



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Hussein in critical condition

Jordan's King Hussein is in critical condition after his body rejected a bone marrow transplant at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. The monarch, who is ill with cancer, is returning home to Jordan, where he will be treated for the failure of internal organs.

### Arafat welcomed at prayer meet

President Clinton asked the thousands of people attending an annual prayer breakfast in Washington to pray for Yasser Arafat. Clinton had a brief meeting with Arafat after the breakfast, telling the Palestinian leader the United States opposes the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state. [Page 4]

### Russian-Syrian arms sale planned

Syrian military officials arrived in Moscow to discuss a massive purchase of weapons to upgrade Damascus' military capability. The arms deal, estimated to be worth between \$2 billion and \$3 billion, could be completed during an upcoming visit to Russia by Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlas, a spokesman for the Russian Defense Ministry said.

### German bank helped build camp

Germany's largest bank helped finance the construction of the Auschwitz death camp, according to a bank historian. The revelation came at a delicate time for Deutsche Bank, which is negotiating with the World Jewish Congress to reach a settlement of Holocaust-era claims. Reacting to the historian's disclosure, New York City's comptroller, Alan Hevesi, said American financial officials should not approve the bank's planned \$10.1 billion takeover of Bankers Trust until the bank settles the claims.

### Suit filed over Egypt confiscation

A Jewish family living in Canada is seeking compensation for property confiscated by Egypt during the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s. The lawsuit was brought before the U.S. Court of Appeals in New York against the Coca-Cola Company and one of its affiliates for acquiring the family's property, including land and factories, despite knowing it had been confiscated. The American Section of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists filed a friend-of-the-court brief to support the family's claim.

## THE ROAD TO ISRAEL'S ELECTIONS

### Mordechai makes clear appeal to Orthodox voters in campaign

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — "Let us walk the path of Maimonides," Yitzhak Mordechai urged a throng of cheering followers. "Let us walk the center path."

The leader of the new, as-yet-unnamed centrist party has wasted little time getting into the thick of campaigning — and in the process he has already begun clothing the often-nebulous centrist stance with meaning.

This has been particularly true in the area of religious-secular relations, where the former defense minister has not hesitated to state his views.

"I would like, no less than anyone else, to see yeshiva students serving in the army," the much-decorated former general told an audience Sunday night, bringing up a long-debated topic.

"But there is no way for the one camp to forcibly foist its views on the other," he added. "The Orthodox cannot threaten the secular, and the secular cannot impose themselves on the Orthodox. The yeshiva boys should serve — but through dialogue, not through threats."

Mordechai's stance on religion-state issues is being closely watched by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is also courting the Orthodox vote. The Labor candidate for prime minister, Ehud Barak, all but gave up Orthodox support with his strongly worded statements last year favoring a draft for yeshiva students.

In the 1996 election, Netanyahu took virtually all of the Orthodox vote in his race against former Prime Minister Shimon Peres. But the latest polls indicate that the Orthodox electorate is making a serious defection from the prime minister in favor of Mordechai.

Mordechai's appeal to Orthodox voters became clear last week, following his controversial vote in the Knesset in favor of legislation requiring all members of local religious councils to abide by the rulings of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate.

The bill, introduced by Orthodox legislators, was intended to prevent Conservative and Reform representatives from serving on the councils — or, failing that, to force them into a blanket acceptance of Orthodox authority on matters under discussion at council meetings.

The bill was passed into law by one vote. Mordechai, vigorously back-slapping legislators from the fervently Orthodox Shas Party and the United Torah Judaism bloc after the dramatic vote was taken, insisted that it was his vote that made the difference.

Prior to the vote, Mordechai had been lobbied by the Shas leader, Aryeh Deri, who made it abundantly clear that a yes vote would put the centrist candidate in a very good position with Shas supporters and other traditional voters.

Mordechai knew what was at stake. He knew the bill was hotly contested by secularist legislators and by the Reform and Conservative movements in the United States. Indeed, a fellow member of the centrist party's leadership, former Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo, issued a statement after the vote deploring the outcome in the name of liberalism and pluralism.

The next day, moreover, another centrist leader, former army chief Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, found himself bitterly criticized by liberal-leaning Jewish activists in New York from whom he was seeking moral and financial support for the newly formed party.

Just the same, there has been no wavering and no backtracking on Mordechai's

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israeli envoy suffers reprimand

Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon reprimanded Israel's ambassador to Germany over a newspaper interview in which Avi Primor was quoted as calling the fervently Orthodox Shas Party undemocratic. Sharon also said Primor's posting to Bonn would not be extended past the summer. Shas officials, who had demanded that Primor be summoned back to Israel earlier in the week, said they found Sharon's action harsh, saying they had already accepted Primor's apology.

### Israel retaliates in Lebanon

Israeli jets struck targets in southern Lebanon after Hezbollah gunmen fired rockets at Israel. None of the rockets landed in Israeli territory, according to an army spokesman.

### Palestinians arrest Hamas cell

Palestinian police officials announced that they had rounded up some 40 Hamas militants who were plotting attacks on Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. The militants had received \$35 million in aid from Iran, the officials said, adding that they had seized arms and explosives during the raid on the Hamas cell.

### Sharon seeks E.U. help

Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon is urging the European Union to support a desalination project that he says will protect Israelis, Jordanians and Palestinians from water shortages. Sharon predicted that the shortages will reach a crisis by the year 2010.

### Israelis attend Greek fair

A delegation representing 13 of Israel's largest companies recently took part in an international farm fair held in Greece. The delegation presented some of Israel's latest achievements in biotechnology, irrigation, water filtering and pesticide production.

part. Milo is "not nearly as extreme as it sometimes seems," Mordechai assured an interviewer over the weekend when asked about Milo's outspokenly anti-Orthodox statements when the former mayor first raised the centrist banner several months ago.

Milo, Shahak and former Finance Minister Dan Meridor had all declared their candidacies for prime minister and leader of the centrist party in recent weeks. All three have now deferred to Mordechai's candidacy, pooling their campaign staffs and other resources to form one unified party.

Reporters have repeatedly asked Mordechai about his meeting last week, on the day after he was fired as Netanyahu's defense minister, with Shas spiritual mentor Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Interviewers and the general public have been particularly intrigued by television footage of the burly ex-general kissing the sage's beard.

"That's me," Mordechai replies with disarming simplicity. "It's not an act or a show like with other politicians.

"These are parts of my personality, of my lifestyle."

It is much too early to know whether these personal traits — his traditionalist beliefs and customs, and his salt-of-the-earth ways — are a key cause of Mordechai's impressive showing in the polls.

The polls indicate that Netanyahu will win the first round of voting on May 17 — but with far less than the 50 percent needed to avoid a June 1 runoff.

Mordechai, meanwhile, emerged in two weekend polls as handily defeating Netanyahu in a two-way runoff.

And Mordechai's party — which is still without a list of legislative candidates or platform — won 15 of the 120 Knesset seats in the weekend surveys.

With Likud and Labor getting just 27 and 26 seats, respectively, in those same polls, the centrists would appear to be making an impressive debut. Just the same, Mordechai says he expects to win 20 or more seats at the ballot box.

He also says he is confident of making it to the runoff. But the question remains as to whether he can beat Barak in the first round and thereby square off against Netanyahu on June 1.

This question, still a matter of speculation at this early stage of the campaign, could well become the focal issue of the entire election.

If polls continue to show Mordechai as the favorite in the runoff, his supporters are certain to pressure Barak to abandon the race prior to May 17 in favor of their man. Meanwhile, Mordechai reacts with angry contempt to assertions that his Sephardi birth gives him an edge with many voters. This, he says, is a slur on them as well as on him.

He prefers instead to project what he terms his authentic "Israeliness" — a supra-ethnic quality that embraces his down-to-earth personality and his religious heritage. This, he maintains, is the essence of his centrism and reflects the main credo of the new movement — unity and an easing of the multiple tensions tearing at the fabric of Israeli society. □

## Canadian beekeeper could be deported

TORONTO (JTA) — A 77-year-old retired butcher from Montreal faces deportation as a suspected Nazi collaborator after a federal judge ruled that he had obtained Canadian citizenship under false pretenses.

Following the ruling, it is up to the Canadian Cabinet to approve revoking the citizenship of Vladimir Katriuk, a former member of a Ukrainian battalion that collaborated with a Nazi SS unit responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews and others in Belarus and Ukraine between 1942 and 1944.

Katriuk, who now raises bees in Quebec, denies any involvement in atrocities, claiming that he entered Canada under an alias because he was a deserter from the French Foreign Legion.

The Canadian Jewish Congress, along with the Justice Department's war crimes unit, applauded the ruling, which, barring an unforeseen setback, will lead to Katriuk's deportation. Irving Abella, chair of the CJC's war crimes unit, hailed the decision as a "giant step forward" in the government's continuing campaign against suspected Nazi collaborators and war criminals living in Canada. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Dutch panel probes El Al crash

El Al warned officials at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport after a cargo plane crashed in 1992 that the plane was carrying explosives and other dangerous materials, according to evidence presented at a Dutch inquiry into the crash.

The inquiry aims to determine whether airline officials participated in a cover-up after the crash, which killed at least 43 people.

Israel confirmed last year that the plane was carrying materials that could be used to create sarin nerve gas.

### Swiss banks tote up audit tab

The cost of auditing Swiss banks to locate Holocaust-era dormant accounts could cost as much as the amount to be paid out on those accounts, according to the president of the Swiss Bankers' Association. The deadline for finding the missing accounts is March 31, said Georg Kreyer, who said the search would cost some \$60 million.

The banks hope to pay the account-holders by the end of the year, he added.

### Canadian Holocaust-denier fined

A Canadian human rights tribunal fined a journalist some \$2,000 for a series of articles that promoted anti-Semitism.

The articles, which included Holocaust denial, "reinforce some of the most virulent forms of anti-Semitism," according to one of the members of the Vancouver tribunal. Columnist Doug Collins, 78, called the decision "outrageous" and, claiming freedom of speech, said he would write the same statements again.

### Monument rededicated in Crimea

A monument to Jewish soldiers who died defending Imperial Russia was rededicated 135 years after it was unveiled in a Black Sea port.

The 13-foot marble obelisk was built in Sevastopol, now Ukraine, with private Jewish donations to commemorate 500 Jewish servicemen in the Black Sea Fleet who were killed in the 1854-55 Crimean War. City authorities used the rededication ceremony to call for some \$7,000 in donations needed to restore the unique memorial.

### Spielberg Holocaust film to open

A documentary that traces the experiences of five Hungarian Holocaust survivors is scheduled to be released in theaters across the United States this month. "The Last Days" was produced under the auspices of Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation, which has recorded oral histories of tens of thousands of survivors.

## Jews welcome Falwell's apology; ready to put the matter 'behind us'

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Rev. Jerry Falwell's apology for recently saying that the Antichrist is a Jewish man alive today is being welcomed by the Jewish community.

On Tuesday the influential Pentacostal minister apologized not for the substance of his remarks, but for what he called "my lack of tact and judgment in making a statement that served no purpose whatsoever."

That apology "puts the matter behind us," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"Now we have to move forward in the dialogue" between evangelical Christians and Jews, said Foxman. "This was a wake-up call that there may be problems ahead that we need to deal with.

"There need to be conversations with Christian leaders to make sure that the coming of the millennium does not bring back some problems of Christian-Jewish history."

The president of B'nai B'rith International, Richard Heideman, also welcomed the apology, saying in a statement that "it was the right thing to do."

Falwell's original statement, made to a Christian audience last month, raised the hackles of leaders of Jewish groups and of experts in interreligious affairs, many of whom deemed it anti-Semitic.

At the time, Falwell told a Nashville audience of some 1,500 Christians that Jesus will return within a decade, an event that in his theological view must be preceded by the arrival of an opponent known as the Antichrist.

The Antichrist will arise and spread universal evil, but be conquered at the Second Coming of the Christian messiah, he believes.

But according to Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, that is not a universally accepted belief among all Christians or even among all evangelicals.

"It was careless for him to say," Eckstein said.

But "what was wrong about his statement was its absoluteness, his saying it with definitiveness publicly without any awareness of the historical baggage which that kind of phrase carries.

"It was not malicious or intentional. It does not even come close to being anti-Semitic," said Eckstein.

Eckstein, whose organization raised more than \$11 million in 1997 to help fund Jewish emigration from the former Soviet Union to Israel, said that while he has at times disagreed with Falwell, the minister is also someone "I know I can always count on to be a voice from the evangelical community that is pro-Israel and denounces anti-Semitism." □

## Exhibit spurs violence in Germany

FRANKFURT (JTA) — A World War II exhibit that has been traveling around Germany for the past four years still manages to generate heated debate — and worse.

Violence erupted Saturday when some 1,000 German neo-Nazis clashed with 500 counter-demonstrators outside the exhibit, currently on display in the northern German city of Kiel.

Police made 52 arrests after violence between the extremists and police escalated. The clashes resulted in considerable property damage, according to police officials.

Similar clashes occurred last year, when the exhibit toured Dresden, and when it appeared in Munich in 1997.

The exhibit focuses on the role that ordinary German soldiers played in the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes. Opponents claim the exhibit brands all veterans of the World War II German army as criminals instead of honoring the vast majority for serving their country. Supporters say the exhibit explodes the myth that the Nazi SS was solely responsible for the wartime crimes against humanity. □

## Arafat welcomed at breakfast by president and Sen. Lieberman

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Clinton and Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) went out of their way to make Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat feel welcome at this year's National Prayer Breakfast.

Sending a clear signal to conservative Christians and a handful of American Jews who had raised objections to Arafat's attendance at Thursday's gathering, both Clinton and Lieberman asked the audience of thousands to pray for the Palestinian leader.

Arafat, whose presence was purposefully ignored in remarks by the event's chairman, Rep. Steve Largent (R-Okla.), appeared to relish the attention and greeted a stream of well-wishers before the remarks began.

The controversy surrounding Arafat's attendance brought more prominence to the event than usual. But that was not the only controversy among some Jewish activists, who questioned the national nature of the event because of its emphasis on Christian themes. The breakfast for many years has been sponsored by a private evangelical Christian group.

After the gathering, Clinton met briefly with Arafat.

Arafat thanked Clinton for his remarks at the breakfast and pledged to continue to work to meet Israeli security concerns, according to a White House official. During the 20-minute meeting, Clinton told Arafat that America opposes unilateral acts, including the declaration of a Palestinian state, the official said.

The Christian Coalition, among others, had attacked Largent for inviting Arafat to the breakfast, which began 47 years ago as a chance for members of Congress to offer prayers to the president.

In his remarks, Clinton called on those in attendance to "pray for Chairman Arafat and the Palestinians, for the government of Israel, and for Mrs. Leah Rabin and her children," who also attended the breakfast.

"If Leah Rabin and her family can continue their struggle for peace after the prime minister's assassination, then we can continue to believe in our better selves," Clinton said.

The president also offered a prayer for King Hussein, who is battling cancer.

Hours later, Jordanian officials said the king was in critical condition after his body rejected a bone marrow transplant at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. The monarch was returning home to Jordan, where he will be treated for the failure of internal organs.

"I ask you to pray for peace, for the peacemakers and for peace within each of our hearts," said Clinton.

Lieberman, the Senate's only Orthodox Jew, reached out during his benediction at the breakfast "particularly" to Arafat, his deputy Abu Mazen and also to Rabin and her children.

"Abraham loved his son Ishmael as he did his son Isaac," Lieberman said, referring to the patriarchs of Islam and Judaism, respectively.

"We pray that you will bring that truth to Chairman Arafat and to the leaders of Israel and you will guide them in the paths of peace so that their children and grandchildren may truly one day not just live in peace but sit together," he said.

The father of an American killed in a terrorist attack in Gaza had opposed Arafat's presence but requested to attend the break-

fast after organizers refused to rescind the invite.

In a brief interview after the breakfast, Stephen Flatow said he had no problems with the prayers offered for Arafat.

"I know that the leaders of the country believe in the peace process," he said. "I have some personal issues with him," he said, referring to Arafat.

Flatow met briefly with Clinton before the breakfast to discuss obstacles the State Department has erected against his legal quest to collect damages against Iran. A federal court has awarded Flatow damages against Iran for funding the Islamic Jihad, which was implicated in the attack that killed his daughter Alisa.

Flatow said Clinton promised to look into the matter.

Some members of Congress boycotted the event, citing Arafat's presence. Among the members of congress who boycotted the breakfast was freshman Rep. Shelley Berkley (D-Nev.).

"The man is a terrorist, has not renounced terrorism and as far as I'm concerned has not lived up to his end of the bargain," in the peace accords with Israel, she said in an interview.

"Until he does that I see absolutely no reason to be honoring him."

Those attending the breakfast included members of Congress, representatives of the diplomatic corps and members of the president's Cabinet.

In his remarks, Clinton also called on all people to use their religion for peace, not war.

"No faith is blameless in saying that they have taken up arms against other faiths, other races because it was God's will that they do so," he said.

"Even though Adolf Hitler preached a perverted form of Christianity, God did not want him to prevail. But I also know that when we take up arms or words against one another, we must be very careful in invoking the name of our Lord."

Concern over the Christian nature of the breakfast prompted at least one rabbi, who asked not to be identified, to reject an invitation.

For its part, in a letter to Largent, the Anti-Defamation League expressed concern that some participants "may feel less than welcome by the invitation's use of this exclusively Christian phrase: 'Many people throughout the world are finding through the Spirit of Jesus a fellowship that is helping to build true community in the family of nations.'"

Citing the invitation, author Max Lucado said in his keynote speech that the event was "not under any religious or political auspices but in the spirit of Jesus." Some Jewish officials said some organizers had told them that they believe that Jesus is a respected figure in all faiths and that prayers to "Jesus" as opposed to "Jesus Christ" do not exclude Jews.

Some in the Jewish community say the problem centers around the portrayal of the breakfast as an official congressional event.

In fact, Clinton, speaking later in the day, referred to the event as "the annual Presidential Prayer Breakfast that Congress sponsors."

In addition to Lieberman, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, the author and talk show host, spoke at the breakfast. Schlessinger, who has called on Clinton to resign, read from Deuteronomy.

Lieberman surprised many in attendance by asking all to pray to God that "at this time of difficulty for the president, that you hear his prayers, that you help him in the work he's doing with his family and his clergy, that you accept his atonement." □