



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Three Israelis killed in Lebanon

Three Israeli army officers were killed and five soldiers were wounded when Hezbollah gunmen ambushed their patrol in southern Lebanon.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who called the deaths a "very, very bitter blow" to Israel, demanded that Syria put an end to the Hezbollah attacks. "It is clear that if Syria wanted to stop these attacks, it has the power to do so," he said. "We expect them to curtail aggression against Israel."

Indyk calls for JCPA support

The U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs urged delegates at the Jewish Council for Public Affairs' annual conference in Washington to support the Clinton administration's request to Congress to provide a \$300 million increase over three years in U.S. aid to Jordan.

Hours after Martin Indyk spoke, the group, as planned, passed a resolution supporting the Jordan aid package, which is intended to signal strong U.S. support for Jordan's new King Abdullah. President Clinton promised the aid after King Hussein played a key role at the Wye peace summit last October.

First lady revises stance

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton told a group of rabbis that it is up to Israel and the Palestinian Authority to determine whether there should be a Palestinian state.

Her comment at an off-the-record session with the North American Boards of Rabbis in Washington contrasted with previous statements backing the creation of a Palestinian state.

Israel included in R&D program

The European Union decided to include Israel in its latest research and development program.

Membership in the program will give Israel access to a fund of some \$15 billion that will be available to participating states for research and development projects over the four-year life of the program.

Israeli Trade Minister Natan Sharansky, who spearheaded Israel's five-month campaign for inclusion in the program, described the decision as "a great achievement."

Israel is the only non-European state to participate in the program. [Page 3]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Debate rages among secularists: How to respond to Orthodox power

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — What should a secular Israeli do in the face of a recent Orthodox mass demonstration against the Supreme Court?

Israel's secular intellectuals are battling among themselves over this question — and in particular over whether joining the Conservative or Reform movement is an appropriate response to the Orthodox protesters' challenge.

Three of the country's best-known writers — Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua and David Grossman — were among a group of two dozen prominent writers and intellectuals who last week called on the public to sign up as members of the two non-Orthodox movements.

"As Long As They Are Persecuted, We Are All Conservative and Reform," was the headline of the ad they published in the national press.

But others in the secular community quickly took issue with this approach, arguing that to join a religious movement — even a non-Orthodox one — represents a betrayal of the very tenets of Israeli secular Judaism.

In an article headlined "Theocracy Lite," a columnist for the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Doron Rosenblum, gave voice to this criticism: "They are prepared to commit a falsehood in their souls — and deceive the masses — by calling for the secular to masquerade as believers and to enter religion as kind of a Trojan horse."

The dispute, which goes to the heart of the self-identity of Israeli society, erupted in the wake of a huge Feb. 14 demonstration in Jerusalem.

Some 250,000 Israelis — most of them from the fervently Orthodox, or haredi, community — gathered for a prayer vigil to protest recent Supreme Court decisions regarding matters of religion and state.

Israel's two Orthodox chief rabbis, along with leading haredi and Zionist rabbis, were among those attending the mass protest. Some 50,000 secular Israelis took part in a counter-demonstration nearby.

Orthodox leaders called for the prayer vigil after the Supreme Court issued a string of rulings that they feel undermine their way of life.

In one ruling, the high court issued an order to allow Conservative and Reform representatives to serve on local religious councils, which oversee the provision of religious services in communities across the country.

Haredi leaders were also stung by a court ruling that canceled a decades-old arrangement under which yeshiva students are entitled to military exemptions.

The haredim and Zionist-Orthodox, in a rare show of solidarity, are bitterly battling this line of judicial activism.

They argue, as indeed many non-Orthodox jurists do, that the Knesset, not the court, should be involved in such issues.

The non-Orthodox movements, whose constituencies in Israel are small, contend that the clout wielded by the Orthodox parties in the Knesset makes it impossible for them to get a fair shake among legislators.

Each side accuses the other of anti-democratic action: Conservative and Reform leaders accuse the Orthodox of revolting against high court decisions; in turn, the Orthodox charge the more liberal religious streams with attempting to sidestep the legislature.

Oz and Yehoshua, in a series of media appearances last week, argued that the time

MIDEAST FOCUS

Netanyahu to visit Jordan

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he will visit Jordan's King Abdullah on Sunday to "widen the circle of peace."

The premier said Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon will accompany him on the trip.

Knesset legalizes pirate station

Israel's Knesset legalized a pirate radio station operated by Jewish settlers. The station, Arutz 7, has broadcast religious music, news and conservative political commentary from a ship off Israel's coast for the past 10 years.

Before the Knesset's 40-30 vote, Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein asked whether "it is fitting for the Knesset to set a precedent by legalizing criminal activity." One of the station's heads described the Knesset's move as a "giant step" forward for freedom of speech.

U.S.-Palestinian groups planned

U.S. and Palestinian officials agreed to establish joint groups to discuss such issues as trade and investment.

The decision came last week during a meeting in Washington of a joint U.S.-Palestinian commission. The commission had been created as part of the Wye agreement reached last October.

Israeli firm brokers pipeline deal

The Israeli firm Merhav brokered a \$2.5 billion deal to build a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Turkey, bypassing Iran by crossing the Caspian Sea. Two U.S. firms, General Electric and Bechtel, recently signed a memorandum of understanding in the former Soviet republic of Turkmenistan declaring their intention to build the pipeline.

The president of Merhav said he expected other companies from the United States, Europe and Japan to join the pipeline consortium.

for impotent hand-wringing has passed. The Orthodox demonstrators had thrown down a gauntlet that has to be picked up, they said. And the way to pick it up is to have large numbers of Israelis join the non-Orthodox movements — and in this way create a more equitable balance of forces in terms of grass-roots numbers.

Yehoshua declared that he remains a staunch atheist and therefore would not actually participate in religious worship or any such activity. Instead, he said, he would be an enthusiast or fan of the Conservative and Reform movements.

Apart from Oz and Yehoshua, very few of those who signed last week's ad have actually taken their own advice and joined either movement.

But the movements are vigorously using the ad as part of a membership drive aimed at reaching young Israelis and offering them alternative modes of Jewish religious experience. And spokespeople for the two movements say there has been a sharp upswing in interest in the wake of the Orthodox mass demonstration.

Oz pointed out in a radio interview that by taking the step that he and his friends were recommending, Israeli secularists would be identifying with millions of their non-Orthodox coreligionists in the United States.

But Rosenblum argued in Ha'aretz that this implied disdain "for the two largest streams in world Judaism: as if they were not serious organizations of believers, but rather a sort of country club for a bit of culture, folklore and Yiddishkeit; a kind of Judaism-lite (like lite hummus or lite beer), that you 'sign up for,' like a scout activity or a bus ride to a demonstration, and even this only to annoy the hard-core Orthodox."

This tactic, Rosenblum added, plays into the hands of the Orthodox by implicitly agreeing with their long-standing contention that the non-Orthodox denominations are not serious about religion.

Moreover, Rosenblum maintained that the intellectuals who signed the ad were in effect showing disdain for secular Judaism itself, adding that their proposed action "reveals a profound sense of inferiority — as if Hebrew secularism were not able to stand alone on its own two feet."

Yehoshua replied to this in an article of his own on Tuesday in which he wrote, "My secularism is neither 'Hebrew,' 'Jewish' nor 'Israeli' — nor does it express criticism or fear of Judaism. Rather, my secularism is a priori philosophical, existing independently of Judaism."

Nevertheless, he wrote, "Judaism is part of both my cultural heritage and of my inner self.

"My friends and I are recruiting support for the Conservative and Reform movements because they are being persecuted.

"When I see Reform or Conservative Jews holding a prayer service at the Western Wall and surrounded by a jeering crowd of Orthodox, when I see religious councils trying to ostracize them, I feel the need, as a secularist, to stand by their side."

As to the "Judaism lite" charge, Yehoshua retorted: "Certainly, the black-clad demonstrators before the Supreme Court building do not represent 'authentic hummus.' Why are those who wear the fur hats and sashes that were fashionable among 16th-century Polish aristocrats authentic Jews, while Reform and Conservative Jews are not? And authentic in terms of what?

"Who can judge authenticity? And is authenticity important? We should support those who believe in goodness and progress and who are close to our hearts. They want and need our help. Our secularism is sturdy enough to withstand our extension of support."

A last word might go to Dedi Zucker, the long-serving legislator from the secularist Meretz Party, who has argued for dialogue between Meretz and Orthodox Israelis, and for a return by secularists to the religious texts. These arguments, it should perhaps be noted, have brought him a notable lack of political success: He was recently dropped from the party's slate of Knesset candidates for the upcoming elections.

Endorsing the writers' ad, Zucker this week recalled his own decision, along with seven foreign workers from Ghana and Nigeria, to form a Foreign Workers Union in Israel. "I shall never be Ghanaian," Zucker said. "Or Nigerian or Thai. So I can never be a foreign worker in Israel.

"Nevertheless, politically, my action in joining with them was meaningful. It expresses sincere solidarity." □



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JEWISH WORLD

I.G. Farben to create fund

The German firm I.G. Farben will be completely liquidated within the next three years and part of the proceeds will be used to set up a compensation fund for Holocaust survivors, according to a company spokesman.

The move comes nearly half a century after the Allies ordered the company's dissolution. The pre-World War II chemical giant I.G. Farben produced the Zyklon B gas used in the gas chambers at Nazi concentration camps.

The company also built a plant on the outskirts of the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland to produce artificial rubber and synthetic gasoline. Historians estimate that the company used at least 35,000 slave laborers at the plant, only 10,000 of whom survived the harsh working conditions.

Senators to eye Russian racism

A U.S. Senate subcommittee will hold a hearing this week on the rise of anti-Semitism in Russia.

Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt and representatives from the National Council on Soviet Jewry and the American Jewish Committee have accepted invitations to testify.

Incitement charges to be aired

An Israeli member of a U.S.-Israeli-Palestinian committee aimed at stamping out incitement against Jews and Israelis in the Palestinian media is scheduled to present documentation of such incitement at a Capitol Hill news conference this week along with at least 10 members of the U.S. Congress.

The gathering, sponsored by the National Unity Coalition for Israel, which opposes the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords, comes a day before the anti-incitement committee is slated to meet in Washington.

Reconciliation gathering planned

Sens. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) and Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) invited their Senate colleagues to attend an interfaith reconciliation gathering aimed at national renewal in the wake of President Clinton's impeachment trial.

The Capitol Hill gathering scheduled for later this week is sponsored by the senators and the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews.

Siskel remembered as mensch

Film critic Gene Siskel was remembered at his funeral as a man devoted to Judaism and his family.

During his eulogy, the officiating rabbi said Siskel's last appearance in public was to attend his daughter's Bat Mitzvah in January. Siskel died Saturday at 53 following complications from a brain tumor.

Conversion issue returns to court; Last-ditch compromise is rejected

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's High Court of Justice this week heard a petition challenging the Orthodox establishment's sole authority over conversions performed in Israel — an issue that stands at the forefront of the nation's religious-secular debate.

The court had repeatedly postponed hearings on the petition, first filed three years ago, in the hope that the matter would be resolved through a compromise among the various religious streams.

However, efforts to reach compromise between the Orthodox establishment and liberal streams of Judaism have failed. Instead, the Conservative and Reform movements have increasingly sought recognition through the judicial system.

The fervently Orthodox community has responded with protest rallies and efforts within the Knesset to pass legislation that would codify into law the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate's authority over all conversions conducted in Israel.

Tuesday's hearing addressed a petition submitted by parents whose children, adopted abroad, underwent Conservative conversions in Israel.

At the opening of the session, in a final attempt to find a solution outside a court ruling, Chief Justice Aharon Barak offered a compromise proposal — that the children be listed as Jews in the nationality section of the population registry, but that the section for religion be left blank. The petitioners rejected the compromise.

"I am happy the parents refused to accept this strange idea, because we as a religious and nationalist movement view Judaism as the uniting of religion and nationality," said Rabbi Reuven Hammer, who is head of the Conservative Movement's rabbinic court for conversions.

The representative for the state then argued that the sole authority for conversions in Israel be the Chief Rabbinate.

The court, which is slated to hold another hearing on the petition before issuing a ruling, will also be hearing a separate challenge to a recent district court ruling that ordered the Interior Ministry to recognize as Jewish 30 individuals who underwent Reform and Conservative conversions. □

E.U. grant Israel membership in its 'exclusive high-tech club'

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Israeli officials were jubilant this week after the European Union decided to include Israel in its latest research and development program.

Membership in the program will give Israel access to a fund of some \$15 billion for research and development projects over the four-year life of the program. Israel is the only non-European state eligible for the E.U.'s fifth such program.

Israel will contribute \$45 million annually, or a total of \$180 million, for membership in what one Israeli diplomat described as "the most exclusive high-tech club in the world."

Israeli officials are counting the E.U. decision as a particularly significant victory because some E.U. officials had repeatedly linked Israel's participation in the program to its willingness to advance the peace process with the Palestinians.

Israeli Trade Minister Natan Sharansky, who spearheaded Israel's five-month campaign for inclusion in the program, described the E.U. decision as a "great achievement."

Israel's participation was opposed, apparently for political reasons, by Britain, France and Belgium, but Israeli sources say this opposition faded when Belgium made a last-minute decision to withdraw its objections. Israel's participation in the lucrative program was among the main agenda items when delegates from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an umbrella group for U.S. Jewish organizations, met with Belgian and E.U. officials in Brussels last week. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES**In tackling affirmative action, group considers student views***By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The cab driver taking Ari Alexander to his internship did not like that a white teen-ager was going to teach in a predominately black public school in West Philadelphia.

"Oh, you're going to help the black kids," the black cab driver said, accusing the University of Pennsylvania sophomore of heaping "pity" on the students in the projects.

Undeterred, Alexander continues his work helping to teach in an 8th grade class at the McMichael School.

"This isn't pity. It's social justice. A fundamental Jewish concern," Alexander said in an interview during a conference here this week that brought hundreds of Hillel college students together with Jewish activists from across the country at the annual plenum of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

Many of the college students at this week's conference are confronting race relations head on at their campuses. Issues pertaining to black-Jewish relations and acceptance of minority students have resurfaced with new vigor in recent years.

The students' experiences are helping the JCPA to shape its policies on race in America as the umbrella group of Jewish community relations councils and national Jewish groups reaches the mid-point of its 2-year study on race relations.

For more than 20 years, JCPA, and its predecessor agencies, maintained a position of support for affirmative action.

In the wake of President Clinton's race initiative, the group last year decided to review its stance.

According to a preliminary report delivered at the conference this week, the group has found continued support among local Jewish communities for affirmative action programs where race is among a set of criteria, said Karen Senter, JCPA's director of domestic concerns.

The group has found that the issue has attracted a lot of attention. It's "a way for communities to pull in new people," said Senter, who is the lead staff person on the race initiative.

If they do, JCPA leaders are likely to hear support for some form of affirmative action. "A lot of our families, having made it as second-generation Americans" without the help of affirmative action programs, "say why shouldn't everybody else. I disagree with that," Alexander said.

Despite seemingly widespread support for programs that help minority students, young Jewish delegates here made a distinction between race-based programs and those based on socio-economic disadvantage. Some white Jewish students say they have been stung by college acceptance procedures that favored minorities with lower grades.

Jasmine Sicula, a 19-year-old Tulane University freshman from New York City, did not apply to California state schools fearing that she would be rejected because of their affirmative action programs. California has since passed a controversial referendum that eliminated race-based admissions policies.

In fact, Sicula said she believes she was rejected from the University of Michigan while minorities with lesser qualifications were admitted. She's glad that there is now a lawsuit challenging

Michigan's affirmative action program. "I believe in being qualified," Sicula said.

Still, Sicula, like a dozen of her peers interviewed during the conference, said she is not against affirmative action.

"I'm not anti-affirmative action in the real sense of what it should have been: if equal, take the person of color."

Many of these students believe that affirmative action should shift from race-based criteria to socio-economic factors.

Nava Mizrahi, a second-year student at Canada's University of British Columbia, believes that the major problem lies in the educational system. Mizrahi, most concerned with "gender inequality" in the classroom, wants to see women afforded better opportunities. "But the best person for the job should get the job."

Almost all students who spoke about affirmative action believe that better public education is the key.

"Do not punish those sealed off at 4- and 5-years old in the ghetto," Alexander said.

All of the students interviewed said they are concerned that opposition to traditional affirmative action programs could lead to more confrontations between black and Jewish students.

Ben Schein, a University of Penn junior, held a forum at the conference to encourage other students to work to improve race relations on campus.

More than 20 students heard Schein talk about a spring break trip to New York City he organized for 16 black and Jewish students.

While there, the group visited a Harlem Church and an Upper West Side synagogue.

The trip led to greater understanding between the students, Schein said, adding that he understands "a lot better how a black person can support Louis Farrakhan," the Nation of Islam leader whose anti-Semitic remarks have prompted outrage among many people. But Schein admits that they have just begun to scratch the surface to revive the positive Jewish-black relations of an earlier generation. "We need to do better," he said. □

Anti-Semitic Russian legislator announces political aspirations*By Lev Krichevsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — A Communist lawmaker who gained notoriety for a series of anti-Semitic comments has announced he will run for governor of one of Russia's largest regions and then make a bid for the nation's presidency.

Albert Makashov recently told a Moscow newspaper he will seek the governorship of central Siberia's Novosibirsk region in elections slated for December. If successful, he will be well placed for a run in the nation's presidential election next year, Makashov told the paper.

In order to insure success in the race for the leadership of the Kremlin, the retired army general added that he may also run for governor in five other Russian regions.

Leaders of several leading ultranationalist groups last year urged Makashov to run for the presidency.

Last fall, Makashov said, among other things, that "it is time to expel all yids from Russia." The Communist Party, the largest bloc in Parliament, subsequently blocked a legislative motion to censure Makashov for his anti-Semitic comments. □