



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Jewish groups back NATO strikes

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs and the American Jewish Congress were among the U.S. Jewish groups giving resounding support for President Clinton's decision to participate in NATO military strikes against Yugoslavia in the Kosovo crisis.

"U.S. national interests and moral values require such a response in this situation," the JCPA said.

WJC blasts French banks' move

French banks will try to identify dormant accounts belonging to Holocaust victims and turn over the funds to relatives, the French Banking Association announced Wednesday.

The World Jewish Congress blasted the banks for taking "unilateral" action in a plan that "denies the demand" for "accountability."

Shamir bolts from Likud

Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir resigned Wednesday from the governing Likud Party, which he helped found.

Shamir, who has accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of betraying the ideology of Likud's founders, told the Associated Press he joined the far-right Herut Party, led by Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, another Likud defector.

As part of its platform, Herut opposes any further territorial concessions to the Palestinians.

ADL to work with Russian Jews

The Anti-Defamation League teamed with the Russian Jewish Congress during meetings this week in Moscow to create a joint project aimed at monitoring and responding to incidents of anti-Semitism in Russia.

Russian Jews will benefit from the ADL's long experience in dealing with intolerance, Pinchas Goldschmidt, Moscow's chief rabbi and an RJC official, said Wednesday after the joint effort was announced.

Meanwhile, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously approved Tuesday a non-binding resolution condemning recent anti-Semitic statements made by Russian legislators.

The resolution was timed to coincide with a trip to Washington by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov postponed because of Russian opposition to NATO military action in the Kosovo crisis.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Water shortage threatens Israeli-Jordanian relations

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli-Jordanian relations have hit one of their lowest points since the signing of their peace accord over an issue that perpetually looms as a threat to regional peace: water.

The crisis erupted last week, when Israel's water commissioner, Meir Ben-Meir, met in Jerusalem with his Jordanian counterpart, Dureid Mahasneh, and informed him that Israel is planning to reduce its supply of water to the Hashemite Kingdom by 40 percent.

The reduction, he explained, was necessary because of Israel's own low water reserves. The Sea of Galilee, Israel's main water reservoir, currently contains only 5.6 billion cubic feet of water, compared to the annual average of 14 billion cubic feet.

The meeting lasted only five minutes, at which point Mahasneh left in a rage.

Alarm bells immediately sounded in Jordan, where many people have long complained about the lack of any real economic benefits to their country in the years since the 1994 signing of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty. The treaty had promised a succession of joint projects with Israel to boost the Jordanian economy.

Supplies of Israeli water to Jordan had provided one of the treaty's few tangible benefits.

The Jordanian economy, which is suffering from its own serious water shortages, cannot afford a cutback in Israeli supplies. Jordanian officials cared little that Ben-Meir had also announced reductions in water usage by Israeli farmers.

Just weeks after King Abdullah had assumed the throne following his father's death, Israeli-Jordanian relations appeared headed for a nose dive.

Ben-Meir's announcement prompted the Jordanian Cabinet to convene a special session, after which the nation's newly appointed prime minister, Abdul-Waouf Rawabdeh, said his country would "insist on the full implementation" of the peace accord, particularly those provisions dealing with water supplies.

The issue also reached the Jordanian Parliament, which rejected a motion to cancel the peace treaty with Israel to protest the water reductions.

At the same time, however, the legislators protested the planned cut, saying it "violated a fundamental element of the treaty."

Ben-Meir subsequently traveled to Jordan in an effort to defuse the situation.

The effort succeeded after the two sides, apparently not wanting to let the matter escalate, agreed to put the issue on hold while attempts are made to work out a compromise.

Hoping for a quick resolution, Jordan called on the United States to help resolve the dispute. An expert on water issues from the U.S. State Department arrived in Israel on Monday and is expected to participate in talks between the two sides.

The discussions underscore the need to remove the ambiguity from some imprecise clauses in the 1994 peace treaty.

According to that agreement, Israel committed itself to pass on to Jordan an annual quota of some 1.75 billion cubic feet of water, an amount that was to increase gradually.

But some of the agreement's provisions were poorly phrased. For example, Article 3 states that the two countries would "cooperate in finding additional sources" of water to be supplied to Jordan. But this placed much of the burden on Israel for finding such sources since Jordan, with some 80 percent of its territory made up of unpopulated

MIDEAST FOCUS

Yad Vashem launches campaign

The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem launched a campaign Wednesday to collect the names of some 3 million Holocaust victims. Yad Vashem, which already has lists of half of the 6 million who perished in the Holocaust, plans to ask Jewish organizations around the globe to help them gather the remaining names.

Israeli workers go on strike

Some 400,000 public sector workers went on strike Wednesday in Israel after union talks with the Finance Ministry broke down in a wage dispute. The strike closed post offices and ports, halted train service and suspended activity at Ben-Gurion Airport for several hours.

Hamas members rounded up

Palestinian police arrested 10 Hamas members Wednesday in the Gaza Strip for planning a terror bombing in Tel Aviv.

The attack, planned to take place three weeks ago, was thwarted when Palestinian officials passed information about the bombing to U.S. officials, who passed the information on to Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed Tuesday that the information had led Israeli security officials to a house north of Tel Aviv where the bomb, ready for detonation, had been hidden.

Ex-Mossad official sentenced

An Israeli court sentenced a former Mossad official on Wednesday to five years in prison after he had been found guilty earlier this month of fabricating reports about Syrian military plans.

Yehuda Gil, 64, could have received a maximum of 15 years. After he was arrested in 1997, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that the false information he provided may have helped bring Israel to the brink of war with Syria in September 1996.



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desert, has no additional water to "find." The agreement also failed to address the question of who would pay the costs for transferring the water from Israel. Nor did it make provisions for the possibility of a severe water shortage, as happened this year.

Another issue left unaddressed in the treaty was who would pay the costs for desalination projects. The Jordanians assumed Israel would pay; Israel assumed that the costs would be shared. This issue prompted a dispute two years ago, when Jordan insisted that Israel undertake all the costs of building desalination projects, while Israel called on Jordan to pay half.

That dispute ended when Israel agreed to provide Jordan with some 1.9 billion cubic feet of desalinated water annually at a price of 2.3 cents for each 35 cubic feet of water. This was a substantial bargain for Jordan because the price generally ranges between 33 and 55 cents.

Just the same, it was a mixed victory for Jordan, since remaining differences about how to approach desalination projects have kept such projects on hold ever since.

Given the large portion of Jordanian land that is covered by desert, the nation's limited water supplies are likely to have a major impact on its economic development.

By next year, most of the nation's water resources will have been fully exploited by conventional measures, such as constructing dams and drilling wells.

The development of non-conventional water supplies — particularly desalination projects — will therefore become key to improving the Jordanian economy.

The water crisis was on top of the agenda of the weekend Cabinet session in Amman. It was the first Cabinet meeting to be chaired by Abdullah, who urged his ministers to take urgent steps to reduce the country's water shortages, which he described as Jordan's "most pressing concern."

Water shortages are endemic to most nations in the Middle East. The only regional nations that have sufficient water sources are Turkey and Lebanon.

The region is plagued by droughts on an average of every four years. This winter was the driest in years.

The issue is a ticking time bomb, with experts predicting that within the next few years, the region will need four times as much water as it can get from natural sources.

Clearly, international cooperation will be required to tackle the problem — but this has been in as short supply as water itself. □

'Farmbelt Fuhrer' is deported after serving four-year sentence

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Neo-Nazi Gary Lauck is being deported from Germany to the United States after serving a four-year sentence on hate crimes charges.

Lauck, who comes from Lincoln, Neb., is known in the United States as the "Farmbelt Fuhrer" because of his Hitler mustache, his feigned German accent and his rabidly anti-Semitic views.

Lauck was convicted by a Hamburg court in August 1996 on charges of inciting racial hatred, distributing neo-Nazi propaganda and using banned Nazi symbols.

While his speeches and pamphlets are shielded by U.S. First Amendment protections, they are criminal offenses in Germany.

Lauck's sentence, which included time already served prior to his conviction by the Hamburg court, ended last Friday.

Until his arrest, Lauck was one of world's largest publishers of neo-Nazi materials.

At his trial, prosecutors said Lauck's Nebraska publishing empire was for two decades the main supplier in Germany of Nazi and neo-Nazi literature, stickers, arm bands, banners and signs.

Lauck's four-year prison sentence was not his first encounter with the German authorities. In 1974, during a speaking tour of Germany, he was deported after giving a speech in Hamburg.

Two years later, Lauck was detained for four months and subsequently deported after being convicted of illegally entering the country and distributing neo-Nazi propaganda. □

JEWISH WORLD

Racism measure fails in House

The U.S. House of Representatives failed to pass a measure condemning "all those who practice or promote racism, anti-Semitism, ethnic prejudice or religious intolerance."

In what was viewed as a partisan political dispute, House Democrats voted Tuesday against the measure after their Republican colleagues blocked a different measure condemning a racist political group that had hosted members of Congress.

Republicans had argued that Democrats were trying to embarrass two of their members, including Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.), for appearing before the Council of Conservative Citizens.

Death penalty to be addressed

Leading U.S. Jewish and Catholic theologians held a one-day meeting Tuesday in Baltimore, where they began preparations to issue a joint statement condemning capital punishment.

The meeting brought together the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Council of Synagogues, which includes representatives of Conservative and Reform Judaism's rabbinical and congregational organizations.

Swiss army fed info on U.S.

Intelligence and secret service agents working for the Swiss Army provided the Swiss government with reports about developments in the United States during the past three years, when bilateral tensions ran high over Holocaust-era issues.

Swiss Jewish leaders called for a probe of the army's activities after Switzerland's point man on those issues, Thomas Borer, made the disclosure this week in an interview with the Swiss daily newspaper *Blick*.

A spokeswoman for the Swiss Foreign Ministry later confirmed Borer's comments, but added that the army made its reports based on material already available to the public.

Rabbis arrested in NYC protest

Some 200 people, including 15 rabbis, were arrested Wednesday in a protest at New York City police headquarters.

A group of about 75 people from the New York-based Jews for Racial & Economic Justice were among those taking part in what have become daily acts of civil disobedience protesting the Feb. 4 police shooting death of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed West African immigrant.

Last week, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League and the New York Board of Rabbis participated with elected officials in a news conference calling for comprehensive police reforms.

Jewish groups to hold summit as Vatican questions dialogue

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — American Jewish groups involved in interfaith dialogue will hold a "summit" next month, following criticism by a leading Vatican official that "aggressive" anti-church attitudes by some Jewish organizations are threatening Jewish-Catholic relations.

The summit was called after Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews, said in a speech at a Feb. 17-18 conference in Baltimore that an "uncertain atmosphere" in Jewish-Catholic interfaith efforts is "beginning to cloud over our present relationship."

"Jewish responses to what we seek to do to improve our relationship are often so negative that some now hesitate to do anything at all for fear of making the situation worse," Cassidy said in the speech.

He added that the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultation — the main institutional Jewish partner in formal dialogue with the Vatican — was essentially "no longer in existence."

The April 15 meeting of Jewish interfaith groups is being convened in New York by Rabbi A. James Rudin, interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee, in direct response to Cassidy's speech.

He said that although IJCIC has indeed been "very moribund" for years, many individual groups had taken up the slack, engaging in their own bilateral contacts with Cassidy and other Vatican officials.

"I have invited everyone in the Jewish community who is actively involved in interfaith work to the April 15 meeting," Rudin told JTA.

"The idea is to make an inventory of what we are doing. We need to take stock," he said.

"We're looking for coordination."

Rudin said he considered Cassidy's criticism a matter of "concerns rather than crisis."

But Rudin, who has long been involved in interfaith dialogue, added, "Dialogue means you take the other side's concerns seriously. I take it very seriously when our chief partner in dialogue raises such concerns."

Cassidy's remarks last month were unusually blunt.

In his speech — which was read out for him because illness had prevented Cassidy from attending the conference — he praised the overall development of Catholic-Jewish relations in the past 35 years.

But, he said, "I must sound a signal of alarm."

"I am becoming concerned that some of the good work that has been done is under threat."

"The reaction within the Catholic community to recent aggressive attitudes manifested in our regard by certain Jewish agencies is the cause of this concern," he said.

He complained that "recent Jewish attempts to influence decisions concerning the internal life of the Catholic church are strongly resented. People very dear to the Catholic faithful are concerned without proof but simply because they are not personae gratae with the Jewish community."

Not naming names, he accused a major Jewish group of being "involved in a systematic campaign to denigrate the Catholic Church."

Cassidy's office did not specify which groups he was referring to.

But a spokesman for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States let it be known that he was referring to the New York-based World Jewish Congress.

The WJC has been vocal in calling for the Vatican to open its World War II-era archives.

The WJC's executive director, Elan Steinberg, denied Cassidy's charges in a recent interview with *The New York Jewish Week*, calling them a "provocation." □

Demonstrators press IG Farben to dissolve and pay war victims

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Shareholders of the company that produced the gas used at Nazi death camps are demanding that the firm liquidate itself immediately and distribute all the proceeds to former slave laborers forced to work for the company during the Nazi era.

IG Farben's liquidators recently proposed such a policy, but they suggested that only a small portion of the proceeds be set aside in a foundation for Holocaust victims. Nor did they give any time frame for dissolving the company.

A nationwide coalition of groups representing Holocaust survivors, as well as IG Farben shareholders, held a news conference here Tuesday to criticize the company's plans.

A spokesman for the Coalition Against IG Farben, Georg Brau, questioned the sincerity of the company's recently announced plans for dissolution.

"We suspect that they have proposed a foundation for Holocaust victims in order to delay the company's liquidation," Brau said.

He also criticized the proposal for the foundation, expected to be discussed when the company holds its annual meeting here later this week.

During World War II, an IG Farben subsidiary produced Zyklon B gas, which was used in the Nazi gas chambers.

The pre-World War II chemical company also built a plant on the outskirts of the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland to produce artificial rubber and synthetic gasoline.

The plant operated largely with slave laborers from Auschwitz. An estimated 25,000 to 30,000 workers, most of whom were Jewish, died as a result of the plant's inhumane working conditions.

Earlier this week, three former Jewish slave laborers for IG Farben filed a lawsuit in a Frankfurt court demanding back pay as well as damages for their involuntary labor during the war.

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.

The Coalition Against IG Farben announced it would set up a blockade at the entrance to the hall where company shareholders will convene for Thursday's annual meeting.

Axel Koehler-Schnura, a spokesman for "Never Again!" a German group fighting for compensation for Holocaust victims, sharply criticized the city of Frankfurt for providing space for the shareholders' meeting.

It is "a colossal scandal and a mockery of the victims," he said at Tuesday's news conference.

At the news conference, there was also considerable criticism of a recent plan announced by the German government to compensate former slave laborers through a foundation funded by German firms.

So far, 13 companies have announced they will participate in the foundation.

Members of groups representing Holocaust survivors expressed anger that the German government has refused to negotiate

with them directly about compensation, working instead with several U.S. Jewish organizations.

They also questioned the German companies' desire to pay compensation only if survivors agree to renounce their rights to file lawsuits against the firms. □

Unhealed wounds opening up as Italy marks wartime massacre

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Controversy stalked this year's commemoration of Italy's worst World War II massacre.

As part of the annual commemoration, Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, Rome Mayor Francesco Rutelli and other top government officials marked the anniversary of the March 24, 1944, Ardeatine Caves massacre with a solemn ceremony Wednesday morning presided over by Rome Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff and a Roman Catholic priest.

But some Jewish and partisan groups protested posters put up by the Rome municipal government to advertise the ceremony, which marks the Nazi execution of 335 Italian men and boys — including about 75 Jews — south of Rome.

The massacre was ordered in retaliation for a partisan attack that had killed 33 German soldiers the previous day.

"Rome, city of peace, confirms its support for those who fought and died for democracy, and expresses respect and mercy for the defeated," the posters read.

An editorial in the left-wing newspaper *l'Unita*, which has close ties with the current government, said "respect for the Nazis is not legitimate."

But the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper defended the posters.

"Hitler and Himmler, Goering and Goebbels deserve no respect," it said in an editorial. "But those who do deserve respect are the German soldiers and citizens subjugated to that dictatorship who carried out the atrocious orders and paid a price for their (incidental) complicity or their incapacity to rebel against it."

Some right-wingers in Italy have long blamed partisan groups for bearing the main responsibility for the massacre. They argue that had the partisans responsible for the deaths of the German soldiers turned themselves in, the innocent civilians would not have been killed in reprisal. The controversy demonstrates that Italians have yet to resolve their feelings about the incident, said the author of a new book on the massacre.

"The Ardeatine Caves massacre is still an open wound in the memory of Rome's citizens," Alessandro Portelli told the English language *Italy Daily*.

Italy began World War II on the side of Nazi Germany, joining the Allies after the fall of Mussolini in 1943.

Former SS Captain Erich Priebke, 84, and Maj. Karl Hass, another former SS officer, are currently serving life prison sentences in Rome for having taken part in the massacre.

In the wake of their trials, two right-wing political parties, including a party linked to neo-fascist groups, filed suit against the surviving members of the partisan squad for allegedly provoking the massacre.

Last week, however, Italy's highest court threw out the suit, ruling that the attack — like all acts of anti-Nazi and anti-fascist World War II resistance — was a legitimate act of war. □