



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu convenes Cabinet

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convened his Cabinet to discuss the Wye agreement after saying he had received American assurances that the Palestinian Authority will arrest 30 wanted Islamic terrorists. Netanyahu created a ministerial committee to examine West Bank maps in preparation for the 13 percent Israeli redeployment called for under the accord. The Cabinet is expected to vote on the pact before the committee submits its findings.

Report: Anti-Semitism increasing

The debate about Swiss banks' wartime dealings with the Nazis has fueled a wave of anti-Semitism in the Alpine nation, the country's human rights watchdog panel said.

The Federal Commission Against Racism said in a report that "latent anti-Semitism is again being increasingly expressed in public by word and by deed." The panel added, "Comments from politicians helped make anti-Semitism socially acceptable."

Lileikis trial stops short

A former U.S. citizen proclaimed his innocence in a Lithuanian courtroom. Shortly after he testified, Aleksandras Lileikis was rushed from court in an ambulance. Doctors said the 91-year-old man may have suffered a heart attack. The judge delayed the trial, which has already been postponed four times this year, until Monday. Lileikis, who during the war headed the Vilnius branch of the Lithuanian security police, is suspected of having handed scores of Jews to Nazi death squads.

Return of artworks approved

The Austrian Parliament unanimously approved a law that would allow artworks in the country's museums that were seized by the Nazis to be returned to their rightful owners. Restitution of the works is expected to begin before the end of the year. Research has shown that hundreds of works will be affected.

Israel reaches milestone

Israel's population passed the 6 million mark at the end of September, the Central Bureau of Statistics announced. Of that total, some 4.76 million are Jews. The total population increased by 1 million during the past seven years, the bureau added.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

JDC preparing to resume assistance for Ethiopians

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee is preparing to return to Ethiopia, just four months after it virtually shut down its operations in the African nation at the request of the Israeli government.

Reports of death, illness and impoverished conditions among the thousands of Ethiopians who have flooded into Addis Ababa, the country's capital, and Gondar City prompted this move by the relief agency.

"We hope that this matter can be brought to an early resolution," Michael Schneider, JDC's executive director, told national Jewish organizational leaders in New York, "so that the Falash Mura population can be clear as to their future and begin to plan accordingly."

JDC's decision underscores what many American Jews are beginning to see as the need for expeditious action regarding the Falash Mura, who consider themselves Jewish and want to immigrate to Israel, but are not recognized as Jews by Israel.

The JDC wants Israel to step up its work screening the thousands of aliyah applicants, who currently live in shacks around the compounds where the JDC operated — and where Israel has its government offices — in Addis Ababa and Gondar City.

But Schneider stresses that the JDC is determined to remain neutral on the question of religious status and that it "is not responsible for deciding who should go to Israel."

Just as it closed its operations on July 1 at Israel's request, the JDC will not implement its emergency plan without discussing it with Israeli officials later this month.

Further pressure is expected at the General Assembly of the UJA Federations of North America, where a protest by thousands of Ethiopian Jews is planned to coincide with the arrival in Jerusalem of the 2,600 American Jews who will participate in this year's annual meeting, which will take place from Nov. 16 to Nov. 19.

Since July some 15,000 Falash Mura have uprooted themselves from their agrarian communities and relocated to the larger towns, transforming themselves into what the JDC describes as "a population of urban slum dwellers."

A grass-roots letter-writing campaign and reports of the refugees' living in squalor have put the JDC in "a kind of nutcracker," Schneider said, with pressure mounting from the American Jewish community to return to Ethiopia and pressure from Israel to stay out.

"Regardless as to how the current situation has arisen, JDC, as a humanitarian organization, cannot ignore the plight of hungry children," Schneider told a meeting of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

JDC says it is prepared to provide blankets and clothing and supplemental food, medical screening for the children in the shantytowns and technical assistance to the community leaders to help them establish medical clinics.

But an advocate for the Falash Mura says the commitment falls short of the need. "People are dying. We need to save the people," said Avraham Neguise, the director of the Israel-based South Wing to Zion, which recently reported that 59 people have died of disease and malnutrition this summer in the shantytowns. Neguise wants JDC to restore housing allowances and stipends and to reopen an employment program.

The refugees currently subsist largely on funds sent by relatives in Israel. "The facilities exist there: the clinic and all the necessary expertise," Neguise said

MIDEAST FOCUS

Labor, NRP officials meet

Israeli legislators from the Labor Party and National Religious Party met to discuss the possibility of forging political ties.

The meeting was intended to signal to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that former links between Labor and the national religious camp could be renewed, political observers said. The NRP has been threatening to bring down the government if it transfers additional West Bank lands to the Palestinian Authority.

Suskin to be released early

A woman who last year posted flyers in Hebron depicting the prophet Mohammed as a pig is expected to be released from an Israeli jail in the coming days.

Tatyana Suskin won a reduction of her 2-year sentence for good behavior, Israeli officials said.

PA issues guidelines

The Palestinian Authority issued guidelines for foreign journalists working in the self-rule areas. The guidelines, which in part call on the journalists to obtain a license, prompted concerns that the self-rule government is trying to muzzle the media. Palestinian officials said they made the move to comply with the Wye agreement, which calls for a Palestinian crackdown on incitement.

Court extends detentions

An Israeli court extended by another six months the administrative detentions of two Islamic leaders who had been kidnapped by Israel in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah leader Sheik Abdel Karim Obeid has been held by Israel since 1988. Another Shi'ite guerrilla leader, Mustafa Dirani, was kidnapped in 1994. The two are being held as bargaining chips for the release of Ron Arad, an Israeli airman who was shot down over Lebanon in 1982.



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in a telephone interview from Jerusalem. "They have the expertise."

JDC and the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, a U.S.-based advocacy group, provided health care, education, food services and vocational training to roughly 3,000 Falash Mura left behind after the mass 1991 exodus of Ethiopian Jews in Operation Solomon.

Most of this group was finally granted entry into the Jewish state after seven years of deliberation by Israel.

A separate population of about 2,500 Ethiopian Jews from the Kwara region has been recognized by Israel — and plans for their immigration are currently under way. By all accounts, however, the processing of the Kwara Jews is advancing at a snail's pace.

Most of the current Falash Mura refugees claim relatives in Israel and say they want to be reunited with their families.

Many say they were persecuted as Jews or feared anti-Semitic persecution.

Responding to those claims, the NACOEJ chose to continue its operations in Ethiopia beyond the July deadline agreed to with Israel.

JDC sent two investigative teams, which failed to find conclusive evidence of widespread persecution.

Israel insists that thousands of recent arrivals in Addis Ababa and Gondar are ineligible for immigration under family reunification because their relatives were admitted under a special humanitarian application of immigration law rather than the Law of Return, which requires immigrants to have at least one Jewish grandparent.

The Law of Entry was used "because those people arrived during Operation Solomon in 1991 under the belief that they would be going to Israel," explained Avi Granot, Israel's former ambassador to Ethiopia and the current minister for public affairs at the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

He insisted that the policy pertained only to those 3,000 individuals, "not to a general community that refers to itself as Falash Mura."

Advocates counter that the Falash Mura are "returning to Judaism" with the guidance of rabbis and religious instruction.

The JDC contends that refugees may have been encouraged to uproot themselves by relatives in Israel and by advocacy groups hoping to create what Schneider called "a hot situation to blackmail Israel and the JDC."

Israel's position has been that allowing the current group of refugees on the basis of family reunification would open up a never-ending flow of immigrants aspiring for a better life in a prosperous country.

"Once people's lives were endangered because they were Jewish," Bobby Brown, the prime minister's adviser on Diaspora affairs, said in an interview. "Today, many people whose lives are in danger say they are Jewish."

"If you are sitting in Ethiopia with tuberculosis, the only chance you have to live is to come to the State of Israel. If you were in that situation, what would you do to come in?" Brown asked. "There is definitely an issue of humanity, families, and it has to be studied carefully. It is not a simple issue with one answer that holds true for everyone."

Israeli officials say applicants will be considered on a case-by-case basis. "It has to be handled with a surgeon's scalpel and not a hatchet," Brown said. □

(JTA correspondent Avi Machlis in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

Vandalism marks Rabin anniversary

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli police have arrested a man who damaged the grave of Prime Minister Golda Meir with a hammer.

Police said the man apparently wanted to attack the nearby grave of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, but struck the wrong tombstone. This week, Israel has been marking the third anniversary of Rabin's slaying by a religious Jew opposed to the transfer of West Bank lands to the Palestinian Authority.

A car belonging to the family of Rabin's assassin was also set ablaze.

Geula Amir said the torching was the fifth attack on family property since her son Yigal shot Rabin at a Tel Aviv peace rally. □

JEWISH WORLD

Court hears Palestinian case

The Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case brought by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee against the Justice Department.

The suit accuses U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service officials of selectively targeting Palestinians for deportation because of their political beliefs. The justices will decide whether the ADC can bring the claim to federal court on free speech and free association grounds. The Justice Department, which alleges the Palestinians were involved in terrorist activities, argues that the claims should be heard in an administrative deportation proceeding.

Alleged Torah thief nabbed

A man accused of stealing Torahs from a New Jersey synagogue was arrested after he unwittingly attempted to sell the scrolls to an undercover policeman. The value of the two Torahs, crowns and breastplates, which were stolen in the middle of October from Temple Emanu-el in Englewood, N.J., are valued at \$100,000, according to police.

Lawmaker escapes censure

The lower house of the Russian Parliament defeated a motion to censor a Communist legislator for anti-Semitic comments he made recently. A Russian Embassy official in Washington criticized the comments of Gen. Albert Makashov and said the legislator's attitude does not represent the Russian government or the Russian people, according to Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

Shoah litigants visiting Germany

Holocaust survivors who filed lawsuits seeking compensation from German firms will travel to Germany this weekend on a fact-finding trip.

The survivors, who will meet with politicians and leading members of the business and Jewish communities during their trip, will also reportedly announce their willingness to cooperate with firms and the German government on the matter. Incoming Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder recently met with leading German business leaders to seek a solution to the problem.

Shahn exhibit to open

An exhibit of works by the artist Ben Shahn is scheduled to open Sunday at the Jewish Museum in New York. The display of paintings by Ben Shahn, who emigrated to the United States from Lithuania in 1906 with his family, will focus on works between 1936 and 1965, when he increasingly turned to biblical themes. After the exhibit is displayed at the Jewish Museum through March 7, 1999, it will then travel to museums in Allentown, Pa. and Detroit.

Survivors returning home 60 years after Kristallnacht

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Next week, the newly built synagogue in Mannheim is scheduled to receive four visitors from America.

But Karl Richter, Erwin Hirsch, Ernest Michel and Rudi Appel are no strangers to that western German city.

The four were, respectively, the former rabbi of Mannheim's main synagogue, the cantor there, a former congregant and the last youth to celebrate a Bar Mitzvah there before Jewish public life in Germany was brought to a harrowing end on the night of Nov. 9-10, 1938 — Kristallnacht.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of that Nazi pogrom, known as the "Night of Broken Glass," when 30,000 German Jews and 8,000 Austrian Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps, when an estimated 1,400 synagogues were demolished and burned, including the one in Mannheim.

On that fateful night and day, Jewish homes and stores were vandalized and looted, their windows shattered.

"It was really the physical end of the German Jewish community," Michel said to a group of American and German reporters gathered this week at the New York office of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, which is working to revitalize Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe.

At the news conference, plans were announced for two upcoming ceremonies — Nov. 8 in New York and Nov. 9 at the Mannheim synagogue — to commemorate one of the fatal turning points in the history of Europe's Jews.

The four former Mannheim residents, living witnesses to the horrific events of Kristallnacht, will come together to pay tribute to the their hometown's once-thriving Jewish community of 6,000 and to celebrate its rebirth.

Today Mannheim boasts a growing Jewish population of 800 people, part of a German Jewish population of more than 70,000, many of whom immigrated from the former Soviet Union.

The new Mannheim shul, which was funded in part by the German government, stands one block from the site where the imposing Hauptsynagogue was erected in 1853.

Michel, who was a teen-ager at the time, survived six years in concentration camps before coming to America as a displaced person in 1946.

"We could not have believed this would happen," Michel said, his blue eyes sparkling.

"To be able to go back to the same town, to have a service in the synagogue. The only way to describe it is, it's a miracle," he said.

A former director of New York's United Jewish Appeal-Federation, Michel worked with Ronald Lauder, president of the foundation that bears his name, on a 1988 ceremony in New York to mark the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht. That event led him to the three other men.

But with each passing decade, opportunities fade for the men to tell about the vibrant and flourishing Jewish life that existed in Europe before the war and recount their personal tales of survival.

"Undoubtedly this is the last time that four men who were alive in Germany from the same town will get together," said Michel, who is 75.

In a lingering German accent, Hirsch recalled with obvious pride and emotion the grandeur and beauty of the Hauptsynagogue, which he joined as cantor the year before Kristallnacht.

Hirsch said he could make no promises about attending a 70th anniversary reunion, but his wife, Marta, sitting at the back of the room in a bright red blazer, nodded an emphatic "yes" to the question as the cantor spoke.

After the briefing, Appel — who at 13 had fled Mannheim and eventually reached his brother in the United States — embraced Hirsch and said, smiling, "People from Mannheim are tough guys." □

Alabama voters defeat supporter of Christian Right

By Larry Brook
The Southern Shofar

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (JTA) — Alabama voters dealt a blow to the Christian Right with the defeat of Gov. Fob James in this week's election.

Lt. Gov. Don Siegelman, a Democrat, defeated James by a margin of 58 percent to 42 percent. The race was closely watched by conservative Christian groups because of James' outspoken views on church-state issues.

The defeat appeared to be part of a larger defeat for religious conservatives in the 1998 election at the hands of moderates from both parties.

Those views received little debate during the campaign, because Siegelman quickly and relentlessly latched onto one popular issue — a state lottery for education — quashing discussion of other issues.

James had vociferously defended a county judge who had Christian clergy open court sessions with prayers and who displayed the Ten Commandments in the courtroom as a sign of his personal commitment to God.

Etowah County Circuit Judge Roy Moore was sued by the American Civil Liberties Union, but the case was thrown out on a technicality.

James even threatened to call out the National Guard if anyone short of President Clinton tried to remove the tablets from the courtroom.

James also railed against a ruling barring school-sponsored religious activity in DeKalb County, stating the ruling did not apply to other counties and that the Bill of Rights did not apply to state governments.

He said repeatedly that freedom of religion meant that teachers and coaches should be free to pray with students whenever and wherever they like.

James also danced like a monkey at a state school board meeting in order to lampoon the teaching of evolution.

These stances earned him little support in the state's small Jewish community, but James and his wife, Bobbie, also are known as passionate Christian Zionists.

At James' 1995 inauguration, a rabbi from Jerusalem blew the shofar and recited the Ten Commandments, another personal friend from Israel gave an invocation entirely in Hebrew and the governor's cousin sang "Hatikvah" accompanied by the Montgomery Symphony.

Bobbie James has traveled to Israel more than 20 times, including a Sukkot trip in 1994 to pray for the election.

She has stated that Alabama's \$900 million oil lease windfall in 1981, during her husband's first term, was a direct result of the Israel Independence Day celebration at the Executive Mansion a few weeks earlier — God was blessing those who blessed the Jewish state.

When James led a trade mission to Israel last year — as have many governors nationally, including Alabama's neighbors — local media dismissed it as another religious junket for James. The mission, nevertheless, was seen as successful, especially with high-tech and defense companies in Alabama.

Siegelman's victory gives Alabama a Jewish first lady.

Siegelman, who is Catholic, is married to the former Lori Allen.

The Siegelmans have two children and attend Montgomery's Agudath Israel, a Conservative congregation. Dana Siegelman celebrated her Bat Mitzvah in February. □

Israel planning to indict friend of Rabin's assassin

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's attorney general has recommended that a former undercover agent stand trial for failing to prevent the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Avishai Raviv, 31, served as an informant for the Shin Bet domestic security service in the months preceding the assassination. An operative among the extreme right-wing and a friend of assassin Yigal Amir, Raviv became a source of controversy in the aftermath of the slaying.

Declassified portions of a government report issued last year stated that Raviv failed to tell the Shin Bet about Amir's repeated boasts that he was planning to kill Rabin.

"Raviv was closer to [Amir] than anyone else in organizing student demonstrations and weekends in Judea and Samaria," the Shamgar Commission report said, adding that it was surprising "that in his report on Yigal Amir, he did not mention or hint at Amir's known statements about plans to attack the prime minister, which he voiced more than once in his circle of friends."

The report also described how Raviv repeatedly attacked Arabs, initiated attacks against Jewish settlement leaders he considered too moderate and repeatedly told friends, including Amir, that the assassination could be justified on religious grounds.

Wednesday's indictment comes on the third anniversary of the assassination.

Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein told reporters that although Raviv did not know the precise date or plan for the slaying, he knew of Amir's intentions.

Rubinstein said the decision to try Raviv was based solely on evidence and did not reflect the stormy public debate that erupted after the declassified portions of the report were issued.

Rubinstein said those sections of the report painted a picture of Raviv as a problematic agent who had been suspended during his service for improper behavior.

Rubinstein said that after reviewing the case, he could not avoid bringing Raviv to trial.

The attorney general also recommended that Raviv be indicted for remarks he made inciting violence against Arabs.

Right-wing legislators welcomed Rubinstein's decision.

"This removes the accusing finger which said the right-wing was responsible for inciting against the prime minister," said Likud Knesset member Ze'ev Boim. The decision shows Raviv "as being at the center of the matter, a hooligan who incited and heated up the atmosphere."

Amir is serving a life sentence for assassinating Rabin.

His brother, Hagai, and a friend, Dror Adani, were convicted in October 1996 in a separate conspiracy trial of plotting to kill Rabin. Hagai Amir was sentenced to 12 years in prison; Adani was sentenced to seven years.

In September, Margalit Har-Shefi, a friend of Yigal Amir, was sentenced to nine months in jail for knowing of the assassination plans in advance but failing to warn police. □