



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Gaza airport inaugurated

Yasser Arafat hailed the opening of a new airport in the Gaza Strip as a step toward Palestinian statehood.

The airport, which bears the Palestinian leader's name, will "pave the way to Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine," he said at the inaugural ceremony.

A flight from Egypt was the first to arrive, followed by planes from Egypt, Morocco, Spain, Jordan and Israel. [Page 1]

FBI reports on hate crimes

Jews and Jewish property are the prime targets of hate crimes motivated by religious prejudice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation concluded.

The FBI's annual report on hate crimes tallied 1,087 crimes directed against Jews and Jewish institutions in 1997, almost 80 percent of all such acts perpetrated on the basis of religion. [Page 4]

Mossad official quits

The chief operations officer in Israel's Mossad intelligence agency stepped down following the recent arrest of two Israelis in Cyprus on charges of spying.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that Mossad head Efraim Halevy accepted the resignation of the official, identified only as "Yud," the Hebrew initial of his name. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman declined to comment.

Levy may rejoin government

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Former Foreign Minister David Levy confirmed that discussions are being held about Levy's rejoining the government. Netanyahu said the purpose of the discussions was to build a strong coalition base for implementing the Wye agreement. [Page 2]

Prisoners continue hunger strike

Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails continued their hunger strike for a third day. The prisoners are protesting Israel's refusal to include them among the 250 Palestinians freed last Friday.

Because of Thanksgiving, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, Nov. 27.

Opening of airport in Gaza gives Palestinians a boost

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Under a crystal-blue sky, a series of five planes inaugurated the Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip this week, giving the Palestinians a tangible cause to rejoice.

An Egyptian plane was the first to land Tuesday, carrying several of the country's film stars.

The European Union's Middle East envoy, Miguel Angel Moratinos, flew in on a chartered plane from Ben-Gurion Airport that was navigated by an Israeli crew "to prove that I am not one-sided in favor of the Palestinians."

Other flights came from Morocco, Jordan and Spain, a major contributor to the \$75 million airport.

The future of the peace process is still unclear, and there is still a great deal of mistrust between the Palestinians and Israelis.

But after 18 months of deadlocked peace talks, the opening of the airport, named after Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, came as welcome news for the Palestinians in Gaza.

And Arafat knew that many Palestinians, tired of drawn-out negotiations and a lack of tangible results, needed this taste of independence. He did his best to provide it for them.

"The airport," he said at the ceremony, "will pave the way to Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine.

"Some say that day is distant," said a jubilant Arafat, "but we see that it is close."

There is no doubt that the airport in Dahaniyeh, a small village in the southern Gaza Strip, means a lot to Palestinian self-esteem.

But it also provides more practical benefits.

The airport, with its arches — and tiles imported from Morocco — will provide greater freedom of movement for Palestinians, who depended until now on flying through Israel or Jordan to travel abroad.

Perhaps more importantly, the airport will also make it easier for Palestinian exports, mostly flowers and produce, which until now depended on Israeli good will.

One of the major obstacles in the two-year-long negotiations over the airport was the Israeli insistence that the Jewish state would have total security control over incoming and outgoing flights, passengers — and goods.

According to the agreement that was finally reached, Israel continues to control the airspace and can shut down the terminal whenever it wishes. The Israeli controllers in the terminal will be behind one-way mirrors, but they will be there, watching who comes in, who is leaving — and what products come and go.

The airport is still far from complete. There are no computerized check-in counters in the terminal, the control tower is still without electronic equipment, and the two-mile-long runway cannot function after dark because of a lack of floodlights. But Palestinian officials promised that it would only be a matter of days before the airport was fully operational.

Nor can all passengers get to the airport easily. Until a safe-passage route linking Gaza and the West Bank is opened next month, West Bank residents will need a special permit to cross Israel to get to the airport.

For the time being, Israeli authorities have banned Israelis from using the airport — although Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon said that may soon change. But Palestinian

MIDEAST FOCUS

Premier praises Swiss

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised the Swiss government for "defly" handling the restitution of assets belonging to Holocaust victims.

His comments came before his planned trip this week to Switzerland to attend a high-tech trade fair and to meet with Swiss leaders. Switzerland's government had contemplated canceling his visit after the premier attended an award ceremony last week honoring four Americans who pressed Swiss officials to confront their wartime past.

Soldiers wounded in Lebanon

Three Israeli soldiers were wounded, two of them seriously, during clashes with Hezbollah gunmen in southern Lebanon. During the clashes, Israeli jets struck Hezbollah targets north of the security zone.

Arutz-7 heads charged

Israeli prosecutors filed charges against the heads of a right-wing pirate radio station. The indictment included companies running Arutz-7, as well as some broadcasters and managers. Station officials called the indictments undemocratic.

Israeli gambling at casino illegal

Israel's attorney general said it is illegal for Israelis to gamble at the casino in Palestinian-ruled Jericho. But Elyakim Rubinstein stopped short of recommending that charges be brought against Israelis who go to the popular casino to circumvent the ban on gambling in Israel.

Haredim accused in torching

Fervently Orthodox Jews allegedly torched the home of a 17-year-old resident of Jerusalem's Mea Shearim neighborhood who had recently become non-observant. Jerusalem City Council member Ornan Yekutieli demanded that charges be brought against those responsible for what he termed a "terrorist act."



Daily News Bulletin

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Airlines, with a small fleet that includes a Boeing 727, is scheduled to begin direct flights to Egypt, Morocco and Jordan next week. It is also expected to provide direct flights soon to the Muslim holy places of Mecca and Medina.

Arafat himself was scheduled to fly later this week from Dahaniyeh to France, for a meeting with French President Jacques Chirac.

Now that the Palestinian airport is a fait accompli, the two sides will concentrate on the next stages of the Wye agreement signed last month.

Next on the agenda is the establishment of safe-passage routes between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The southern route linking Gaza and Hebron is expected to open soon. The northern route to the West Bank town of Ramallah is still subject to negotiations.

A Palestinian industrial park between Gaza and Israel is to open next month, and negotiations continue on the creation of a seaport in Gaza.

Even as some Palestinians rejoiced, others protested the way the agreement reached last month was being implemented.

Upset at the fact that some 100 of the 250 prisoners released last week were criminals, some Palestinians staged demonstrations in front of the Gaza residence of Abu Mazen, Arafat's second-in-command, calling him an "American agent." Indeed, some families of prisoners held a small protest at the airport itself.

But this was just a minor part of the mostly jubilant ceremony. Crowds at the inauguration threw flowers as the pilot of Arafat's plane emerged.

Arafat himself was received by a guard of honor of Palestinian policemen, and a uniformed band played national tunes.

As Palestinian policemen hugged each other, waving their AK-47 rifles in the air, some airport workers and senior officials held each other's hands and danced in celebration. □

Netanyahu wooing Levy to broaden base of support

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Seeking to broaden his coalition base, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has confirmed that discussions are being held about bringing former Foreign Minister David Levy back into the government.

Netanyahu, who faces hard-line opposition within his coalition to the latest land-for-security accord with the Palestinians, said the purpose of the discussions is to build a strong coalition base for implementing the Wye agreement.

"We are in the process of working for peace and security for our people," the prime minister said Tuesday. "I think all this will be better implemented with a strong government."

Netanyahu said that no specific Cabinet portfolios for Levy had been brought up in the discussions, which are currently being conducted via intermediaries.

The prime minister did not rule out the formation of a national unity government, though in recent days both he and opposition leader Ehud Barak have denied that any serious discussions were taking place.

In light of the ongoing contacts with Levy, Netanyahu said he was considering delaying a scheduled trip to Europe.

Levy also confirmed that the discussions are under way.

The premier's longtime political rival said that if it appears that the government is continuing to move in a positive direction, he would convene his Geshar Party to make a decision.

Levy left the government in January, citing the Middle East peace deadlock and differences with Netanyahu over social spending.

Observers pointed out that should Levy rejoin the coalition, it would not guarantee Geshar's support for the Wye accord.

Though Levy is considered a political moderate, other members of his Geshar faction are leading forces in the Land of Israel Front, a group of hard-line legislators opposed to making any land concessions to the Palestinians. □

JEWISH WORLD

Polish Jews deny report

Poland's Jewish leadership reacted angrily to what it called "misinformation" recently published in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz about the restitution of communal property in Poland.

The newspaper had reported that the communal properties, worth some \$3 billion, would be divided equally among the Polish Jewish community, the World Jewish Restitution Organization and other organizations.

But Polish Jewish leaders questioned the total and said only members of the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland have the right to claim the property of pre-war Polish Jewish communities.

Latvia refuses apology

Latvia's president refused to apologize for an advertisement his government ran in the Israeli press that failed to address Latvian complicity in World War II crimes.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center had demanded an "unequivocal apology" for the ad, which commemorated the sixth anniversary of Latvia's independence.

But Guntis Ulmanis said he had already expressed regret for the Holocaust and did not consider it necessary to revisit the issue in the ad.

Official kept from museum board

A French politician elected with votes from an extreme-right party was excluded from the executive board of a French Holocaust museum.

Charles Millon, who automatically became a board member when he was elected president of the Lyon region last March, was ejected by a vote of 149-1 for agreeing to govern with the xenophobic National Front.

The Children of Izieux Memorial Museum is located at the site of a home where 48 Jewish children were hidden during the Nazi occupation before being turned in by a neighbor, arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwitz.

School opens in Bulgaria

A Jewish school funded by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation opened in Bulgaria. The school is the 12th school opened by the foundation in post-Communist Europe.

GQ weighs in on what's Jewish

A leading men's magazine is publishing a list called "Jewish vs. Goyish" in its next issue.

Among the entries in the December issue of *Gentleman Quarterly's* are "Obituaries are Jewish. Wedding announcements are goyish" and "Marrying an Irish Catholic is Jewish. Sleeping with an intern is goyish."

French court lightens sentence against LePen

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — A French appeals court has reduced a ban preventing National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen from holding public office to one year.

But the combative extreme-right politician said he would try to have the ruling overturned by the country's Supreme Court.

An appeal to the high court means that Le Pen's sentence, which includes a three-month suspended jail term, would be put off until the court rules — most likely not for another year — and would allow him to lead the National Front ticket in next June's elections for the European Parliament.

The leader of the xenophobic party had been convicted by a lower court last April of assaulting Socialist Party candidate Anne Peulvast, whom Le Pen's daughter Caroline challenged in last year's legislative elections. Peulvast went on to win the election.

The lower court had imposed a two-year ban on holding office and a \$3,600 fine.

Besides shortening the ban on holding office, the appeals court also reduced the fine to \$900, ruling that the burly former paratrooper had not insulted Peulvast during the tussle in the northern Paris suburb of Mantes la Jolie, where Peulvast is mayor.

Le Pen slammed the appeals court ruling as "slimy, hateful and scandalous," and said it had been orchestrated by the left-wing government in power.

"This decision goes against the facts, law and justice," he said from Strasbourg, where he already holds a seat in the European Parliament.

"It is going to bring me more sympathy and support in the next elections," Le Pen said.

By appealing to the Supreme Court, Le Pen is also avoiding a power clash — for the moment — with his deputy, Bruno Megret, over his future leadership of the National Front, which regularly wins 15 percent of the nationwide vote.

Le Pen, 70, had initially said that he planned to have his wife, Jany, lead the party list in the European poll if a sentence prevented him from running, an option that a number of National Front politicians have chosen when they have been banned from office.

But Megret had publicly affirmed that putting Jany Le Pen at the top of the ticket was "a bad idea" and the role should be his, launching the first public challenge to Le Pen's leadership since he founded the party in 1972.

Even if the Supreme Court upholds the ruling, Le Pen would still be able to run in the next presidential election, scheduled for 2002.

But Le Pen's legal troubles, which date back to the 1960s, are far from over.

He still faces charges in Germany for trivializing the Holocaust, an offense known there as the "Auschwitz lie."

German prosecutors are seeking to put Le Pen on trial for repeating last December in Munich that the murder of 6 million Jews was a "mere detail" of the history of World War II.

The European Parliament voted by an overwhelming majority to lift his immunity last month, opening the way for a trial in Germany that could lead to five years in prison and a heavy fine.

In 1991, Le Pen was fined \$200,000 by a French court for saying the same thing about Hitler's gas chambers. □

New rations for Israeli soldiers

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli soldiers used to complaining about the unappetizing products they find in their combat rations will soon be dining on chicken cutlets, cold cuts and fresh vegetables.

The move to upgrade the food served to combat units came in the wake of an army study that found the new items more nutritionally sound and as economical as the existing combat portions. □

Orthodox youth group keeps kids more Jewish, study finds

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — As a debate rages on about the most effective type of Jewish education — formal or informal — a new study is providing evidence that participation in an Orthodox teen youth group spurs people to lead more Jewishly committed lives, even if they don't come from observant homes.

The study of alumni of the National Council of Synagogue Youth, a program of the Orthodox Union, found marked differences between their Jewish behavior and Jews of the same age group, as measured in the 1990 National Jewish Population Study.

The prestigious Lilly Endowment funded the \$377,000 NCSY study. It follows on the heels of a study released last month that showed that alumni of another Jewish youth movement, Young Judeaea, lead more Jewishly active lives.

In NCSY's early years — the group began in 1959 — about 60 percent of participants came from non-Orthodox homes and attended public or non-Jewish private schools. The balance were yeshiva kids from Orthodox homes.

Today that proportion has flip-flopped. Just 40 percent of NCSY participants attend non-Jewish schools, while the majority is educated in yeshivas or Jewish day schools.

NCSY, with an annual budget of \$10 million, runs Jewish culture clubs in 87 public schools around the country. Almost all of the teens who participate in these clubs are otherwise uninvolved in Jewish life, said Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, national director of the youth movement.

The NCSY approach has always been "rigid in its observance of commandments and it is liberal with young people. It puts no pressure, gives them no guilt trips and doesn't demand that they do anything outside the organization," said Stolper.

"We let them find their own level," he said.

The study of 1,070 alumni shows that such an approach helps kids lead more active — and even more strictly Orthodox — Jewish lives.

About three-quarters of respondents now consider themselves Orthodox, with "a significant shift to more strict observance since high school," the study says.

The overwhelming majority of high-school-aged participants continued their formal Jewish education during and after their college years.

While the fact that 94 percent of the NCSY alumni who were yeshiva students in high school continued their Jewish education may not be surprising, the fact that 80 percent of the public school students did is surprising and validating, Stolper said.

"It means they did things beyond going to Hillel events" on their college campuses, Stolper said. "They went to Yeshiva University or Touro College," two Orthodox institutions, he said, or studied full time in a yeshiva in the United States or Israel.

Just 2 percent of NCSY alumni have married non-Jews, compared with a 52 percent intermarriage rate among the most recently married Jews surveyed in the National Jewish Population Study. Similarly, the Young Judeaea study released in October showed alumni of that Zionist movement had only a 5 percent intermarriage rate.

Participation in an NCSY program also seems to lead to greater fertility.

While the birthrate among American Jews is 1.9 children per couple, NCSY study respondents had given birth to an average of 2.3 children. And since the mean age of respondents was 26, with several potential childbearing years ahead of them, the fertility rate is expected to grow even higher.

The program is also touting the high retention rate of Orthodox kids demonstrated by the study — and NCSY's success in turning high school kids connected with the liberal movements into Orthodox Jews. Of NCSY alumni who said they were Orthodox in high school, 94 percent say they still are, and 3 percent say they're Conservative.

In the National Jewish Population Study, less than a third of those raised Orthodox remained so as adults, while 40 percent identified as Conservative and 18 percent as Reform.

Of those NCSY alumni responding who said they were Conservative Jews while in high school, 21 percent now consider themselves Orthodox, as do 10 percent of former Reform and Reconstructionist Jews, according to the new study.

"I was really surprised to see what a large percentage of alumni ended up more observant than their parents, in a world where today the opposite is generally the case," said Nathalie Friedman, a retired senior research scholar at Columbia University who conducted the NCSY study.

The study also found that 92 percent of respondents said they were affiliated with a synagogue, compared to 38 percent of respondents to the National Jewish Population Study who identified as Jewish.

The findings of the new study show that participation in a youth movement like NCSY "is a big step toward continuity, when continuity is the key word these days," Friedman said.

"Nothing can compare to a good day school or yeshiva education," she said. "But NCSY and others, in their informal structure," can do a lot, "especially for those kids who can't attend day schools or yeshivas." □

Jews are biggest target of crimes of religious bias

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jews and Jewish property are the prime targets of hate crimes motivated by religious prejudice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has concluded.

The FBI's annual report on hate crimes, released this week, tallied 1,087 crimes directed against Jews and Jewish institutions in 1997, almost 80 percent of all such acts perpetrated on the basis of religion.

Responding to the findings, the Anti-Defamation League issued a statement saying, "This high level of violence and vandalism directed against Jews is another reminder that violent anti-Semitism remains a significant problem in America."

All told, 8,049 hate crimes were reported by the FBI for last year, representing a decrease of about 700 from the previous year.

The statistics were collected by 11,211 law enforcement agencies across the United States, 144 fewer than the year before, marking the first time since the Hate Crimes Statistics Act was enacted in 1990 that the number of participating agencies declined from one year to the next.

Calling the report "a disturbing measure of hate in America," ADL urged expanded bipartisan efforts at state and federal levels to combat "bias-motivated violence." □