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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Timetable for payments uncertain after Swiss settlement agreement

By Mitchell Danow

Survivors applaud settlement

The exact timetable under which Holocaust survivors will receive payments from the \$1.25 billion settlement involving Swiss banks remains unclear.

The banks' initial disbursement of \$250 million will come after a U.S. federal judge involved in obtaining the settlement grants his approval to the deal. While survivors cite their advanced age in calling for a prompt schedule of payments, they hailed what they described as a historic agreement — as have Jewish officials in the United States and abroad.

Meanwhile, the comptrollers of New York City and New York State announced they were lifting their threats of sanctions against Swiss banks. [Page 1]

Russia alleges Israeli spying

Russia's security service said it uncovered an Israeli spy ring. A high-ranking officer with the Federal Security Service reportedly claimed that a tank factory worker in Siberia had passed sensitive information on to Israel's Nativ agency.

A once-secret unit, Nativ was set up to monitor the political and economic climate in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The factory worker and Nativ officials denied the accusations.

Poland's premier backs crosses

Poland's prime minister defended the placing of crosses at the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp. In a letter to United States Holocaust Memorial Museum director Miles Lerman, Jerzy Buzek asserted the right "to use symbols appropriate to the religious creed" of Nazi victims.

Lerman and other Jewish officials have called for the removal of some 90 crosses placed at the site by Catholic fringe groups during the past three weeks.

Barak urges speed on bill

Israeli opposition leader Ehud Barak urged the Knesset committee responsible for preparing a bill that would force early elections to expedite the process despite the summer recess.

Barak said the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "has come to the end of the road" and blamed it for a host of social ills.

Committee chairman Hanan Porat said he plans neither to "bury" the bill nor to accelerate the legislative process.

NEW YORK (JTA) — Estelle Sapir had mixed emotions.

"My heart is very happy," the 73-year-old Holocaust survivor said in a slight voice outside the Brooklyn federal courthouse where Switzerland's leading commercial banks had just agreed to a \$1.25 billion settlement of Holocaust-era claims.

But at the same time, Sapir, who fled a Nazi death camp as a teen-ager, was concerned about the advanced age of survivors who have waited decades for the return of assets they claim are rightfully theirs.

"I think this should have happened long ago. There are many old people who need help. I am among the youngest, so you know how old the others must be."

In May, Sapir reached a settlement with Credit Suisse, one of the banks involved in Wednesday's landmark agreement. But there remain tens of thousands of survivors who sought payment from the banks in a more than \$20 billion class-action lawsuit.

The settlement announced Wednesday outside the courthouse came after a series of negotiations in recent weeks involving representatives of Switzerland's two leading commercial banks — United Bank of Switzerland and Credit Suisse — as well as World Jewish Congress officials and the plaintiffs' lawyers.

According to a source familiar with the discussions, the talks reached a turning point Monday night, when Judge Edward Korman — the federal judge who was considering whether to hear the lawsuit— invited the participants for dinner at a steakhouse. The evidence against the banks presented during that dinner was "not just a smoking gun. It was a smoking machine gun," the source said.

When he saw the evidence, the source added, Korman ordered both sides to reach a settlement — a clear indication to the banks that they would not fare well if the suit went before him. More talks followed on Tuesday and Wednesday before the sides reached the settlement, under which the plaintiffs will release all claims against the two banks — as well as against the Swiss National Bank, which bought gold from the Nazis worth tens of billions of dollars in today's currency, the Swiss government, other Swiss banks and Swiss industry.

The only group not affected by the settlement are Swiss insurance companies, which are likely to face additional pressures in the coming weeks to pay Holocaust victims and their heirs the unpaid proceeds of policies dating back to the war years.

The settlement also ends the threat of potentially harmful sanctions against Swiss banks that financial officials representing some 20 states and 30 cities in the United States had said they would impose if no settlement were reached.

On Thursday, New York City Comptroller Alan Hevesi and New York State Comptroller H. Carl McCall announced that they were lifting their threats of sanctions, which were slated to begin Sept. 1. They also recommended that other states and cities not proceed with boycotts — a recommendation that will likely be followed.

Meanwhile, the exact timetable for Holocaust survivors to receive payments from the \$1.25 billion settlement remains unclear. Korman is expected to give his initial approval to the settlement agreement in the coming days, according to Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJC, which has spearheaded international efforts to get the Swiss to confront their wartime past.

The banks' initial disbursement of \$250 million should come within 30 days after Korman gives his approval to Wednesday's agreement in principle, Steinberg added. But it could take far longer before any survivors see those funds. In the coming weeks,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Unity government plans denied

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and opposition leader Ehud Barak refuted reports that the two were supporting the creation of a national unity government. President Ezer Weizman also rejected the feasibility of such a move.

Arafat calls for sanctions

Yasser Arafat called for economic sanctions against Israel. The Palestinian leader said "real and effective" international pressure against Israel was needed to force a permanent peace settlement.

"All negotiation tracks have broken down," Arafat told an audience in South Africa, comparing current Israeli policies to those of apartheid. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman, David Bar-Illan, said Arafat's call was not "furthering the cause of peace." Arafat, who is on an official visit to South Africa, a day earlier told a joint session of the nation's Parliament that there could be no peace in the Middle East if the Palestinian people did not have control over Jerusalem.

Court eyes religious councils

Israel's minister of religious affairs told the High Court of Justice he opposes the appointment of two non-Orthodox candidates to the Jerusalem Religious Council. Eli Suissa cited fierce objections by the council's rabbis to support his request for a postponement of the court hearing.

Hezbollah claims it has film

A television station operated by Hezbollah claims it has a filmed record of how one of its militants infiltrated an Israeli position in southern Lebanon and managed to escape unharmed. The Iranian-backed group made the three-minute film available to international news agencies and local media. Meanwhile, Israeli army officials have called for an inquiry into how the incident could have occurred.

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the World Jewish Restitution Organization — which is headed by WJC President Edgar Bronfman and includes the Jewish Agency for Israel and other international Jewish groups — will work with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to come up with a distribution plan, Steinberg said.

He said that the WJRO will seek to have all proceeds of the settlement go to survivors. "We are opposing any payment of contingency fees to lawyers from these funds."

He added that he hopes a final agreement can be reached with the banks within 90 days. Once all the parties sign on to that agreement, Korman will put his signature on the court order mandating payments from the settlement fund.

The banks will also pay \$333 million each year during the next three years.

"The funds will be used for the benefit of tens of thousands of Holocaust survivors worldwide," said Steinberg, who estimated the total worldwide survivor population at between 500,000 to 600,000.

The settlement covers "all material assets" — including dormant accounts, looted Nazi gold and securities — "stolen from the Jewish people that wound up in Switzerland," he said.

The settlement is separate from the payments being made from a \$170 million Swiss humanitarian fund that was set up last year by Swiss banks for the benefit of Holocaust survivors.

Survivors in Eastern Europe — Jews and non-Jews — have already begun receiving distributions from that fund.

How Holocaust survivors in the United States can apply for payments from the fund is to be announced next week. Some \$32 million of the \$170 million in the fund is slated to be distributed in the United States.

Steinberg said that anyone seeking to apply for payments from the humanitarian fund should not be concerned that they will be ineligible to participate in the proceeds from this week's settlement.

"It is not our intention that the two funds will conflict," he said.

A large portion of the settlement will be used to satisfy the claims of survivors seeking the return of dormant accounts held by Swiss banks.

Those claims are being processed by the Volcker Commission, a panel led by former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker investigating the extent of the dormant accounts. The commission could produce unclaimed assets estimated to be currently worth more than \$700 million, one source said recently.

For their part, the Swiss banks said in a statement that they "look forward to continuing their cooperation with the Volcker Commission's efforts to identify dormant accounts." While the banks also described the settlement as a "major milestone in our efforts to insure that justice is served," it remains unclear whether UBS and Credit Suisse will be alone in shouldering the \$1.25 billion payment.

A spokesman for UBS told Swiss radio on Thursday that while the Swiss National Bank and other members of Swiss industry had not participated in the settlement negotiations, they might want to "show their appreciation" for an agreement that exempts them from any further lawsuits.

Steinberg of the WJC recalled how his group's efforts to get the Swiss banks to confront their wartime past began almost exactly three years ago, when Bronfman first negotiated with the bankers. The bankers never bothered to offer Bronfman a chair during those first talks, which soon concluded with their offering \$32 million to settle all claims. "That chair has cost them \$2 billion," Steinberg said, referring to all the costs, in addition to the settlement, that the banks have incurred in the succeeding years.

Steinberg, who was as clearly pleased with the settlement as other Jewish officials in the United States and abroad, called it "a triumph for justice and the cause of memory." But, he added, "This was not about the mass slaughter of the Jewish people. We do not put a price tag on that. This was about the goods that were stolen from them."

A similar point was made by Stuart Eizenstat, the U.S. undersecretary of state for economic affairs who has served as President Clinton's point man on Holocaust restitution issues. While applauding the settlement as a "historic and very positive development," he said the "legacy of the Holocaust should not be just gold and money."

"It should be truth and facts," he added, citing the importance of Holocaust education, which "will outlive the survivors and all of us." □

JEWISH WORLD

German minister seeks delay

Germany's foreign minister said plans for a national Holocaust memorial in Berlin should be postponed until after the Sept. 27 national elections.

Klaus Kinkel was quoted in a German newspaper as calling the issue too sensitive for discussion during "the heated phase of an election battle." Chancellor Helmut Kohl has called for a decision this month on the controversial project.

Museum features Jewish painter

A museum dedicated to the work of a German painter who was killed at Auschwitz opened last month in his hometown of Osnabruck in northwestern Germany. The leading candidate to become Germany's next chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, inaugurated the Felix Nussbaum Museum.

Neo-Nazi concert banned

Austrian authorities banned a music concert organized by a neo-Nazi group. Members of the extreme right-wing New Youth Offensive vowed to find a new venue for the event. The concert in a town 35 miles southeast of Vienna would have brought together neo-Nazis from Germany and Austria. Neo-Nazi activity is illegal in both countries.

Italy, Libya reach accord

Italy and Libya agreed recently to collaborate to promote stability in the Mediterranean by fighting terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The agreement emerged from a meeting in Rome chaired by the foreign ministers of the two countries. Italy, which wants to help Libya normalize its relations with the rest of the world, said in a statement that it would not violate U.N. sanctions against Libya that include an air and arms embargo.

Shul is good for you

A study by Duke University indicates that older people who participate in religious activities tend to have lower blood pressure than others in the over-65 age group. The study, which appeared in the latest issue of the International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine, also showed that religious people are less depressed, deal better with overcoming addictions and have healthier immune systems.

Mussolini stars in Israeli movie

A film festival slated to open in Italy later this month will include an Israeli movie in which Alessandra Mussolini stars as an Israeli soldier. "Back to Freedom" was made before she went into politics, according to Mussolini, the granddaughter of Italy's World War II fascist dictator who is now a legislator with Italy's right-wing National Alliance Party.

Israeli Arab teen-ager serves as guide at Holocaust museum

By Lori Silberman Brauner
New Jersey Jewish News

WHIPPANY, N.J. (JTA) — Before she visited Yad Laveled, a museum at the Ghetto Fighters' House in northern Israel that memorializes child victims of the Holocaust, the Shoah was just a "dry" school topic for Hanin Elias.

Elias, 17, a resident of the northern Israeli Arab village of Kfar Yassif, is now a guide at the museum's Center for Humanistic Education, a Holocaust study program established two years ago for Israeli Arab and Druse youth.

The museum's goal is to introduce youngsters, through a multi-dimensional approach, to the inner world of children who experienced the Holocaust.

Elias, who at one time was bitter at Israel for the plight of the Palestinian people and believed that "all the Jewish nation was my enemy," now says there are many things to learn from the Holocaust.

She is one of the guides teaching those lessons to museum visitors.

Elias became interested in the museum's activities after Raya Kalisman, the center's coordinator and an educator with experience in Jewish-Arab encounters, visited her village, looking for student volunteers.

Elias then participated in a yearlong seminar run by the staff of the Fighters' House, which was founded in 1949 at the Ghetto Fighters' Kibbutz by survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

The Fighters' House has become a depository for documents related to Jewish resistance during World War II and serves as an international center to teach about the Holocaust.

After completing the course, Elias received training to be a guide for visitors to Yad Laveled.

"We guided other generations from many schools," said Elias, adding that she worked hard to convince other Arab — as well as Jewish — students that it was worthwhile to learn more about the Holocaust.

"If everyone can learn the Holocaust in the same way that I learned" at the Fighters' House, then other teens can effectively fight hatred and anti-Semitism, said Elias, who recently visited the United States.

She had come here to participate in an international seminar for young adults, "How We Can Fight Hatred," that was held last month in Washington.

Elias said she does find it difficult when Arabs ask her how she can teach about the Holocaust when they believe they are victims themselves of the Israelis.

"I can't answer this question," Elias said. "I just look at every situation differently."

She firmly believes, however, that Holocaust education provides the best chance to prevent Arabs from suffering a similar fate.

Despite the apparent success of the program, its future is uncertain.

Israel's Education Ministry has cut \$20,000 in funding.

"They are looking for ways to find the funding to make up the difference," said Debbie Nahshon, executive director of the American Friends of the Ghetto Fighters' House in Teaneck, N.J., adding that the cut comes at a time "just when this program is developing so well." □

Cell phone follows teen to grave

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli teen killed in a road accident is being remembered in death as he was in life — with a telephone.

A black marble tombstone in the shape of a cellular phone preserves 17-year-old Guy Arkish's memory with the words, "Hello, this is Guy, how are you doing?" inscribed in its "digital display."

Arkish's family chose the unusual memorial because, his sister reportedly said, "Guy so much enjoyed talking on the phone." □

Domestic violence rises in Israel, but denial is high

By Janet Silver Grant

Jewish Bulletin of Northern California

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It could be a typical middle-class Israeli home.

A Fisher-Price farm sits on the living room floor, laundry hangs outside, children race in and out and, in a homey kitchen downstairs, a mother prepares eggs for her two young boys.

But a television screen on the living room wall warns residents against approaching visitors. And the 12 women residents and their 25 children — many of them emigres — are forbidden to leave at night. Several years ago, when one woman walked out, against advice, to meet her husband, he killed her.

Domestic violence in Israel is on the rise. Approximately 200,000 Israeli women are battered each year, according to the Israel Women's Network. Some 40,000 of them reach emergency wards. Last year, 15 of these victims died.

Only about 2,000 women file charges or seek refuge in such facilities as the Jerusalem Shelter for Battered Women, which serves some 70 women and 100 children each year. The facility, one of 11 such shelters in Israel, collaborates with the Hadassah Medical Organization, which forwards patients in need of housing. Four of the shelters are in Jerusalem.

"I think it's a very aggressive society we live in," said Rachel Bialer, director of the Jerusalem Shelter. "Our history has a lot to do with it."

Gurith Schneidman, head of social work services at Hadassah's two Jerusalem hospitals, said, "Whenever political tensions rise, the numbers in the emergency rooms are higher." During the winter months, when Israel was threatened with a possible Iraqi attack, the number of battered women referrals was the highest it had been in many months.

Domestic violence "is a global issue," said Nora Kort, a Palestinian activist and social worker who heads the Arab Orthodox Society in Jerusalem's Old City. What's new in the Middle East, she said, is that it's being addressed, including in the Arabic press.

Women are not the only victims. Child abuse, like spousal abuse, permeates every segment of Israeli society, said Dr. Yigal Shvil, head of the Child at Risk program and pediatric nephrology department at Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center.

He estimated that among Israel's 1.5 million children, 20,000 are abused each year — about 230 suspected cases arriving at Hadassah's two hospitals annually.

Shvil first encountered the growing problem in the early '70s, when he noticed bruises and cigarette burns on a small girl. He discovered that her parents had not wanted a third daughter and were forcing her to sleep in a doll cradle that was too small for her.

"The father had broken her arms and legs," he said. "I saw healed fractures."

As a result of such cases, he said, Hadassah now has a team consisting of himself, two social workers, a psychologist and a pediatric psychiatrist to deal with suspected cases of child abuse.

Several who work with battered women and children report an upsurge in domestic violence in the last 12 or 13 years.

While Hadassah does not maintain statistics on the religious and ethnic breakdown of its clients, Schneidman, who also consults

with the Jerusalem Shelter, attributes the rise in part to demographic changes, including immigration from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

Among the former Soviets, she said, alcohol use is often high, contributing to abuse.

"There's also a crisis of adaptation. They don't know the language, the culture, the bureaucracy. Some are so unequipped, so troubled, which can explain the extra use of alcohol."

Among the Ethiopians, poverty, low literacy rates and scant knowledge of Hebrew exacerbate stress. And the male-dominated Ethiopian culture makes it difficult for a woman to achieve independence.

The task of treating victims of domestic violence in Israel, Schneidman said, is also complicated by religious and ethnic differences.

In both the Arab and the fervently religious Jewish communities, there is a strong desire to keep such incidents private. Frequently, women themselves will hide suspected abuse.

Schneidman remembers a woman coming into one of the Hadassah hospitals the night before a Passover seder. She had a high temperature, a cough and pneumonia. She was anxious to get her medicine and depart to finish making her home kosher for Passover.

But physicians noticed bruises and burns. Social workers later discovered that three of the woman's seven children were being abused.

To treat such cases, a shelter for fervently Orthodox women and children was opened earlier this year, with the involvement of rabbis and women from the community.

Arab communities, which have their own shelters, face other complications. For example, if a woman is viewed as bringing disgrace upon her family through premarital pregnancy or infidelity, some husbands or fathers may feel a moral obligation to physically punish or kill her, Schneidman said.

About one-third of the women murdered in Israel last year by their spouses or male relatives were Arab, she said. Moreover, because Arab society is paternalistic, the husband is likely to get custody of the children in case of divorce.

Until recently, domestic abuse was not discussed openly in Israel, Schneidman said.

"The phenomenon was very new and very embarrassing. Nobody thought it should be a hospital dilemma or that we should be involved in it."

But increased awareness brought about changes in reporting laws. While Israeli hospitals have been required to report suspected cases of child abuse, spousal abuse was a grayer area, unless the woman filed a complaint with the police. Today, hospital officials can have a husband placed under 24-hour police custody and keep a wife in the hospital for 24 hours until a safe place can be found if abuse is suspected.

Gaining the trust of abused women is critical, Bialer said. In the past, counselors often used feminist rhetoric in an attempt to persuade women to be strong and leave their husbands. It often backfired.

If women who have just entered a shelter are given a strong message that they should divorce, they may feel like failures if they decide to return to their spouses. And if the abuse continues, they may be reluctant to return to the shelter.

"Some women can only leave their husbands after coming to us five times," Bialer said. "It's a process." □