cannot be refused for military service in Israel because you are gay, evicted from your home or fired from your job like in some places in America."

Indeed, the Israeli gay community has scored several victories in its struggle for equal rights in recent years.

In 1993, Israel's national labor court ruled that a gay El Al steward's significant other should receive free airline tickets granted to heterosexual spouses of El Al employees.

Last year, a Tel Aviv appeals court ruled that Adir Steiner, the partner of Col. Doron Maisel, an Israeli army officer who died of cancer at the age of 46, should be

MIDEAST FOCUS

Yeshiva bill blocked

Israel's speaker of the Knesset blocked a bill that would have drafted yeshiva students. Dan Tichon said the proposed legislation, submitted by opposition leader Ehud Barak, was similar to another bill defeated by the Knesset in December. Under Israeli parliamentary law, a six-month waiting period is required before a bill similar to one that has been defeated can be submitted.

Israel releases Lebanese prisoner

An Israeli court ordered the release of a Lebanese man who was jailed without trial for seven years. But the court delayed the release of Ghassan Al-Dirani for 30 days to allow the state to appeal the ruling.

Israel's Cabinet approves plan

Israel's Cabinet approved a plan by its national infrastructure minister, Ariel Sharon, to establish a string of Jewish communities along the boundaries of the pre-1967 borders.

As part of the decision, the Cabinet approved the establishment of a new settlement between Beit Shemesh and Beersheba. It also approved the establishment of six new communities along the border between Israel and the West Bank.

Israel strikes in Lebanon

Israeli air force planes attacked suspected terrorist targets in the southern Lebanon security zone after two South Lebanon Army soldiers were killed in roadside blasts. The fundamentalist Hezbollah organization claimed responsibility for the blasts.

Dana cancels performance

Israeli transsexual pop star Dana International canceled a German television appearance, saying death threats had been made against her. Dana's victory in the Eurovision song contest last month led to her vilification by some Orthodox leaders in Israel.

recognized as an army widower. Steiner won the right to pension benefits as well as non-financial benefits, such as the right to be invited to official memorial ceremonies in Israel.

The case was considered a precedent for gay rights throughout Israel's public sector.

Gay rights groups were awarded another big victory in 1997 when the Supreme Court ruled that Zevulun Hammer, then education minister, could not prevent the airing of an educational television program on homosexuality.

The talk show for youngsters included a panel discussion of homosexual teenagers.

And Israeli homosexuals say progress is not only limited to laws ensuring their rights, but extends to their acceptance in society — at least in Tel Aviv, where the fervently Orthodox are not as powerful as they are in Jerusalem.

Einat, 34, and Roni, 40, a lesbian couple who arrived at the parade with their two daughters in a stroller, say they have been surprised by the openness of Israelis since they returned to the Jewish state from San Francisco, where they had lived for several years.

"We came from the promised land to the promised land," jokes Einat, 34, describing their return to Israel last year from the gay and lesbian Mecca on the West Coast.

"We've had a surprisingly good reception from heterosexual people we know — friends, family and even parents of other kids," says Roni.

But amid the smiles and festivities, not everyone was upbeat.

As the parade prepared to set out, a man wearing a knitted black kippah was scouring the square for a banner he planned to march behind: Orthodox Gays and Lesbians.

The man is a gay Orthodox-ordained rabbi from New York who is living in Israel to do research for a book on homosexuality in Judaism.

He distributes small notices for a support group based in Israel for Orthodox homosexuals.

"Who are we?" it asks. "We are Orthodox Jews who love the Torah."

While gays and lesbians danced through the streets of Tel Aviv, the small group of about five Orthodox homosexuals who joined the parade appeared tormented by the conflict between their sexuality, their love for the Torah and the intolerance for gays they say exists within the Orthodox community.

One Orthodox gay couple in their early 30s, visiting from the United States and preparing to join the parade, are wearing baseball caps to conceal their kippot. The rabbi tries to convince them to march behind the Orthodox banner, but they are not ready to take such a bold step.

Their dilemma was solved when the rabbi could not find the banner. But reconciling their lifestyle with the Orthodox community and the religious law that they accept is not nearly as simple.

"Reconciliation is the end of a process," says the rabbi, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"The beginning of the process is to say that existing in the Orthodox community are gay people, homosexuals and lesbians, who are neither sick nor confused heterosexuals, but simply people with a different sexuality." □

Israel's security system questioned

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's security system "is not updated and probably doesn't provide answers to threats" against the Jewish state, according to a top Israeli general.

Matan Vilnai, who was passed over for the position of army chief of staff earlier this month, said Israel could not defend itself against surface-to-surface missiles that had been developed by countries in the Muslim world.

Israel's defense minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, responded by saying that top military strategists have been working on a new security approach.

Mordechai said the plan would be presented to the government when it was completed. □



Daily News Bulletin

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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.
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JEWISH WORLD

Norway to pay survivors

Jewish groups praised Norway's approval of a draft law setting aside about \$58 million for Jewish survivors of Nazi death camps, their descendants and Jewish organizations. The Scandinavian country became the first nation occupied by the Nazis during World War II to launch a plan to pay compensation to Jews for the Holocaust.

Jury selection in bomb trial

Jury selection was slated to begin in the trial of two Brooklyn, N.Y., residents who are charged with plotting to plant bombs in one of New York City's subway stations in July.

Opening arguments in the case of Ghazi Ibrahim Abu Maizar and Lafi Khalil are scheduled for next week. Police reportedly found anti-American and anti-Israeli literature along with bomb-making accouterments in the men's Park Slope apartment when they were arrested.

Carlos hires Papon lawyer

An international terrorist who attacked Jewish targets in the 1970s hired a lawyer who represented Vichy collaborator Maurice Papon in the former French official's recent trial.

The lawyer said he thinks he was hired by Carlos the Jackal, who is serving a life sentence in prison for some of his terrorist attacks, but still faces trial for several others, because "he seemed to have appreciated my attitude during the Papon trial."

French neo-Nazis sentenced

Two French neo-Nazis were sentenced to prison for murdering a Jewish automobile salesman. Philippe Vignaud received a life sentence and Vincent Parera received 20 years in jail for the murder of Guy Levy. Levy was strangled to death shortly after the two men kidnaped him in July 1995.

Center seeks commander's wife

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is seeking the extradition of the wife of World War II concentration camp chief Dinko Sakic to Croatia for a war crimes trial.

The Wiesenthal Center said it has documents proving that Esperanza Sakic was a wartime camp guard for Croatia's Ustashe fascist regime.

From 1942 to 1944, Dinko Sakic was commander of the Jasenovac camp, where an estimated 500,000 Serbs, Jews and Gypsies died.

Dinko Sakic was extradited to Croatia after a television expose showed that he was living in Argentina.

Croatian prosecutors have said they would begin interviewing witnesses this week for his trial.

Swiss legislators object to more aid for survivors

By Fredy Rom

BERN (JTA) — Swiss lawmakers have sent a message to Holocaust survivors — do not expect a franc from a planned multimillion dollar humanitarian foundation.

The lower house of the Swiss Parliament voted 25-3 last week to recommend that Holocaust projects be excluded from the beneficiaries of the Swiss Foundation for Solidarity.

Last year, Swiss President Arnold Koller proposed the establishment of the foundation, which would be funded by some \$5 billion of the Swiss National Bank's gold reserves.

The foundation's estimated \$230 million in annual income would be used to provide help to victims of catastrophes in Switzerland and abroad, including organizations that aid Holocaust victims.

But Hans Danioth, the lawmaker who initiated the June 25 vote, said the funds should be used exclusively for future catastrophes.

Holocaust survivors, he said, can benefit from the Holocaust Memorial Fund, which was established last year by Swiss banks.

That fund has already begun making payments to individual survivors in Eastern Europe.

"We want to make sure that no money from the solidarity fund will go to the Jews in the United States," said Danioth, referring to U.S.-based Jewish groups that have spearheaded the efforts to press the Swiss government and financial institutions to pay compensation for their wartime roles.

Last week's parliamentary vote is not binding, but it indicated the growing anger among Swiss leaders over the bitter dispute between their country and Jewish groups abroad.

The vote came as American municipal and state public finance officers prepared to convene this week in New York to discuss whether to impose sanctions against Swiss banks.

The renewed threat to penalize the financial institutions comes in the wake of an apparent breakdown last week in U.S.-mediated negotiations between Jewish representatives and three Swiss banks aimed at settling Holocaust-era claims.

The Swiss government went ahead last week with distributing a draft document to create the Solidarity Foundation.

Local Swiss governments, churches and Swiss Jewish groups, among others, have been asked to comment on the draft.

The draft lists Holocaust survivor projects — such as social service programs — but not individuals, as potential beneficiaries of the foundation.

The Parliament is expected to vote later this year or early next year on creating the foundation, after which it will be subject to a national referendum, which may be held in the year 2000.

Sources at the Ministry of Finance said Sunday that payments from the foundation — if approved in the referendum — are not expected before the year 2003. □

Study: Jews unlikely alcoholics

JERUSALEM (JTA) — How many Jewish alcoholics do you know?

Maybe the reason you don't know any is because a genetic mutation believed to prevent alcoholism is especially widespread among Jews, according to a study conducted by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Indiana University.

Scientists discovered the genetic mutation in 35 percent of males living in Jerusalem, but in only 7 percent of a sampling of the world's population, according to the study, which was reported in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

According to the study, people with the mutation break down alcohol more quickly and, as a result, they experience physiological effects such as shaking and an accelerated pulse that might deter them from drinking. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Russians survey U.S. memorials as they plan Holocaust museum**

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — For more than a week, Tankred Golenpolsky, together with six other Russian Jewish leaders and museum professionals, visited American Holocaust institutions to experience “the climate” of a Holocaust museum.

In Los Angeles, Houston and New York, he saw films, photographs, relics and documents — including a report card from a Jewish school in Shanghai, where he spent his childhood during World War II.

What most touched the genteel founder of the Moscow-based newspaper *Evreiskaya Gazeta*, however, was “Daniel’s Story,” an exhibition at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. that depicts the wartime life of a fictional 8-year-old boy.

Children at the museum “were writing letters to Daniel to drop in the mailbox,” Golenpolsky recalled here last week as the delegation wrapped up its eight-day tour. “It took a genius to think of that. There you have the link between today and yesterday.”

As delegates involved in the development of Moscow’s Jewish Holocaust museum and synagogue prepare for the opening this fall of Russia’s first Jewish museum, Golenpolsky and his colleagues face the challenge of creating a similarly vibrant connection to a nearly obliterated past.

Developed by the Russian Jewish Congress in partnership with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the memorial synagogue and museum will present most of its thousands of expected visitors — both non-Jews and Jews — with their first exposure to Jewish life and culture.

The site, already under construction, will also be the first Russian memorial devoted solely to the Jewish war experience.

Although more than 1 million of the estimated 20 million Soviet war dead were Jewish victims singled out for extermination by the Nazi terror, the particular fate of Soviet Jews was considered by the Communists solely as part of a universal tragedy.

And while hundreds of thousands of Jewish soldiers fell beside their army comrades, there is a widespread misconception in the former Soviet Union that Jews somehow evaded military service in what is called the Great Patriotic War.

The building’s existence and its location, therefore, attest to a seismic shift in Russian Jewish consciousness and in official recognition of the Jewish community, say those involved.

“Jews in Russia dealing with Jewish heritage is news,” said Michael Steiner, the executive director of the Moscow office of the JDC. “And Russians supporting it is news.”

In 1996, the Russian government approached the newly founded Russian Jewish Congress, inviting it to build a memorial synagogue at Poklonnaya Gora, or Memorial Hill, a public park that is already home to a World War II museum, a Russian Orthodox church and a mosque.

“This place is a very specific place in Russia,” Alexander Osovtsov, the RJC’s executive vice president, said of the popular leisure spot, where Victory Day celebrations each May attract millions. “There is nothing to compare. Maybe the only place to compare is Red Square.”

The RJC accepted the invitation, but not the offer of financial

backing. Organizers said donations from the Russian Jewish community will cover all costs for the nearly 20,000-square-foot granite and marble building — now estimated at \$14 million, with another \$3 million budgeted for exhibition galleries.

“We didn’t want support from the government or abroad,” Osovtsov said. “This is our participation in Jewishness.”

An international board of advisers will lend expertise and assistance in procuring artifacts.

The Jewish commitment to the project is significant because, according to Pinchas Goldschmidt, the chief rabbi of Moscow, only 30,000 of the more than half a million Jews living in the Russian capital are affiliated with Jewish institutions.

After they concluded their American tour last week at New York’s Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, the delegates cited films about Jewish life, personal photographs and recorded interviews with Holocaust survivors as the most captivating elements of the exhibits they saw.

Aside from their natural appeal for a younger “television generation,” they said, such visual elements personalize Holocaust history, conveying the human consequences of events that might otherwise be subsumed in anonymous time lines and statistics.

Steven Spielberg’s Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation has promised to share with the museum its vast archive of digitized interviews with survivors and rescuers from the former Soviet Union.

The museum has already amassed collections of artwork, Soviet army documents and personal items from family and ghetto life, according to the delegates. But after seeing displays of Havdalah spice boxes and Torah ornaments in American museums, the delegation has decided to broaden its mission.

Rather than focusing exclusively on the Holocaust, “now we want to make it about history, tradition and culture,” said the executive director of the RJC, Olga Obukhova.

By creating a rich and positive Jewish environment, the museum’s organizers hope to spark a renewal of cultural pride within the Russian Jewish community, which endures continuing and sometimes violent expressions of anti-Semitism.

The museum and synagogue will not eradicate hatred, but Golenpolsky believes its appearance on the Russian landscape will make a forceful statement. “It will show that we are there,” he said, “that we are citizens of Russia — if you want, taxpayers of Russia. This will commemorate our participation in Russian society.” □

Rabbis aid bombed Moscow shul

NEW YORK (JTA) — The New York Board of Rabbis came to the aid of a firebombed Moscow synagogue last week during a stateside visit by that city’s chief rabbi.

Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the group, which represents the four major Jewish denominations, presented Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt with \$3,600 on June 25 to help rebuild the Marina Roscha Synagogue.

The Lubavitch synagogue, attacked previously in 1993 and 1996, was partially destroyed again on May 13, when an explosion blasted through two floors of the three-story building. Two people were injured in the presumed neo-Nazi attack, which caused an estimated \$100,000 in damage.

Meanwhile, vandals this week sacked some 14 graves at a Jewish cemetery near Moscow run by the synagogue. □