



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S. pledges \$900 million

The United States pledged some \$900 million in aid over five years to the Palestinians at an international donors conference that could raise billions of dollars for the Palestinian Authority.

The gathering appears to have raised more than \$3 billion for the Palestinian Authority from 50 countries and international organizations, according to the *United States*. President Clinton met with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat at the White House before opening the meeting.

Report: Funds misused

The Palestinian Authority allegedly misused \$20 million in aid from Britain and other European countries, according to the *London Sunday Times*. The aid, supposed to help poor Palestinians, was reportedly used to build luxury apartments for high-level "acolytes" of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Premier ready to reopen talks

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he is ready to reopen peace talks with Syria without any preconditions. He denied reports that Syrian President Hafez Assad had sent a message offering Israel peace with Lebanon and Syria in return for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Meanwhile, the United States urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to use "maximum restraint" in his Lebanon policy. Similar messages were delivered by U.S. diplomats to officials in Lebanon and Syria.

Rally supports Makashov

Some 500 people rallied in Moscow to support a Communist lawmaker who made several recent anti-Semitic statements. The rally came after a nationwide public opinion poll suggested that most Russians do not support Albert Makashov. [Page 4]

Jospin defends government panel

A French Jewish leader accused the government of dragging its feet on a report about property looted from Jews during World War II. But French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin defended the government-appointed commission producing the report, which is scheduled to be released in 2000. The comments came during the annual dinner of CRIF, the umbrella organization of secular French Jews.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Israel ready for pilgrims intent on provoking millennial havoc

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — When a man who said he was the biblical character Samson arrived at the Western Wall several years ago and insisted on moving a large stone he believed was in the wrong place, policemen in Israel were not terribly surprised.

"Samson," a muscular Canadian tourist, was turned over to Kfar Shaul, a Jerusalem psychiatric hospital that has hosted countless prophets and many messiahs. Each year, about 100 tourists succumb to the Jerusalem Syndrome, a psychiatric disorder in which visitors are swept away by the power of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Like Samson, most are sent home without causing any damage.

But between Easter 1999 and Easter 2000, Israel expects at least 4 million tourists — twice as many as during 1997.

Many more than usual will be religious pilgrims. Authorities fear that among them there will be many dangerous visitors, and even a few apocalyptic groups that may try to bring about the end of the world.

Warning bells are already ringing. The United States recently told Israel that an apocalyptic cult from Denver might be headed for Jerusalem to try to commit mass suicide next year.

Indeed, there have already been reports that some of the group's members have already arrived in Israel.

Last month, a deranged tourist attempted to set fire to an Egged bus in Jerusalem.

"During the millennium, many will arrive full of religious fervor, and the combination of mentally unstable people and religious faith is extremely dangerous," says Yair Carlos Bar-El, a psychiatrist in Jerusalem who has conducted an extensive study on the Jerusalem Syndrome.

According to Bar-El's still unpublished study, the syndrome is a "unique psychotic state" caused by Jerusalem's special place in the hearts of people of all faiths across the globe.

"When people dream of Jerusalem, they do not see the modern, politically controversial Jerusalem of 1998," he writes, "but rather, the City of David, the City of Jesus, a Gateway to Heaven, God's dwelling place, the place where Messiah will reveal himself or the place where Jesus was resurrected and will, one day, reappear."

These emotions often spark extreme psychotic reactions. Some tourists convince themselves they are biblical figures.

Others believe that they must carry out some sort of mission to bring about a miraculous event.

Bar-El says most people who catch the Jerusalem bug were already mentally unstable before they arrived in Israel.

Christians and Jews are equally susceptible.

However, in 42 recorded cases, perfectly normal visitors were overwhelmed during their stay.

Forty of them were Protestants, who are expected to make up the bulk of millennial pilgrims.

Evangelical Christians reject the excitement they say is being drummed up by the media over potential threats.

They insist that the vast majority of visitors next year will be peace-loving believers

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arafat addresses Arab Americans

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat told a group of Arab Americans meeting in Virginia that he hopes next year "will be the year of the independent Palestinian state" with Jerusalem as its capital.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated that Israel will suspend the peace process if Arafat unilaterally declares statehood next year.

Clinton travel dates set

The White House formally announced President Clinton's plans to travel to Israel and the Palestinian self-rule areas between Dec. 12 and 15.

Clinton is scheduled to address a meeting of the Palestine National Council in the Gaza Strip and meet with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Islamic Jihad activist arrested

Palestinian security forces arrested a senior Islamic Jihad activist suspected of recruiting two terrorists who carried out a bombing in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market several weeks ago.

The two bombers were killed, and 21 Israelis were wounded, in the Nov. 6 attack.

According to Israeli security sources, the Palestinian Authority has also detained two more fugitives whose arrest Israel has demanded.

U.S. governors visiting Israel

Texas Gov. George Bush and three other U.S. governors are making a five-day visit to Israel.

The delegation, sponsored by the National Jewish Coalition, a Republican group, met with Israeli President Ezer Weizman.

The delegates were also scheduled to be the guests of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a private dinner.

seeking a spiritual experience in the place of Jesus' birth.

"We have to use the year 2000 the best we can to get a sober, solid biblical message out," says David Parsons, spokesman for the Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, which represents evangelicals around the world.

According to many Christian scholars, Parsons says, Jesus was actually born in the year 4 or 5 B.C., which means that the second millennial year actually already occurred, in 1996.

"We believe we are in prophetic times, and probably the greatest sign of this is the regathering of the Jewish people in this land," says Parsons. "There is a growing expectation [that Jesus will return], but I don't know of any prominent evangelical figures who [say it will happen in] the year 2000."

But on the Mount of Olives, a small group of born-again believers is already waiting to greet Jesus when he returns.

If their savior does not arrive on schedule, Bar-El says such groups could decide they must take action to help him come.

Millennium watchers say some extremist groups may even try and take down the Al-Aksa Mosque, Islam's third holiest site, located on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City, in an attempt to spark Armageddon.

Gershon Gorenberg, a senior editor at the Jerusalem Report magazine who has researched millennial groups, says there is a "specific theological school of thought" of pre-millennialists that "asserts that the temple must be rebuilt as part of an 'end times' scenario."

"The only problem is there is no temple there," he adds, which is why some of these groups have a keen interest in fringe, messianic Jewish sects that are planning to rebuild the temple.

They already have role models for creating chaos in Jerusalem.

In 1969, Michael Rohan, a Christian fundamentalist from Australia, set fire to the Al-Aksa Mosque.

Rohan wanted to rebuild the ancient Israelite temple and then destroy it to spark Armageddon and the resurrection of Jesus. Alan Goodman, an American Jewish immigrant to Israel, opened fire on Muslims at the Temple Mount in 1982, killing one Palestinian and injuring four. Both Rohan and Goodman were clinically diagnosed psychotics.

Today, with the fate of the politically sensitive Holy City set to be discussed in final-status talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, such an attack could turn into the Jewish state's worst nightmare.

"It is now possible for people who want to bring about the end of the world to bring it about, and people behave very strangely under millennial circumstances," says Richard Landes, a professor of medieval history who heads the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University.

Landes says it is "extremely difficult to gauge" just how many people are coming to Jerusalem with apocalyptic ideas because most people don't admit how apocalyptic their views are.

Since many religious pilgrims expect something dramatic to happen, he adds, they will be "extremely susceptible" to apocalyptic rhetoric during their stay.

Israeli officials say they are beefing up security near Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Tiberias — and preparing psychiatrists in those cities — that are expected to be trouble spots.

Israeli and Palestinian health officials are even working together to head off problems in Palestinian-controlled Bethlehem.

But strategic planning remains difficult, since nobody is quite sure what to anticipate.

"That's the big problem, nobody wants to prophesize," says Michael Dor, an Israeli Health Ministry official who participates in an Israeli government committee preparing for the millennium.

However, Dor adds, one thing is certain.

"We don't want to hospitalize crazy people from all over the world. As soon as someone is diagnosed, we will send them home as quickly as possible and the State of Israel will foot the bill." □



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JEWISH WORLD

GM may have collaborated

General Motors may have collaborated with the Nazis, according to The Washington Post.

A class-action suit has already been filed against Ford on similar charges.

Both auto manufacturers have stated that they had no control over their German subsidiaries during World War II.

But according to the article, documents indicate that the U.S. automakers profited from the German units' use of slave labor during the war.

Stelmokas dies during appeal

A man who was linked to the slaughter of Jews in Lithuania during World War II died in a Pennsylvania nursing home before he could be deported.

A U.S. immigration judge had ordered in April that Jonas Stelmokas be deported to his native Lithuania for lying about his activities when he was a member of a Nazi-sponsored auxiliary police unit during the war.

Stelmokas, 82, was appealing that order at the time of his death.

Painting may have been looted

One of artist Claude Monet's paintings of water-lilies was likely stolen by the Nazis from a Jewish collector, according to the Boston Globe.

The painting, "Water Lilies 1904," is part of an exhibition at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts until Dec. 7, when it is scheduled to be returned to a museum in France.

U.S. to back federation program

The U.S. government will pay more than \$2.1 million to build 24 one-bedroom apartments for low-income disabled elderly residents in a program sponsored by the Worcester, Mass., Jewish Federation, President Clinton announced.

The project, approved by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, also includes a five-year \$474,000 rental subsidy to ensure that residents pay no more than 30 percent of their incomes on rent.

Controversial play opens

A play that many consider to be anti-Semitic recently opened in Italy.

One of the characters in "Garbage, the City and Death," is a rich, Jewish real-estate speculator who supposedly was based on Ignatz Bubis, who is now the leader of Germany's Jewish community.

The play, which was written in 1975, has been performed in various countries, including the United States, but it has never been publicly performed in Germany.

Debate simmers regarding restitution of Polish property

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — An article in the Israeli press about restitution efforts in Poland has touched off angry denials from Polish Jewish leaders.

The leaders described as "misinformation" a report 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 the Polish Jewish leaders questioned the total and said only the Polish Jewish community has the right to claim the prewar properties.

One leading Polish Jew called the report "false and destructive" and expressed concern that it could have negative repercussions in Poland.

"It sounds as if we were expecting \$3 billion and the matter was how to divide it," Stanislaw Krajewski, a member of the board of the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland, told JTA from Warsaw.

In New York, Elan Steinberg, a board member of the WJRO, confirmed that the WJRO and the Polish Jewish representatives had not discussed any specific amount.

He said an agreement had been reached last month under which the money would be divided into thirds.

According to Steinberg, one-third of the money would go to the nine existing Jewish communities in Poland, one-third would be administered by a joint foundation to be headed by Jewish American philanthropist Ronald Lauder, and a decision had yet to be made on who would receive the remaining one-third.

Steinberg said he was unsure how the foundation would distribute its share of the money, mentioning that dividing it among Polish Holocaust survivors currently living outside of Poland is one possibility.

Such a decision would likely be unpopular among the Polish Jewish leadership.

The union issued a statement noting that under Poland's restitution law, only the Jewish communities that are members of the union have the right to claim the property. The law does not deal with private property lost by individual Jews.

"We always thought that the WJRO negotiators meant it when they said that the money will be left in Poland for the cemeteries, renovations, taking care of the legacy of Polish Jews and helping the Jewish communities to survive," Krajewski said. □

(JTA staff writer Peter Ephross in New York contributed to this report.)

Pope calls on Catholics to atone during millennium

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Pope John Paul II has issued an edict declaring the year 2000 a Holy Year during which both individual Catholics and the Roman Catholic Church itself should ask forgiveness for past failings.

The pope wants the church to enter the next millennium with a clear conscience. During the Holy Year celebrations, the church is expected to ask forgiveness for specific past errors, including the Inquisition and its treatment of the Jews.

Holy Year begins on Christmas Eve 1999 and lasts until Jan. 6, 2001.

Sunday's edict, known as a papal bull, called on Catholics to make a "humble recognition of our faults."

During Holy Year, the edict said, the church should "kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters."

The papal bull also called for Jerusalem to be a center of interreligious peace.

"May the Jubilee serve to advance mutual dialogue until the day when all of us together — Jews, Christians and Muslims — will exchange the greeting of peace in Jerusalem," it said. □

French premier vows to step up restitution of Nazi-looted property

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — France will create a new body to examine restitution claims by the heirs of Jews whose property was looted during the Nazi occupation of the country.

"We know that no reparation will ever be sufficient because what was committed is irreparable. At the same time, it is fair that those whose property was seized — or their descendants — obtain some kind of reparation," Prime Minister Lionel Jospin told Jewish leaders over the weekend at the annual dinner of CRIF, the umbrella group of secular French Jewish organizations.

More than half a century after the end of the war, France is still grappling with charges that it is reluctant to come to grips with the collaborationist past of its wartime Vichy government.

Jospin denied a suggestion by Jewish leaders that banks, insurance companies and other state agencies were dragging their feet in turning over their archives to a government-appointed panel, known as the Matteoli Commission, which is investigating the systematic plundering of Jewish assets during the war.

"The deliberate, discreet nature of its work should not mask the extent and quality of the results it has already achieved thanks to the active cooperation of the state agencies concerned," Jospin said.

Yet he promised that his left-wing government would allot some \$1.75 million to hire more staff for the Matteoli Commission and said he had already asked various ministries in possession of wartime files to devote more personnel to search for records of the confiscations.

Jospin added that the commission would set up the new office to hear individual claims and, once it had completed its probe, would suggest a means of compensation.

The prime minister also reassured Jewish leaders that the commission's final report on its inquiry would be completed by the end of 1999.

During the dinner, Henri Hajdenberg, CRIF's president, accused state agencies and financial institutions of balking at the probe.

"Because of a shortage of staff and a lack of goodwill in certain ministries and official bodies, we fear the final official report will not be ready before the year 2000," Hajdenberg said.

Hajdenberg also asked that more than 2 tons of gold plundered by the Nazis and returned to France after the war be allocated to needy concentration camp survivors, the construction of a Holocaust memorial and the creation of a nationwide school curriculum on the Holocaust.

It would "not be moral" for the looted gold "to be used merely to help fill the state's coffers," Hajdenberg said.

Jospin did not reply directly, but he said France had recently pledged about \$3.5 million to an international fund to help Holocaust survivors.

Hajdenberg, who in the past has taken a relatively low profile on the restitution issue, gave a hard-hitting speech at the dinner, making it clear that the Jewish community had to be reckoned with.

He was especially harsh on the insurance companies, accusing them of making no effort to seek out survivors or their heirs while profiting from their money.

"It would be entirely intolerable for the misappropriated savings of the victims to continue to enrich financial institutions, whether private or state-controlled," he said. □

Demonstrators denounce Jews at rally for anti-Semitic lawmaker

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Some 500 people gathered in a Moscow square Sunday to express support for a Communist lawmaker who recently escaped parliamentary censure after making several anti-Semitic remarks.

"We all live in poverty and Zionists in government are to blame. They think only how to destroy Russia and when a patriot calls a spade a spade, they immediately want to throw him in jail," said Nina Drobysheva, one of the attendees at the rally for Albert Makashov.

The significance of the rally's turnout is unclear. It was far less than the roughly 2,000 people who turned out in Moscow last week at a rally honoring slain liberal lawmaker Galina Starovoitova.

The rally, held in bitterly cold weather, came on the heels of a nationwide public opinion poll conducted last week that strongly suggests a majority of Russians do not share the views of the demonstrators. Some 83 percent of the poll's more than 1,500 respondents said public statements insulting Jews should not be allowed; only 8 percent said they should be allowed.

Roughly 43 percent said they opposed the Duma's failure to censure Makashov for his anti-Semitic remarks, while 23 percent supported the body's failure to act.

The poll's margin of error is about 3.5 percent.

Dmitry Vasilyev, leader of the ultranationalist group Pamyat, and other speakers at the rally hailed Makashov as a Russian patriot.

Some speakers were critical of the Communist Party's equivocal stance on the controversy, and others were particularly outraged by a recent meeting that Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov held with German Jewish leader Ignatz Bubis in an apparent attempt to save his party from further international embarrassment over Makashov.

The flags above the crowd at the rally represented the full spectrum of contemporary Russian ultranationalism — from the white, yellow and black colors of monarchists to red Soviet-era flags to white banners with black crosses belonging to the small, rabidly anti-Semitic National People's Party.

One of the newspapers sold at a rally called on its readers in large-print letters "to clear Moscow of the wicked Jews."

Though the Russian criminal code prohibits this sort of "incitement to racial hatred," authorities have not prosecuted any of the dozens of Russian papers spewing hate that are regularly sold at many of Moscow's subway stations.

Meanwhile, the Moscow Prosecutor's Office said it would investigate a small ultranationalist group to see if the group could be charged under Russia's hate crimes law for a rally it held last week. The leader of the Black Hundreds, named after a czarist-era group known for its role in pogroms, said the demonstration was not anti-Semitic and that its participants used humorous slogans to protest the "Jewish-controlled media." □