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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Ross to draft agreement

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross will likely remain in the region at least through the weekend to advance Israeli-Palestinian talks, an Israeli official said. Ross called his talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "useful" after he emerged from a meeting with the premier.

A U.S. official said Ross will soon start drafting an agreement on a further Israeli redeployment in the West Bank, as efforts continue to reach consensus on the steps the Palestinians will take on security issues.

Rabbi to confirm deaths

An Israeli rabbi flew to the United States to confirm the deaths of the Jewish victims of the Swissair Flight 111 plane crash. According to Jewish law, a widow cannot remarry until it can be proved that her husband has died. At least seven of the 229 killed in last week's tragedy were Jewish.

Artworks' return promised

Austrian museums will return hundreds of artworks seized by the Nazis to their rightful owners, a government official said. The artworks include paintings, coins, sculptures and antiques — most of which belonged to Jews.

Thousands of artworks confiscated by the Nazis after Austria was annexed by the Third Reich in 1938 were returned after the war. But some were incorporated into Austrian museums on the grounds that they could not be shipped out of the country.

AJCommittee calls for memorial

The American Jewish Committee called on Germany to go ahead with long-delayed plans to construct a national Holocaust memorial in Berlin.

A decision on the controversial project has been postponed until after the Sept. 27 national elections. Current Chancellor Helmut Kohl supports the project; opposition candidate Gerhard Schroeder questions it.

Rabbi charged with murder

A Reform rabbi in New Jersey was charged in the 1994 murder of his wife. Rabbi Fred Neulander, formerly senior rabbi at a Cherry Hill, N.J., congregation, resigned more than three years ago after conceding that he had participated in inappropriate rabbinic behavior.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Israel intensifies efforts to deport foreign workers

By Avi Machlis

TEL AVIV (JTA) — For Michael James, the road home from Israel to Nigeria passes through the squalid, dusty streets behind Tel Aviv's old bus station.

James, a well-built man who looks younger than his 45 years, is knocking on doors of every clothing and shoe store tucked amid the peep shows and massage parlors of this dilapidated section of Tel Aviv, hoping to find any job that will pay for a ticket home. But work is scarce and time is running out: In October, Israeli police plan to step up deportations of illegal foreign workers, and James' work permit expired six months ago.

"I want to leave the country," he says. But he adds, "I don't have enough money for a ticket. I don't want somebody to dump me in a prison. I'm willing to work for my ticket or I'll go home immediately if the government pays."

Until recently, there were some 250,000 foreign workers in Israel, about 100,000 of them legal. Israeli officials say a decision to stop renewing permits has reduced the number of legal foreign laborers to about 75,000.

Starting in October, Israel plans to deport 1,000 illegal workers each month, after expelling 500 per month during the past year. In 1999, authorities hope to deport 2,000 workers a month, and eventually they hope to double that number.

The drive to deport foreign workers stems from public criticism that their swelling numbers, against a backdrop of rising unemployment, are creating a social time bomb.

Activists on behalf of foreign workers say the deportation policy has been accompanied by rhetoric that reeks of racism.

Official Labor Ministry press releases have compared the expulsion of foreign workers to "holiday cleaning" or "burning the chametz," the ritual of burning bread and other leavened products before Passover.

In addition, activists say setting up deportation camps is a cruel way to treat people who were let in by the state, often exploited by employers and have contributed to the economy by doing jobs that most Israelis avoid.

James, who has a university degree in agricultural science, left his wife and four children two years ago to work in Israel.

He spent most of his time cleaning houses and doing what he describes as the "ugly jobs" shunned by Israelis. Like many foreign workers, he has also been cheated. After cleaning one family's home for three months, they refused to pay.

"If foreign workers are paid regularly, it will be easy for us to leave," he says. "But if they embezzle us, we will just stay longer."

Israel began importing workers en masse during 1993, when prolonged closures of the West Bank and Gaza Strip prevented Palestinians from working in Israel. Before the closures, Palestinians filled menial jobs in the construction, agriculture and service sectors.

Encouraged by Israeli policies, workers arrived from developing countries all over the world. In Tel Aviv's dingy pedestrian mall of Neve Sha'an'an, where lonely foreign workers pass their free time nursing beers and thinking of home, a handwritten sign on an international telephone center advertises rates to more than 20 developing countries, ranging from Romania to Ghana to Thailand.

Since they began arriving in Israel, abuse of foreign workers has reached epidemic proportions. Many building contractors house laborers in cramped conditions,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Shoval presents credentials

Israel's ambassador to the United States presented his credentials to President Clinton at a White House ceremony. Zalman Shoval was joined by 11 other ambassadors at the diplomatic event.

Israeli rescuers thanked

Two Palestinians were killed and 44 hurt in the Gaza Strip when the bus in which they were riding to jobs in Israel veered from the road and overturned. Palestinian police thanked Israeli rescue workers for helping to evacuate the victims.

Palestinian activity cited

The Palestinian Authority is furtively strengthening its presence in eastern Jerusalem, according to an Israeli ministerial committee report. Palestinian officials are allegedly keeping a low profile — particularly in efforts to gain additional influence over Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem — to avoid Israeli objections.

Demonstration claims victim

A Palestinian woman died after being shot by Israeli security forces when she walked into a weekend clash with Palestinian stone-throwers. Israeli police said the woman died in an Israeli hospital from a rubber bullet fired during a demonstration Saturday in eastern Jerusalem.

The demonstration erupted over Palestinian claims that an Arab died of a heart attack because an Israeli ambulance was needlessly delayed.

Wall security questioned

An Israeli man with a gun entered the Western Wall area recently after metal detectors were shut off for the Sabbath.

Israeli police learned of the incident only after the man wrote a letter of complaint, indicating that he slipped by the security checkpoint.



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often a dozen to a small room in wall-to-wall bunk beds. Although they are paid the legal minimum wage, workers are often charged exorbitant rates to live in these accommodations.

In the months before a foreign worker returns home, many employers withhold wages. And most construction companies illegally confiscate passports from "legal" workers when they arrive, to guarantee that they cannot change jobs.

But there is little reason for such action because, according to Israeli law, a legal foreign worker may not change employers. If he does, he automatically becomes an illegal worker.

"In Israel, it is actually better for a worker to be illegal than legal," says Hanna Zohar, director of Kav Laoved, a hotline that provides legal assistance to distressed foreign workers.

"Illegal workers are not bound to an employer. At least nobody takes their passports, and they can move from one employer to another if they are treated badly."

Zohar objects to the deportation plan.

"Somebody let these people into the country. The Israeli economy has profited from them," she says. "These people came to Israel to work. They are not criminals and do not deserve to be treated like criminals."

Several Israeli shop owners on the Neve Sha'anun pedestrian mall agree.

"If we go abroad to work and we don't cause trouble, we wouldn't expect to be thrown out like this," says Michel Barkhalifa, who owns a barber shop.

But Israeli authorities are determined to press ahead with the plan. The government wants Israelis and Palestinians to replace the foreigners, even though few Israelis want these jobs and Palestinian labor would be affected if closures of the West Bank and Gaza were again imposed.

"We are not being brutal and will expel the workers in the most humane way possible," says Efraim Cohen, head of the Labor Ministry's foreign workers department. "No state will allow foreigners to work without a permit. Can you work in the United States without a green card?"

Cohen admits that in the Labor Ministry's opinion, "illegal workers have no rights" no matter how or why they arrived in the country.

"We are also trying to deal with the employers who are abusing legal workers, and are slapping on fines of \$1,300 to employers who hire illegal workers."

Zohar, of the worker's hotline, says the state has yet to prove that it is cracking down on employers with the same resolve that it is cracking down on foreign workers.

"If there were serious sanctions against employers, there would be no work for illegal workers, and they would leave the country on their own. Instead, the government is going to build tent camps and spend millions of shekels on deportations. Whatever happened to intelligent Jewish thinking?" □

Premier's flu sparks controversy

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Some opposition politicians are claiming that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was faking it after the Israeli premier canceled work for two days this week, saying he was ill.

Netanyahu canceled a meeting with U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross on Thursday as well as deliberations on the 1999 budget and a trip to the Soviet republic of Georgia to celebrate 2,600 years of the Jewish community there.

Netanyahu did meet Thursday with Ross at the premier's home.

Some Labor Party politicians said Netanyahu was just trying to avoid the political problems at hand.

Netanyahu complained of a general weakness earlier in the week. Following initial concern that he was suffering from a heart attack, Dr. Andre Keren was called in. Keren said there was no heart trouble, but that Netanyahu was suffering from the flu.

The Meretz Party's Yossi Sarid also used the opportunity to get in a potshot at Netanyahu.

Sarid said he believed the Likud Party leader was sick, but added: "This is what happens to a person who always lies. No one believes him anymore." □

JEWISH WORLD

Lileikis trial postponed

A Lithuanian court indefinitely postponed the war crimes trial of the man who headed the country's Nazi-sponsored secret police. The court said it would appoint a medical commission to determine whether Aleksandras Lileikis is too ill to speak in his own defense.

The trial will likely never be held if Lileikis, 91, is found unable to testify. Lileikis is accused of having given Jews over to Nazi death squads during the war.

Dutch Jews demand inquiry

Dutch Jewish groups demanded an inquiry into dormant Jewish bank accounts dating back to the Holocaust.

The demands came as the country's Finance Ministry admitted that records of these accounts had mistakenly been destroyed.

Nazi protest remembered

A plaque was erected in Berlin to commemorate the only public protest by Germans against the Nazi persecution of the Jews. In February 1943, a group of German women demonstrated outside a Berlin community center where their Jewish husbands and children had been rounded up for deportation to the Auschwitz death camp.

The 1,200 men and children held in the center by the Gestapo were released a week later and did not experience any further persecution. German Jewish leader Ignatz Bubis said the plaque memorialized what he described as a courage that is lacking in modern-day Germany.

Nuremberg documents donated

A judge who participated in the Nuremberg Trials donated 22 boxes of documents from the proceedings to the Holocaust museum in Washington.

The papers include Judge William Christianson's notes on the trials he participated in and memos from defense attorneys. The records will join other collections available for research, according to a museum official.

Police injured in skinhead clash

Twenty German police were injured during a clash with right-wing extremists in the eastern town of Hirschfeld. Some 200 skinhead threw bottles at police and shouted "Heil Hitler" after authorities canceled a rock concert. A total of 65 youths were arrested.

Schindler stamp approved

The U.S. Senate approved an amendment to commemorate Oskar Schindler with a postage stamp.

The idea for the stamp came from a New Jersey resident who was one of the Jews saved by the German businessman during World War II.

Iraq may still have Scuds and nuclear-capable bombs

By Mark J. Joffe

NEW YORK (JTA) — Iraq could still have Scud missiles capable of striking Israel and may even have three nuclear bombs, despite eight years of U.N. disarmament efforts.

Richard Butler, chairman of UNSCOM, the U.N. special commission charged with Iraqi weapons inspections, raised the possibility that Iraq still possesses Scud missiles in remarks he made Wednesday at a briefing sponsored by the Middle East Forum, a New York-based think tank that publishes the journal *Middle East Quarterly*.

He spoke a day after the U.N. Security Council unanimously approved a resolution delaying any possible review of sanctions against Iraq until Baghdad resumes cooperation with UNSCOM inspection activities. Iraq suspended such cooperation last month.

Butler also refused to comment on an Israeli media report that Iraq is hiding three "technologically complete" nuclear bombs that lack only the fissile material to make them operational.

The Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* reported that the existence of the bombs was disclosed recently at a closed-door meeting of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy by Scott Ritter, a ranking member of the Iraqi inspection team who recently resigned from UNSCOM in protest.

The *Ha'aretz* report said the U.N. inspection team knew where the three nuclear bombs were being hidden, but that no order was given to the team to conduct a surprise inspection of the site.

Ha'aretz also reported Wednesday that Iraq is believed to still have between five and 12 Al Hussein ballistic missiles and parts for another 25. Such missiles would have an even greater capacity to inflict damage on Israel than the Scuds, which produced collateral damage but relatively few casualties during the Gulf War.

Butler said he was not going to comment on intelligence documents that might give the Iraqi government a precise idea of what information UNSCOM currently possesses about Baghdad's weapons capability.

The *Ha'aretz* report about nuclear-capable bombs and the possibility that Iraq still possesses Scuds capable of hitting Israel are important because they appear to indicate that Baghdad remains a greater potential threat to Israel than has generally been believed.

The prevailing view has been that most, if not all, of Iraq's Scud missiles were destroyed soon after the Gulf War ended in 1991, and that Baghdad's nuclear capability has been virtually, if not totally, eliminated.

Butler raised similar concerns about the threat to Israel a year ago, when he told *The New York Times* that Iraq may possess enough biological substances, such as anthrax or botulin toxin, to "blow away Tel Aviv."

Butler said Wednesday that his team had asked the Iraqis for an accounting of some 300 tons of propellant that is used only with Scud missiles.

The Iraqis first denied that the propellant still existed and then said that if it did, it would not matter since all missiles had been destroyed.

To this day, Butler said, the Iraqis have not proven that the propellant had been destroyed.

"As long as Scud-specific fuel is retained," he said, "it points to the possibility that Scud missiles are retained."

The UNSCOM chief said that his commission had accounted for 817 of the 819 Scud missiles that Iraq had imported from the former Soviet Union — leaving doubts about the whereabouts of the other two missiles. In addition, he said his commission had failed to obtain any information from Baghdad about any Scuds the Iraqis may have produced indigenously.

Last September, Butler told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations that Iraq still has "an indigenous missile capability." And he was quoted at the time by *The Times* as saying the remaining missiles are "very crude, but they work." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Atlanta theater to feature controversial Yiddish play**

By June D. Bell

ATLANTA (JTA) — The Jewish Theatre of the South's upcoming production features a Jewish brothel owner, a loving lesbian relationship and domestic violence.

Since when is this Jewish theater?

Since 1907, when European audiences attended the first performances of Sholem Asch's Yiddish drama "God of Vengeance." The play proved so potent when it was translated into English and performed on Broadway in 1923 that the entire cast was arrested on obscenity charges.

Mira Hirsch, the 33-year-old founder and artistic director of the Atlanta-based Jewish Theatre of the South, says what appealed to her about the play was Asch's frankness in tackling societal taboos as well as his mixing of Jewish and gay themes.

"God of Vengeance," which is playing here from Oct. 28 through Nov. 22, tells the story of Jewish brothel owner Yankel Chapchovich and his wife, Sore, a former prostitute, who live in a large Polish town at the turn of the century. Yankel has commissioned a Torah scroll to protect the purity of his marriage-aged daughter, Rivkele.

Her parents plan to marry her off to a scholar. But they don't know that Rivkele already has a lover — Manke, a young prostitute. Like the other women in Yankel's employ, she plies her trade beneath the Chapchovich home.

"Down there is a brothel, a house, while up here a young virgin lives, who will someday make a pure bride," Yankel says in an adaptation by Stephen Fife. "There must be no mixing, none!"

But of course the worlds do collide, with wrenching results for a man who thought he could purchase God's protection.

Fife's adaptation, prepared with the help of Yiddish scholar Nina Warnke, trimmed about an hour from the play, leaving a 90-minute production. He adapted the work for New York's Jewish Repertory Theater, which performed "God of Vengeance" in 1992. He says his version has not been produced professionally since then.

Obie Award winner Joseph Chaiken will direct the Atlanta production, a decision that thrills Fife, who says he worships Chaiken, the founder of New York's Open Theatre 35 years ago.

Fife's adaptation uses such coarse language as "bitch" and "whore" because those words, he says, convey the original grittiness of the young playwright's script.

"Asch, especially at 21, was very angry. His whole thing was rawness. He wanted to take Yiddish theater into a more gutsy realm," Fife says.

"You end up with some very visceral language, the seamy side of Jewish life, but there's also a real thirst, a hunger, for God."

Interestingly, the play's heavy themes — and forthright depictions of Jewish pimps, prostitutes and connivers — didn't initially trigger outcries. It was released in 1907 and quickly translated into German, Russian, Polish, Hebrew, English, Italian, Czech and Norwegian, according to "The Pakn-Trager," the magazine published by the Yiddish Book Center, which featured the play in a 1996 issue.

It was only in 1923, when "Got Fun Nekome" was playing as

"God of Vengeance" at the Apollo Theatre on Broadway that the furor started.

The cast, producer Harry Weinberger and the Apollo's manager were charged with presenting an obscene and immoral play. The New York Times reported that the theater had received letters from patrons complaining the play was anti-Semitic. Indeed, the Jewish Daily Forward's Abraham Cahan received the same reaction in an interview with Rabbi Joseph Silverman of Fifth Avenue's Temple Emanu-El.

"This play libels the Jewish religion," Silverman told Cahan. "Even the greatest of anti-Semites could not have written such a thing."

Actor Rudolph Schildkraut, who portrayed Yankel, responded: "I have played this role for 13 years, and in three languages, and never has anyone considered it immoral."

But a New York jury did, after 90 minutes of deliberation. The verdict was reported on the front page of both The New York Times and the Forward, according to an article in The Pakn-Treger. The producer and Schildkraut were each fined \$200.

Hirsch, of the Jewish Theatre of the South, says the immigrant Jewish community believed its desperate efforts to assimilate were being thwarted by a play depicting Jews as lowlifes and hypocrites. "It was really an issue: Do not embarrass us," she says.

Hirsch grappled with similar concerns nearly 80 years later and concluded that the play is more than a lewd foray into a Jewish family's misguided quest for decency.

"There's a reason it's not called 'God of Mercy,'" she says. "This is a morality play," he says. "Yankel really wants the best for his daughter. It's not a black and white play; he's a multilevel character."

After making a successful pitch to the Atlanta Jewish Community Center, which funds the theater, she was free to schedule rehearsals. They'll start in early October.

Though she defends the play, Hirsch admits she — and others in Atlanta's Jewish community — might feel differently if it were presented by anyone but the Jewish Theatre of the South.

But in this case, she says, "We're the people who are overseeing it and saying, 'This is appropriate; this is not.'" □

Mayor backs out of wedding

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A politician who has pledged to make religious freedom a centerpiece of his campaign for prime minister has backed out of a promise to perform a secular wedding ceremony.

Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo had told Galit Lissner, 27, and Nir Assulin, 29 that he would marry them in an "alternative weddings fair" scheduled for Thursday evening in Tel Aviv.

Milo had called a press conference and invited the young couple for a rehearsal before the cameras on Wednesday.

But when the couple showed up at his office, Milo told them he had changed his mind based on advice from Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein, who told him that "marriages and divorces of Jews in Israel will be performed according to the rule of Torah."

Disappointed, the couple turned to noted civil rights leader and former Knesset member Shulamit Aloni to perform the wedding instead.

The fair was organized by a group known as Hemdat as a protest against religious coercion. □