



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### U.S. lawmakers oppose state

A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers urged President Clinton to "publicly reaffirm the United States' position that any unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state" would not be recognized by the United States.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat has said that he would declare statehood in May 1999, regardless of progress in the peace talks.

Clinton has resisted the request from Congress, which came in the form of a letter, and a similar call from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

But the president said in a recent letter to Jewish leaders that Palestinian statehood can only be settled through negotiations.

### First lady visits Shanghai shul

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited a Shanghai synagogue. During the visit, Albright called the Ohel Rachel Synagogue, recently restored by the Chinese government, "a sign of the changes that are taking place in China." The Clinton administration has made religious freedom a central focus of its official state visit to China. [Page 1]

### Poll: Germans ignorant of Shoah

A significant proportion of German teen-agers are ignorant about the Holocaust, according to the results of a new poll. Only 29 percent of teen-agers knew that 6 million Jews died during World War II, and some 31 percent of German teen-agers do not know where Auschwitz is. Some 506 teens were surveyed for the poll.

### Swiss warn of backlash

A group of Swiss citizens warned of an increase in anti-American sentiment in the country as a result of U.S. criticism of Switzerland's dealings with the Nazis.

In a letter to the U.S. ambassador to Switzerland, Madeleine Kunin, the citizens reportedly wrote that the criticism could jeopardize relations between the two countries.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, July 6.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### Expatriates in China spur revival of Jewish communities

By Tom Tugend

BEIJING (JTA) — When the tiny Jewish community of China's capital city wanted to hold a Passover seder with all the culinary trimmings, they naturally turned to the bubbe of Beijing.

The bubbe is Elaine Silverberg, who came here 10 years ago from New York to join her resident daughter, Elyse Beth Silverberg, a successful business executive.

Since then, the bubbe has devoted much of her time to coddling her Beijing-born grandson Ari, and to training some of the city's top chefs in the art of Jewish-style cooking.

For the seder, her lesson plan included instructions on how to make matzah ball soup and charoset.

The seder was a huge success, with 280 celebrants in attendance. Joining the festive occasion were Israeli Embassy personnel and some foreign tourists.

With the opening of China to the West, a steady trickle of Jewish businessmen and entrepreneurs from the United States, Canada, Australia, Europe and Israel have established a Jewish presence in Beijing and are reviving the long-dormant Jewish community in Shanghai.

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton got a first-hand glimpse into the community on Wednesday, as she and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright paid a visit to a recently restored synagogue in Shanghai.

The Ohel Rachel Synagogue was built by Sephardi Jews in the 1920s and used during World War II by some of the 20,000 Jewish refugees who fled to Shanghai.

But in 1949, when the Communists came to power, they seized the synagogue along with several others in the city and outlawed worship.

The Jews of Shanghai scattered, and the synagogue was converted into a storage facility for the state education commission.

The restoration was spurred by a promise the mayor of Shanghai made to Rabbi Arthur Schneier, a member of a U.S. religious delegation that visited China in February, to designate the building a historical site and open it to the public.

Schneier said recently he hopes the restoration will mark a "first step in the revival of Jewish life in Shanghai," and this week he and his wife brought a Torah to the synagogue as a gift from Schneier's synagogue, Park East Synagogue in New York.

After visiting the synagogue Wednesday, Clinton hailed the restoration as an example of a new respect in China for religious differences, and said, "I'm delighted I could come and see this."

Albright, who recently learned that she was born Jewish and that her grandparents died in the Holocaust, said she was optimistic that the restoration was "a sign of the changes that are taking place here."

The number of Jews in China is augmented by resident diplomats from Israel and other countries, and by young men and women who often find a foothold here as English teachers.

Hong Kong, the outpost of the British empire until its incorporation into China last year, remains by far the largest Jewish center in the country, with some 3,500 residents.

But the formation of Kehillat Beijing by Beijing's 250 Jews, and of the newly established B'nai Ysrael congregation by Shanghai's 150 Jews, proves once again that it takes only a small critical mass of Jews to trigger a chain reaction of communal

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israeli leaders try to make up

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Ezer Weizman met and agreed to keep their differences private. But there was no indication that the two had resolved the bitter differences between them.

The meeting was arranged after Weizman said earlier this week that Netanyahu should call for early elections if he was not serious about carrying out a further redeployment in the West Bank.

### Arafat: Patience is running thin

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat said the struggle over eastern Jerusalem is a "life-and-death" battle. Arafat, who also said the Palestinians are running out of patience with Israel, spoke at a special session of the Palestinian legislative council in Ramallah.

His words came a week after the Israeli Cabinet approved a plan to expand Jerusalem's municipal boundaries.

### Palestinians back violence

An increasing number of Palestinians back violence against Israel, but a majority still support the peace process, according to a new poll.

In the survey, conducted by the Center for Palestinian Research and Studies, 50 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip backed such violence, as opposed to 36 percent in September 1997.

Some 68 percent said they backed the peace process, while 29 percent opposed it. The poll has a margin of error of 3 percent.

### Yad Vashem updates

The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem announced it would make its archives available online.

The plan is part of "Yad Vashem 2001," the Israeli museum's \$12 million modernization plan.

activities — and rivalries. Elyse Beth Silverberg came to Beijing as an exchange student in 1979, married a Chinese businessman and, after founding a medical instrument company, has recently opened the Beijing United Family Hospital.

She has been the sparkplug and steady anchor in a community whose Western business and diplomatic members rarely stay in place for more than three years.

Although Kehillat Beijing has no synagogue, the small congregation has ritual and continuing education committees, and holds occasional retreats led by a rabbi based in Hong Kong.

"We live in an alien place and during the week we are very busy trying to integrate into the local environment. So on Shabbat and holidays, we feel a particularly strong need to bond as Jews," said Silverberg.

Shanghai has a much longer history of Jewish life than Beijing, but its present community is of more recent origin.

When the port city was opened to international trade in the 1840s, Jews from Iraq and India established themselves as the city's foremost merchant princes and constructed many of its still-existing landmark buildings.

A new wave of some 4,500 Jews arrived in the first two decades of this century as refugees from czarist pogroms and later the Bolsheviks in Russia. During the Nazi era, when Shanghai was just about the only place in the world to admit refugees without a visa, some 20,000 Central European Jews settled in the city's Hongkou district.

All of the wartime refugees left for Israel, the United States or Australia after the war, and organized Jewish life disappeared until the founding of the B'nai Ysrael congregation some 18 months ago.

The revival owes much to Seth Kaplan, an entrepreneur from New York who was the congregation's first president. Kaplan, 31, sees a parallel between the current influx and the arrival of Jewish merchants 150 years ago.

"Jews make up less than 2 percent of Shanghai's non-Asian population, but they represent 30 percent of the non-Asian entrepreneurs," says Kaplan.

Last April, the city's 150 Jews, representing 11 different nationalities, celebrated Passover, but were unable to agree on one joint communal seder. Instead, there were three seders, one organized by Chabad-Lubavitch, one by the Israeli consulate and one by a private family.

Indeed, says Kaplan, the toughest part of his volunteer job is to prevent the Jewish community from splintering into even smaller parts.

Two buildings that formerly served as synagogues, the Sephardi Ohel Rachel and the Ashkenazi Ohel Moishe, still stand, and the municipality has promised for years to renovate them and return them to the Jewish community.

Just weeks ago, at the behest of the White House advance staff, the Chinese government completed the restoration of Ohel Rachel.

The former Ohel Moishe, which houses a permanent photo exhibit commemorating the Jewish enclave and its inhabitants during World War II, received a long-overdue coat of paint in late May to welcome Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who visited China in June.

Although enclaves of ethnic Chinese practicing Judaism existed in past centuries, particularly in Kaifeng, they have melded into the general population and none is found among the members of the present congregations in Beijing and Shanghai.

There is, however, a growing interest in Judaism and Israel among Chinese academicians, who have established a Center of Jewish Studies and the China Judaic Studies Association in Shanghai, and a four-year curriculum in Hebrew language and literature at Beijing University.

Formal diplomatic relations between Israel and China were established in six years ago, and reports on Israel in the state-controlled Chinese press have become more balanced in recent years, says Orna Sagiv, the information officer of the Israeli Embassy in Beijing.

Both the embassy and the consulate in Shanghai spend considerable effort to expand trade relations between the two countries. Currently, trade between the two countries amounts to about \$300 million per year, with China holding a 2-1 edge in the balance of trade. □

(JTA correspondent Daniel Kurtzman in Washington contributed to this report.)



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Jewish activists smile as food stamps are restored

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — With the stroke of a pen, President Clinton has restored food stamps to some legal immigrants, including thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union.

A few yards from the place Clinton revoked the benefits as part of the 1996 welfare reform law, the president, in a Rose Garden ceremony, signed the \$1.9 billion agriculture bill into law.

As a result of the new law, refugees can collect food stamps for seven years instead of five. The measure also restores food stamps to children, the elderly and disabled legal immigrants who were already in the United States when Clinton signed the welfare law. All other legal immigrants remained barred from the federal nutrition program.

The changes will go into effect November 1. The provisions will cost about \$818 million over five years and will provide benefits to about 250,000 of the 935,000 legal immigrants — including 75,000 children — who were taken out of the program.

“When I signed the welfare reform bill in 1996, I said the cuts in nutritional programs were too deep and had nothing whatever to do with welfare reform,” Clinton said.

“None of these benefit cuts had the first thing to do with welfare reform. Reinstating them is the right thing to do.”

The restoration of food stamps is the latest measure to reinstate benefits that had been lost under welfare reform. An earlier act of Congress signed by Clinton enabled many immigrants to receive Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid.

“We did not think that we would get anything restored” after the welfare law, said Diana Aviv, director of the Council of Jewish Federations’ Washington Action Office.

Aviv, who attended a small gathering in the Oval Office before the bill signing, estimated that 85 to 90 percent of Jewish immigrants and refugees will continue to receive food stamps as a result of the new law.

But over time, as new immigrants who are not eligible for food stamps come to the United States, and refugees after seven years do not become citizens, the Jewish community will face a “critical mass” that local federations “won’t be able to handle,” said Aviv, who watched over Clinton’s right shoulder as he signed the bill.

The partial restorations of benefits, she said, is “just for us a down payment.” □

### Israel gets mixed reviews in annual human rights report

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has made some advances in the area of civil rights, but discrimination against Israeli Arabs and human rights violations against Palestinians in the territories continue, according to an Israeli civil rights group.

In its annual report released Wednesday, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel said the main infringement of human rights was the continued use of violent interrogation techniques against Palestinians suspected of terrorism.

The association also criticized the continued use of administrative detention of prisoners, which involves holding them without trial, as well as other violations.

“It is manifested in the daily lives of Palestinians in the occupied territories, regarding restrictions on freedom of movement, receiving permits to enter Israel and move between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the demolition of houses because of lack of zoning permits,” said Dan Yakir, legal adviser for ACRI.

Yakir also said that within Israel, discrimination continued against Israeli Arabs, particularly in the distribution of financial resources to Arab villages. ACRI said Israel had improved in some areas of civil rights for Israelis, citing as an example the passage of the Freedom of Information Act, which allows access to public documents.

But, the group said, government ministries failed to provide equipment for the disabled, and discrimination against women in some workplaces continued. □

### Seeking Russian help on Iran

Argentina asked Russia to use its diplomatic relations with Iran to obtain information about bombings against two Jewish institutions in Buenos Aires.

Argentina believes Iran was involved in the attacks earlier this decade against the Israeli Embassy and the Jewish community headquarters. Scores of people were killed in the incidents. Argentine Interior Minister Carlos Corach sought Russian help during a recent visit to Moscow of Argentine leaders, including Argentine President Carlos Menem.

### Holland postpones Israel visit

Holland’s government postponed an official visit to Israel because of the stalemate over the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The delegation of officials from the Dutch Foreign Ministry had been scheduled to travel to Israel this week for talks on the Middle East security situation.

### Sharansky in Uzbekistan

Israeli Cabinet minister Natan Sharansky said he supports Uzbekistan’s crackdown on Islamic fundamentalism. But at the same time, Sharansky said the former Soviet republic must find a way to build democracy. Sharansky made his comments during a visit to the Uzbek capital of Tashkent.

### Building request makes deadline

The debate over whether Orthodox Jewish institutions can build a campus in a Cleveland suburb continued as the local city council issued a 120-day moratorium on zoning changes. The Hebrew Academy of Cleveland filed its request for a variance an hour before the delay by the Beachwood governing body took effect. The issue of Jewish building there has pitted Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews against each other.

### Zukerman named to Ottawa post

Israeli violinist Pinchas Zukerman was named music director of the Ottawa-based National Arts Center Orchestra. In November the orchestra is planning a weeklong celebration of Israel’s 50th anniversary, during which it intends to perform a concert to raise funds for a Middle East tour in 2000. The orchestra is also planning to bring young Israelis, Palestinians and Canadians together to study and play music.

### Jewish historian dead at 93

Jacob Katz, a historian who was an international expert on the history of Jewish-Christian relations and the history of Jewish law, has died. An ordained Orthodox rabbi, Katz taught Jewish history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He was 93.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

**Diverse Italian community strives to resolve tensions**

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Italy's small, ancient and highly diversified Jewish community has been so rocked recently by internal tensions over who is a Jew and what is Judaism that some feared it could be split apart.

The crisis pitted increasingly militant religious traditionalists against the non-observant and, as such, mirrored trends evident throughout the Jewish world.

The 35,000-strong community, however, appears to have emerged from its policy-making congress last month with a renewed commitment to compromise that leaders hope will enable different religious trends and traditions to coexist under an umbrella of unity.

"Sometimes crises create their own antibodies," Tullia Zevi, the outgoing president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, said in an interview.

Said Francesco Spagnolo, director of a Jewish music study center in Milan, "There are too few of us to split up."

The quadrennial congress elected a new governing board that is expected at its July 13 meeting to name Venice-based Amos Luzzatto to replace Zevi, who stepped down after an unprecedented four terms as president of the group.

The congress met here from June 21 to 23.

Luzzatto, editor of a prestigious Jewish scholarly review, is a choice that appeals to a broad range of factions within the community.

He is a respected secular intellectual who, at the same time, has a profound knowledge of Jewish religious traditions and is descended from a prominent rabbinic family.

A flash point of the recent tensions among Italy's Jews was controversy over the conversion of young children of mixed marriages.

Italian Jewry is Orthodox.

There are no Reform or Conservative congregations or practicing rabbis here.

And, unlike the system of congregations in the United States, Italy, like other European countries, has a kehillah system.

One joins the kehillah, or local community, not a congregation — and those not recognized as Jewish by the Orthodox rabbinate are excluded.

Just the same, most Italian Jews are not observant and even Orthodox Jews are traditionally highly acculturated, with a strong Italian identity.

The rate of intermarriage is 50 percent or more.

Many intermarried families in Italy have raised their children as Jews, obtaining Orthodox conversions for them when they were infants or toddlers.

Last year, however, a rabbinical ruling decreed that small children could not be converted unless their non-Jewish mothers also were converted.

Otherwise, they would be barred from attending Jewish schools.

After widespread debate and protests, the blanket ruling was relaxed to some extent, allowing each community with its rabbis

to decide the issue on a case-by-case basis. The conversion issue, however, reflected more widespread strains, based on mounting concern among rabbis and others that secular Jews had lost sight of what it meant to be Jewish.

"At root is a widespread and advanced loss of Jewish identity, in religious, family and social terms," Rabbi Giuseppe Laras, president of Italy's Rabbinical Assembly, told the Union's congress.

Jewish continuity, he warned, was under threat.

"That which once seemed anomalous, illicit, dangerous and exceptional, today for many people no longer is so," said the assembly's president.

In recent years, some younger people who returned to Orthodox observance became militant in criticizing Jews who were less stringent in their observance.

These new Orthodox were in turn branded as "fundamentalists" by secular Jews.

Adding to the complications has been the Italian Jewish community's unique status in Europe, based on its antiquity and the divergent elements within such small numbers.

Jews have lived in Rome for more than 2,000 years, making theirs the oldest continuous Jewish community outside the Holy Land.

"We lived in Rome long before Lubavitch existed and long before Polish Jews knew there was a Poland," said Franco Pavoncello, a board member of Rome's Jewish community.

Today, about 15,000 Jews live in Rome, and about 10,000 in Milan.

The rest live in a score of other towns and cities, mostly in northern Italy, in communities ranging from a small handful to about 1,000 people.

The Rome and Milan communities are comprised of both native Italian Jews and descendants of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 — as well as immigrants who have arrived during the past 30 years.

One-third to one-half of Rome's Jews are Libyan Jews who fled after bloody anti-Jewish riots in 1967 following the Six-Day War.

The Milan Jewish community consists of recent arrivals from more than two dozen countries, with the biggest immigrant group from Iran.

Many of these Jews maintain their own rites and often highly Orthodox lifestyles, which are quite different from the assimilated lifestyles of most Italian Jews.

This, too, has been a cause of friction.

Some Italian Jews have expressed the fear that the historic character of their community, with its tradition of integration, is under siege.

In an article published in April, the man who will soon head Italian Jewry made clear he felt that Italian Jews must learn to coexist in a flexible unity.

"There should be a dialogue among everyone," Luzzatto wrote in a Jewish magazine.

He appealed for a situation "where the rabbinate is not divided into opposing Orthodox and liberal, but is one sole entity, and is, with this, quite flexible." The community, he wrote, should be one all-encompassing entity that will welcome "Jews who belong to the 'Orthodox' as well as 'non-Orthodox' currents, as long as halachic norms are respected." □