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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Haredi leader warns of civil war

A fervently Orthodox leader in Israel warned of civil war if the Supreme Court does not stop interfering in religious matters. Rabbi Meir Porush's comments came in the wake of a massive demonstration in Jerusalem by some 250,000 members of Israel's Orthodox community, who protested recent court decisions that they say undermine their way of life. Some 50,000 secular Israelis took part in a counter-demonstration. [Page 3]

Charles Bronfman tapped for post

Philanthropist Charles Bronfman was named to the top volunteer post of American Jewry's new central fund-raising establishment, which is being formed by the merger of the Council of Jewish Federations, the United Jewish Appeal and the United Israel Appeal.

Jewish senators voted no

All 11 Jewish members of the U.S. Senate voted to acquit President Clinton on both articles of impeachment. Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), the only Jewish Republican, joined with the 10 Jewish Democratic senators in rejecting the perjury and obstruction of justice charges. [Page 2]

Troops face off in Gaza

Israeli and Palestinian troops faced off with guns in the Gaza Strip after some soldiers got into a fist-fight. The incident took place after Israeli troops parked a truck across the main north-south highway before Palestinians held a protest march against Israeli settlements. The standoff, which took place when the troops refused to move the truck, was later defused by commanders from each side.

Did Swiss fail to arrest Mengele?

Swiss police reportedly did nothing to arrest Nazi death camp doctor Josef Mengele when he surfaced in Switzerland in 1961. Zurich police observed Mengele's movements, but failed to follow through on an Interpol request for his arrest, according to the Jewish Weekly of Switzerland.

"We are shocked that a mass murderer" was able to freely enter and leave Switzerland, the secretary-general of the Swiss Jewish community, Martin Rosenfeld, said in a television interview. Rosenfeld called for a government investigation of the report.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Clinton's acquittal brings relief to activists ready for some action

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Clinton's acquittal has brought a palpable sense of relief to scandal-weary Jewish activists, who, like many across the country, have been waiting for the impeachment cloud to lift.

The relief comes at least in part from the fact that the president, who has been considered highly responsive to the concerns of the Jewish community, is now assured of completing his term in office.

But there is also an expectation that the end of the entire affair will generate new momentum to finally get real work done.

As Clinton turns from the ignominy of impeachment to the task of trying to resurrect his legacy, many of his legislative and foreign policy priorities can be expected to dovetail with the Jewish community's agenda — in areas including the Middle East, social spending, education, religious liberty and civil rights.

In fact, his efforts in those areas during the remaining two years of his term may provide a significant boost to Jewish interests, just as the community's lobbying efforts on behalf of mutual interests may, in turn, help Clinton.

Ironically, the post-impeachment political dynamic may provide the best bet yet for bipartisan cooperation between the Clinton administration and the Republican-led Congress, especially as both search for ways to restore their public standing.

Although deep partisan divisions and lingering animosity from the impeachment process, coupled with a looming presidential campaign, may still make it difficult to achieve compromise, most Jewish lobbyists are optimistic about the prospects for positive advances in the 106th Congress.

"It's time now to heal the wounds that have been caused by this disastrous process in which so many bear responsibility, and it's time to move on to addressing the urgent problems that America faces," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Jewish lobbyists are anxious to start moving their agenda on Capitol Hill, which includes bolstering Social Security and Medicare, protecting patient's rights, strengthening the nation's hate-crimes laws, extending new protections for religious practice and securing aid to support Israel and to implement the Wye agreement that was signed last October.

"People have been so removed and so distanced from the whole Washington scene, it's been so distasteful, that we need to focus people on Washington issues that are something other than Monica and Ken Starr," said Michael Lieberman, the Anti-Defamation League's Washington counsel.

"I think we'll be delighted to immerse ourselves back in the policy issues that we're trying to move forward."

In a bit of fortuitous timing, activists from around the country will be gathering in Washington next week for the annual plenum of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella body representing local community relations councils and most of the organized community.

They are scheduled to arrive just as Congress, newly freed of all impeachment-related responsibilities, reconvenes to take up legislative work.

Concern that they would not even be able to schedule meetings with key members of Congress has turned to what JCPA's Washington representative, Reva Price, called

MIDEAST FOCUS

Minister tries to bypass court

Israel's interior minister issued a regulation that was seen as an attempt to bypass a recent court decision requiring the Jerusalem religious council to convene with Conservative and Reform representatives. Eli Suissa of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party said the council would not have to convene if fewer than one-third of its members show up for a meeting. Orthodox members of the council boycotted a scheduled meeting last week, and the court-ordered session was canceled for lack of a quorum.

Labor Party holds primary

Members of Israel's Labor Party voted to determine the party's list of candidates in the May elections for the Knesset. The primary took place amid tensions over party leader Ehud Barak's plan to reserve a number of top slots for members of other political parties who may form a coalition with Labor before the elections are held. Senior Labor members criticized the plan, saying it decreases their chances of getting a seat in the incoming Knesset.

Jordan: Confederation premature

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's call for a confederation with Jordan is premature, Jordanian officials said, adding that they first wanted to see the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Arafat, speaking to loyalists of his Fatah movement, expressed interest in forging a confederation with Jordan. The Palestinians have proposed the idea before, but Jordan's late King Hussein rejected it out of fear for the stability of his kingdom, which already has a Palestinian majority.

Israel strafes Hezbollah bases

Israeli jets struck a suspected Hezbollah base in the second straight day of attacks in southern Lebanon. Monday's attack came after Hezbollah gunmen attacked an Israeli outpost in Lebanon.



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optimism about convening at a "prime time" when everyone is geared to focusing on "the issues that matter."

Beyond the politics and lack of legislative movement, some Jewish and rabbinic leaders said that from a Jewish viewpoint they were deeply troubled by the impeachment process.

They also said they were less than comfortable with the independent counsel investigation that prompted it.

Rabbi Paul Menitoff, executive vice president of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis, said the best thing to come out of Clinton's acquittal was that it would stop Kenneth Starr "dead in his tracks."

"Whenever you have an effort to hound people and to really badger them in ways that most respectable prosecutors wouldn't pursue, that's not good for the Jews or any other minority group," Menitoff said,

He called Starr's approach "McCarthyesque."

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) touched on a similar point in the speech he delivered on the Senate floor during impeachment deliberations.

In underscoring his reverence for the Constitution's protections from "partisan prosecutions," the Jewish senator invoked his family's experience fleeing Nazi Germany.

Another rabbi, Harold Schulweis of Valley Beth Shalom synagogue in Encino, Calif., said the way the trial was conducted by the House managers "violated one of the central aspects of Judaism itself."

He said the managers, who were responsible for prosecuting Clinton in the Senate, appeared to "gloat" in his shame.

"To shame somebody in public is considered as if you had shed his blood," Schulweis said.

He added that Judaism teaches that everybody sins and instead "we ought to look forward and encourage his rehabilitation." □

Specter becomes only Jewish senator to break party rank on impeachment vote

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — There was little doubt about what verdict the 10 Jewish Democratic senators would render on impeachment— all voted not guilty on both the perjury and obstruction of justices charges.

But Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), the Senate's only Jewish Republican, surprised some observers when he broke ranks with his party and voted to acquit Clinton on both articles.

Specter, a former prosecutor, offered a unique vote, rising to say, "Not proved, therefore not guilty."

He earlier announced he would vote that way in accordance with Scottish court practice, which he said allowed the nuance of "not proved" as an alternative verdict in the case.

Other Jewish lawmakers distinguished themselves as well during the course of the trial.

Sen. Russell Feingold (D-Wisc.) was the only Democrat to break party rank and vote against dismissing the charges against the president.

He also joined Republicans in voting to take depositions from the three witnesses called by the House managers.

And in the last matter of official business directly after Clinton's acquittal, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) attempted to bring to the floor a censure resolution for which she had painstakingly gathered 38 signatures.

It stated that Clinton had "deliberately misled and deceived the American people" and took actions "impeding" the judicial process.

Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), however, threw up a parliamentary roadblock that prevented the measure from being considered.

It appears unlikely the Senate will revisit the issue again. □

JEWISH WORLD

Jewish leaders meet in Brussels

Leaders of the American Jewish community are meeting for three days this week with their counterparts from Eastern and Western Europe.

Delegates from more than 20 European Jewish communities are attending the meeting in Brussels convened by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Before attending the meeting, the Presidents Conference paid a condolence call to King Abdullah II of Jordan.

The successor to King Hussein told the delegation he is committed to his father's policies and to the Middle East peace process in the interest of regional stability and for "the future of our children and grandchildren."

Students' parents sue Iran

The families of two American Jewish students killed in a February 1996 suicide bombing attack in Israel filed a lawsuit against the government of Iran in federal court in Washington.

The families of 25-year-old Matthew Eisenfeld and his girlfriend, 22-year-old Sara Duker, filed the suit in accordance with a 1996 anti-terrorism law that allows U.S. citizens to seek damages in U.S. courts against foreign governments deemed responsible for sponsoring terrorism attacks.

The lawsuit follows a case last year in which a federal judge ordered Iran to pay \$247.5 million in damages to the family of Alisa Flatow, a 20-year-old Brandeis University student killed in 1995 by a suicide bomber in the Gaza Strip.

Beit Din judge offers repayment

A former judge at the London Beit Din agreed to reimburse the religious court for books that are missing from the court's library. The books are worth some \$800,000.

Casriel Kaplin, a noted bibliophile and full-time Beit Din judge in London from 1976 to 1994, was dismissed as a part-time consultant to the court last year after it was discovered that the books were missing.

The scandal erupted when a rare 15th century volume offered for sale last year in Israel was found to have come from the London collection.

Paltrow has rabbinical roots

Gwyneth Paltrow, the Oscar-nominated heroine of the film "Shakespeare in Love," is reportedly descended from a distinguished rabbinical dynasty that may stretch back to 17th century Russia.

According to the London-based Jewish Chronicle, the actress can count 33 rabbis among her ancestors on her father's side.

Religion-state frustrations spark mass Jerusalem demonstrations

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Supreme Court has become the focal point of an increasingly heated debate about the roles of religion and state in Israel.

Since its founding 50 years ago, a religious status quo defined the boundaries of religious and secular life in Israel.

But tensions have increased as the haredi, or fervently Orthodox, political parties gained power in the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — and as the high court issued a series of rulings that eroded the status quo and granted more recognition to Judaism's liberal streams.

The friction boiled over last week, when haredi leaders declared the judiciary "enemies" of the Jewish people. This in turn spawned an outcry by political leaders, who described the attack on the court and its justices as an attempt to undermine the foundations of Israeli democracy.

The debate was taken to the streets of Jerusalem on Sunday, when hundreds of thousands of people converged for demonstrations to voice their support or opposition to the court's rulings.

Some 250,000 fervently Orthodox Jews heeded the calls of their rabbis to take part in a mass prayer vigil Sunday to seek an end to what organizers termed the "anti-religious" rulings of the high court. Traveling by bus, they poured into the capital, turning the western entrance of the city and the streets surrounding it into a sea of black hats and coats, the traditional garb of the fervently Orthodox.

In a counter-demonstration about a mile away, some 50,000 people — including university students and youth group members — filled a public park to make their stand known. Organizers of the counter-demonstration said thousands of other university students from around the country had been unable to get to the rally because of inadequate transportation.

Anticipating possible violence, police poured 2,000 reinforcements into the city to serve as a buffer between the two demonstrations.

Police, soldiers and snipers were also stationed around the Supreme Court building to prevent any violent acts.

But the demonstrations dispersed without incident, leaving residual traffic jams that clogged the streets of the capital through the evening rush hour.

At the prayer vigil, participants read out psalms as shofars were blown. Some of the demonstrators carried signs calling on the authorities to "Bring the High Court to Trial." After the vigil was held, one of the organizers, Rabbi Meir Porush of the fervently Orthodox Agudat Yisrael Party, warned of civil war if the high court is "not convinced to stop interfering in matters of religion and state."

Passions and frustrations were just as deeply felt — and expressed — at the counter-demonstration. "It doesn't matter where I turn, the haredim are interfering in my life," one demonstrator, student Hagit Barnea, told reporters.

One of the speakers, Jewish Agency for Israel Chairman Avraham Burg, described himself as "100 percent an Israeli and democrat and 100 percent a proud Jew."

He argued that a separation of state and religion is essential in order to maintain Israeli society as a "free market of opinions, and not one of religious coercion."

Among those who refrained from participating in either of the demonstrations were the three candidates for prime minister in the upcoming elections — Netanyahu, Labor leader Ehud Barak and centrist leader Yitzhak Mordechai.

At Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting, Netanyahu told his ministers that "certain elements" are seeking to "inflammate" religious-secular divisions, but added that the "existence of the Jewish people is conditioned upon its ability to transcend internal schisms."

Meanwhile, Israeli writers Amos Oz and A.B. Yehoshua called on the public to join the Conservative and Reform movements.

This is the best way to counter fervently Orthodox attempts to turn Israel into a non-democratic state ruled by religious law, they said. □

Horrors of Holocaust detailed at Britain's first Nazi crimes trial

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — In heart-breaking, numbing detail, the horror of the Holocaust was described for the first time in the austere setting of a British criminal court last week.

And this week another British legal precedent was set when jury members traveled abroad for the first time to inspect the sites where the Jews of Domachevo — a prosperous spa village in Poland, now Belarus — were slaughtered. The guide to the sites of massacres in Domachevo — and a key witness in the trial — was 76-year-old Fedor Zan, who last week was brought face-to-face with his boyhood friend, Anthony Sawoniuk, now facing four counts of murder in Domachevo in 1942.

Sawoniuk is estimated to have been one of about 300 Nazi war crimes suspects who found refuge in a labor-starved Britain immediately after World War II. He worked as a ticket collector for Britain's nationalized railroad system. Now retired, he lives in a working-class district of London. He is being tried under 1991 legislation that permits the prosecution in British courts of Nazi war crimes suspects who committed their alleged offenses against non-British citizens on foreign soil under Nazi occupation.

The trial is expected to last two months.

According to the case laid out by the prosecution last week, the 77-year-old Sawoniuk was the illegitimate son of a washer-woman who worked for Jewish families in the village. As a boy, the court was told last week, he earned pocket money by collecting wood and lighting fires for Jewish families on the Sabbath.

The court was told that when the Nazis occupied Domachevo in 1941, it had a population of 5,000, of whom 3,000 were Jewish. By the end of the war, the Jewish community had been destroyed.

After the invasion, the court was told, 20-year-old Sawoniuk was the first to volunteer for a new police force that was established by the Nazis. By the time he fled the village with the retreating German army in 1944, he had risen to head the force.

Dressed at his trial in a brown suit and supported by a cane, the silver-haired pensioner admits that he was a volunteer policeman at the time and that he had fled with the retreating Germans. But he denies the charges of murder.

With clinical dispassion, however, prosecution counsel John Nutting contradicted his claim to innocence. Nutting told the court that on Sunday, Sept. 20, 1942 — Yom Kippur — 2,900 of the Jews of Domachevo were herded out of the ghetto, where they had been concentrated behind barbed wire. They were marched down a track to an area known as the sand hills. There, they were forced to strip and all were slaughtered.

While the prosecution will not present evidence of Sawoniuk's involvement in that massacre, it will, said Nutting, offer testimony by eyewitnesses — some still living in Domachevo — that over the following weeks Sawoniuk led the "search-and-kill" operation against Jews who had escaped the initial massacre by hiding in the ghetto or in a nearby forest.

Although Sawoniuk has been indicted on just four counts of murder, Nutting alleged that between Sept. 19 and Dec. 31, 1942, Sawoniuk was responsible for killing 20 Jews. Sawoniuk, said Nutting, "was not only prepared to do the Nazi bidding, but carried out their genocidal policy with enthusiasm.."

Fedor Zan, he said, will testify that he heard women crying on the outskirts of the village. When he went to investigate, he saw some 15 Jewish women of mixed ages standing in front of an open grave. Sawoniuk was standing behind the women armed with a submachine gun. "He ordered the women to remove their clothes and then shot them with the weapon," said Nutting. "As they died, they collapsed into the grave."

Zan, who had known Sawoniuk since their school days, observed "the transition from schoolboy to policeman, from being just another youngster to being one of those exercising a ruthless authority over Jew and Gentile alike." He had also seen Sawoniuk taking his own aunt and her family to their executions because of their suspected association with anti-Nazi partisans in the forest.

The prosecution said that another witness, Alexander Baglay, will tell the court that he and a friend were taken to the sand hills five days after the main slaughter.

They saw two Jewish men, each about 40 years old, and a Jewish woman, about 20, who were wearing the distinctive yellow stars on their clothing. Sawoniuk told them to undress. When the woman was apparently too embarrassed, Sawoniuk shouted at her until she complied. He then ordered the trio to face the ready-dug grave, took out his pistol and shot each in the head from behind. As he fired, he pitched the victims forward into the grave and then ordered the two young men, one of them Baglay, to fill it in and return the shovels to the police station.

Before the war, said Nutting, relations between the Jewish majority and their Polish, Ukrainian and Belarussian neighbors "were generally peaceful and harmonious."

All that changed after the Nazi invasion: "It is apparent that Sawoniuk carried out his duties as a policeman conscientiously," Nutting told the court. "He frequently searched Jews on their journeys in and out of the ghetto and if he found any forbidden item in the possession of a Jew, he invariably assaulted the culprit."

"It is clear that the Germans had greater faith in Sawoniuk than in most of his colleagues in the police force. Not only did they promote him, but he was also permitted to carry a firearm at all times." Nutting told the court that proof of Sawoniuk's guilt was "irresistible" because he either was seen shooting directly or "because he was seen taking Jews to a place where they were habitually shot and returning without them, or because he boasted about the fate of his victim." And he raised the question, likely to be the centerpiece of the defense, that "after such a long time maybe the witnesses' memories are at fault."

"Or do they," asked Nutting, "describe events which are literally unforgettable, which once witnessed would remain fixed in a man's memory for his life?"

The court was told that when Sawoniuk was first questioned by British authorities investigating war crimes allegations, he denied having served in the volunteer police unit and claimed to have been deported to a forced labor camp in Germany.

But, Nutting added, the defendant no longer disputes that he served in the Domachevo police at the relevant time or that he left Domachevo in 1944 with the retreating Nazis.

Sawoniuk had told investigators that anyone who accused him of killing Jews was "an idiot," because the Jews had helped him by giving him food when he worked for them and that "he would not go against such people."

"No one can put a finger on me that I killed a Jew," he said. "The people who gave you that evidence are liars." □