



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Court allows graduation prayers

A U.S. court banned student-led prayers at high school football games but agreed to allow the prayers at graduations, citing the ceremonies' "singularly serious nature."

The ruling by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Houston, which follows recent Supreme Court decisions on the issue, will likely apply to all school athletic events in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

Did Israel tap Lewinsky's phone?

Israel and the White House denied as nonsense allegations that the Mossad tapped Monica Lewinsky's sexually charged phone conversations with President Clinton and blackmailed him into calling off a search for an Israeli spy in the White House.

The allegations, made in a book on the Mossad by a British author due out next week, mentions a 1997 episode during which the United States accused the Jewish state of having a high-level spy code-named MEGA.

Croatian Jews criticize backlash

Croatian Jewish leaders are criticizing a recent flurry of anti-Semitism. Ognjen Kraus told a news conference that constitutional protections against racial and religious hatred were not being enforced.

The comments came after a former commander of a Croatian concentration camp was hospitalized on the eve of his war crimes trial.

The illness of Dinko Sakic, who headed the Jasenovac camp during World War II, leaves uncertain the fate of his trial, which was expected to begin this week.

If convicted, Sakic, who was extradited to Croatia by Argentina in July 1998, faces up to 20 years in prison.

Israeli Arab joins Supreme Court

The first Israeli Arab judge to sit on the Israeli Supreme Court assumed his duties this week.

Abed Al-Rahman Zuabi, 67, was appointed to the court for a nine-month period.

Zuabi's legal career spans 40 years, half of them working as an attorney in the private sector and the other half as a jurist.

He most recently served as vice president of the Nazareth district court.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jews unlikely to cut circumcision despite new policy from academy

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Most Jews aren't flinching at the medical establishment's most recent findings on circumcision.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is recommending for the first time that pain relief, such as local anesthetics, be provided to infants being circumcised.

The group, which issued its latest policy statement on circumcision this week, also found the procedure's potential health benefits are "not significant enough" to recommend the routine circumcision of newborns.

But rabbis and mohels, who perform Jewish circumcisions, alike say the report — which reflects 40 years of medical research — will have little effect on the 4,000-year-old tradition of brit milah, the circumcision ceremony by which Jewish males are accepted into the community.

"Obviously we don't recommend circumcision for medical reasons, but for religious reasons," said Ismar Schorsch, the chancellor of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary. "It is a sign of the bond between Israel and God, a sign of Jewish identity," he said.

"And it will continue to remain a rite of passage for Jews as long as there is an organized Jewish community."

The covenant of circumcision, first commanded by God to Abraham, was reiterated to the Israelites by Moses at Mount Sinai. The practice is still followed by the majority of Jews around the world.

But some Jewish parents have opted to forgo what they see as a barbaric custom.

Opponents argue that circumcision inflicts permanent physical and psychological damage.

Some 60 percent of all newborn males in the United States are circumcised, as are 48 percent in Canada, according to statistics quoted in the academy's report — down from a peak of 90 percent in the 1960s. Until recently most circumcisions in hospitals were performed without any anesthesia. The practice among mohels varies considerably both with regard to technique and the level of pain relief provided.

The academy's policy statement cites new evidence showing that newborn circumcised without analgesia experience "pain and stress."

But this finding is no surprise to most Jews.

"Suddenly now, pain is a new medical condition?" asked Rabbi Moshe Tendler, a mohel and professor of medical ethics at Yeshiva University in New York.

"Pain has been with us from the time of Adam and Eve."

Tendler also noted that the academy had issued a report in 1993 on the effectiveness of lidocaine as a topical analgesic for use during circumcision.

The current statement represents the academy's third official policy on circumcision. In 1971, the group concluded that there was "no absolute medical indication for routine circumcision." But by 1989, new research indicated that circumcision did carry potential health advantages.

Among the benefits most widely lauded are reduced incidences of urinary tract infections and penile cancer. Circumcision is also believed to decrease the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

But debate over the procedure's benefits and risks as a part of routine medical care continued for a decade, resulting in the most recent recommendations. The report, which

MIDEAST FOCUS

Labor delays move on pluralism

Senior Labor Party members are trying to block the inclusion of a clause changing the religious status quo in the party's platform for the upcoming May elections, fearing it could alienate potential Orthodox voters.

The effort came in response to a report in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz this week that Labor's Yossi Beilin and the politically moderate religious movement Meimad had discussed such a clause as part of the platform of a joint list Labor wants to establish with Meimad and the David Levy-led Geshet.

Guard dies in Jordan

An Israeli security guard shot during a training accident at the embassy in Amman died.

Sorek Gefen, 24, was critically wounded last week by a bullet from the gun of a senior security official at the Israeli Embassy.

Israel is investigating why the gun was loaded during exercises in contradiction to regulations.

Labor rejects Sharon's call

Israel's Labor Party rejected Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon's call for an emergency unity government to address the pressing problems facing the Jewish state.

Sharon, who has previously expressed his support for a unity government, said only a broad consensus could resolve the issues of Israel's presence in southern Lebanon and the peace process.

Settlement population going up

The population of the 10 largest Jewish settlements in Israel grew nearly 6 percent in the first nine months of 1998, at three times the natural growth rate, the Peace Now group said recently.

Peace Now said that a total of 92,584 people were living in the 10 largest settlements, which make up 50 percent of the settler population.



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appears in the March issue of the academy's journal, *Pediatrics*, indicates that while uncircumcised males are more likely to develop urinary tract infections during the first year of life, the risk is low — around 1 percent. And while uncircumcised men are three times as likely to develop penile cancer, the disease is rare, affecting only 10 or fewer men in a million each year in the United States.

"There are some medical benefits to circumcision," said Dr. George Kaplan, one member of the seven-person task force that prepared the latest report.

But "the benefits are not so compelling that the academy feels that it should recommend routine circumcision for everyone," Kaplan, a San Diego-based pediatric urologist, said in a telephone interview with JTA.

The task force also noted studies that suggest circumcised infants may respond "more strongly to pain of future immunizations" compared to uncircumcised boys.

"Parents should discuss it with their pediatricians and come to some conclusion as to what's right for their son" on medical as well as religious, cultural and ethical grounds, Kaplan, one of at least two Jewish members of the task force, said.

Dr. Gwenn Robinson, one of some 200 medical professionals certified to perform ritual circumcision by the Reform Movement's *Berit Milah* Board, said most parents who request her services have their minds set on the traditional circumcision ceremony.

"I never try to convince people based on medical reasons," said Robinson, a family physician in Albuquerque, N.M. "I tell them the medical reasons, but I talk to them more about the important covenant and the establishing of a Jewish life."

But those who oppose the ritual question why a child's entry into the Jewish faith requires pain and bloodshed.

"I'm not willing to harm my son just for religious practices," said Andrew Reiver of Philadelphia, the father of a 3-year-old uncircumcised son.

"Just because I'm Jewish, there are a lot of things I don't do," such as follow kosher dietary laws or keep Shabbat," said Reiver, who volunteers as a phone counselor for the National Organization to Halt the Abuse and Routine Mutilation of Males.

His organization is one of a growing number of national organizations that opposes circumcision on humanitarian grounds.

Some Jewish parents have developed alternative "welcoming" ceremonies that they feel incorporate elements of the traditional ritual.

"I believe the debate in the Jewish community is just beginning, so we don't know where it will go," said Ronald Goldman, the executive director of the Boston-based Circumcision Resource Center.

Goldman, the author of "Circumcision: The Hidden Trauma," said recent studies demonstrate that circumcision has traumatic effects and cited decreased sexual activity as one of its significant long-term effects. The academy's report, he said, "gives us all pause for thought and reconsidering what is still common in this country."

But for most Jews, what Schorsch calls the "mark of unique distinction" is essential to the Jewish male identity.

"The bond of circumcision, besides being a covenant with God, is a bond with every other Jew," Tendler said of the ancient custom. "The fact that you let out a drop of blood and my son let out a drop of blood makes you members of the same tribe."

Proponents believe that the procedure, when performed by a skilled mohel, is virtually bloodless and the pain temporary.

"I don't think Jews ever deluded themselves into thinking that it wasn't a painful moment," said Schorsch. "But that's all it is, a moment."

Robinson, the mohelet from Albuquerque, said she can finish the job in under a minute.

"It is true babies do feel pain," said Robinson. "Traditionally, we say we're helping the pain with kosher wine.

"There have been studies that sugar water" has analgesic properties, "and certainly kosher wine has a lot of sugar. We're not talking about dry white wine."

Used together with topical anesthetics, kosher wine usually provides adequate pain relief — to the point that some babies have slept through the ceremony, she said.

Tendler said he has insisted for a decade that topical analgesics be used during the hundreds of circumcisions he has performed or witnessed.

"God gave us the duty to master nature and to improve the lot of mankind," he said. "And if it's possible" to perform circumcision "under anesthesia, why not?" □

JEWISH WORLD

Russia bars Pentecostal group

A Russian court barred a Pentecostal church from operating in a town in Siberia.

In making the ruling, the court relied on a controversial 1997 religious freedom law that has been criticized by human rights groups.

The law allows local authorities to decide whether religions that have not been in existence in Russia for at least 15 years can operate locally.

Nazi-hunters defend Red Cross

Two leading Nazi-hunters defended the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has come under siege because Nazis used the group's documents to travel after World War II.

Serge and Beate Klarsfeld said the amount of good done by the Red Cross to help people after the war dwarfed the advantage taken by a few Nazis.

The Red Cross has confirmed that it issued travel documents to Nazi camp doctor Josef Mengele, but that it was unaware of his identity. The document was issued in the name of Helmut Gregor.

FBI warns of Olympic threat

Terrorist Osama Bin Laden has threatened Australia and could target the Olympic Games to be held in Sydney in 2000, according to FBI director Louis Freeh.

Speaking on national television in Sydney, Freeh, who was in Australia for a series of meetings with top Australian officials, said Bin Laden's "threat, or fatwa, is against not only Americans but the friends of America," and listed the Sydney Olympics as an opportunity "for someone who has a terrorist agenda."

Supporters of Bin Laden in Sydney publish a magazine and have an Internet site, and Olympic security sources have confirmed that he has a group of supporters who live near Sydney.

Survivors to weigh in on fund

Holocaust victims suing German firms for compensation will present Germany with proposed guidelines for the country's Holocaust fund next week, according to a lawyer for the victims.

Michael Hausfeld told the Reuters news agency that the fund, which is estimated to exceed more than \$1 billion, would be more complicated than the settlement reached by Jewish groups and Swiss banks.

AJCommittee closes office

The American Jewish Committee closed its office in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Despite growing membership there, the AJCommittee's national leaders cited financial considerations and a lack of leaders for the move. The Twin Cities chapter, however, will continue to run programs.

50 years after producing Zyklon-B, I.G. Farben to disband, pay victims

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Officials with I.G. Farben said the firm 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.

The move, a surprise, comes nearly half a century after the Allies ordered the dissolution of the company that produced the Zyklon-B gas used in the gas chambers at Nazi concentration camps.

In an interview with the Frankfurter Rundschau newspaper, the company's liquidators said they could not yet attach a figure to the fund's size.

But they did indicate that some \$2.3 million could be set aside from the company's liquidated assets to create the compensation fund and a separate research project on the company's history.

In addition to manufacturing Zyklon-B gas, the chemical 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.

The Allies broke up the company into smaller units after the war. But I.G. Farben claimed it needed a skeleton staff to wrap up company business — which it is still doing five decades later.

In the 1950s, the company gave small one-time compensation payments to some of the former slave laborers at the Auschwitz plant.

Holocaust survivors have frequently called on the company to shut down and pay compensation. Annual meetings of the company in past years have been accompanied by protests from survivors and their supporters.

The company postponed its annual meeting three times this year because of threatened disturbances.

In a recent announcement that the meeting will be held March 25, the company said for the first time it wanted to set up a compensation fund for survivors.

A gathering last October in Frankfurt of more than 90 survivors of the I.G. Farben plant at Auschwitz received international media attention.

The survivors came from around the world to attend the three-day gathering, sponsored by the Fritz Bauer Institute for Holocaust Research in Frankfurt. At the conclusion of the meeting, the group issued a statement calling on German industry to acknowledge responsibility for its involvement in the crimes of the Nazi regime.

Earlier this month, faced with growing international pressures, 12 large German firms announced their intention to participate in a central compensation fund, to be administered by the German government, for previously uncompensated Nazi victims.

The companies hope this action will resolve numerous class-action suits filed against them by Holocaust survivors in the United States. □

Syria pays for U.S. Embassy damage

LONDON (JTA) — Syria has formally apologized and paid \$500,000 for damages caused by last December's attack on the U.S. Embassy and ambassador's residence in Damascus, according to the London-based Saudi newspaper al-Hayat.

The paper quoted unnamed U.S. State Department officials as saying Syria's moves, coupled with a pledge that such episodes would not occur again, have "put an end to the diplomatic tension" between the two countries.

The embassy is reportedly resuming partial consular services suspended after the attack, which occurred during U.S.-led air and missile strikes on Iraq.

During anti-American demonstrations, Syrian protesters forced their way into the embassy compound, threw rocks and tore down the American flag, while others stormed the residence of U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker. □

Britain to investigate origins of art acquired since Nazi era

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — The London-based Holocaust Educational Trust is welcoming the decision of British public art galleries and museums to investigate the origin of all paintings they have acquired since the Nazis came to power in 1933.

The prestigious National Gallery on Monday announced that it was investigating the origin of all paintings to determine whether any had been looted by the Nazis.

The British government has now ordered all public galleries and museums in Britain, including the British Museum, the Tate Gallery and smaller regional institutions, to investigate the provenance of works in their collections.

Holocaust Educational Trust Chairman Lord Janner said the "swift attempt to investigate paintings in British galleries" will be "an example to museums around the world."

The National Gallery, a popular tourist destination overlooking London's Trafalgar Square, has 2,400 paintings in its collection, of which 470 were acquired since 1933.

Gallery director Neil MacGregor said there are question marks about the origin of 120 of its paintings, which include priceless works by Velazquez, Van Dyck, Degas, Renoir and Picasso.

Of these, the gallery admits that at least 10 paintings — including works by Delacroix, Courbet, Pissarro and a Monet acquired just two years ago — are giving rise to particular concern.

These paintings, said MacGregor, appear to have been in unknown collections in Europe during the 1930s. However, he pointed out that even if paintings are found to have been looted by the Nazis they cannot be returned to their lawful owners.

"In law we can't transfer title," he said, "but the individual might want compensation."

The gallery had embarked on the exercise, he said, "so that anyone who might have a claim can see what is in the National Gallery." He said no claim had been made and no evidence had emerged that "any previous owner of any painting was unlawfully deprived of it."

But he believes the galleries owe Holocaust victims the opportunity to establish beyond a doubt the origin of works they acquired since the 1930s, even though he doubts that many works in British collections would become the subject of dispute. □

In medieval Moroccan city, a synagogue is rededicated

By Peter Ephross

FEZ, Morocco (JTA) — Tens of thousands of Jews once lived in the Old City of this former capital of Imperial Morocco.

Now only a handful remain within its walls — most have emigrated to France, Israel or Canada. But last week about 200 Jews — Moroccans and visitors — braved a driving rain to sing and dance through the medieval streets here as part of a Torah procession to rededicate a historic synagogue.

The rededication of the Danan synagogue, which is more than 200 years old, is the first recent rehabilitation in the Old City of Fez. The renovation was sponsored by the United Nations Educa-

tional, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which has declared Fez's Old City a historic preservation area. Two or three other synagogues in Fez also are expected to be restored as part of the UNESCO program.

The Torah procession and rededication was just one of many events held last week in Morocco commemorating the rich tradition of the country's Jewish community.

Jews are believed by some to have lived in Morocco for some 2,000 years, and as recently as 1948, there were an estimated 250,000 Jews in the country.

Now, the community has dwindled to an estimated 5,000, the majority of whom live in the country's largest city, Casablanca.

Only about 300 live in Fez. Most live in the new section of the city, built when Morocco was a French protectorate.

The synagogue, which has not been used for about 25 years, will not be used for regular prayers; instead, it will serve as a tribute to the history of Moroccan Jewry.

The synagogue is marked by a dark wooden Torah ark surrounded by a multicolored tile wall. Several chandeliers hang from the ceiling, and a steep staircase leads to the upstairs women's section.

The rededication, said Henry Danan, a descendant of the person for whom the synagogue is named, will "show to future generations how beautiful Jewish life was in Morocco."

Several days of events accompanied the rededication. After the official ceremony, which was attended by representatives of the Moroccan government, about 450 people — many of them former Moroccan Jews now living abroad — celebrated with a gala dinner that featured traditional Moroccan cuisine and Sephardi Jewish and Arabic music.

Rebuilding the synagogue cost approximately \$300,000, the majority of which was donated by an association headed by the Danan family, most of whom now live outside of Morocco. The World Monuments Fund, a New York-based organization, provided additional funds. □

Jews welcome Czech raid

PRAGUE (JTA) — Czech police have arrested a dozen leaders of a skinhead organization, seizing magazines, CDs, cassettes and lists of movement supporters.

Czech Jewish leaders welcomed the news of the Feb. 19 raid as a sign that the Czech government was serious about cracking down on hate crimes.

"This would have been just another police action if it were not for the reaction from the government," said Tomas Kraus, executive secretary of the Federation of Czech Jewish Communities.

"This is a good signal," said Kraus. "It means that the government is treating [hate crimes] seriously."

Last year, Kraus criticized the Czech court system for failing to mete out appropriate punishment to skinheads convicted of hate crimes.

Police involved in the raid said the lists of skinhead supporters were among the most valuable results of the raid. The lists included names of subscribers to skinhead magazines — and financial supporters of the movement.

The police official responsible for the raid said that people on the list, as well as the dozen skinheads who were arrested, could face criminal charges. □