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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

8 Jews flee Macedonia

Eight Jewish men from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia fled to Bulgaria over the weekend and are being cared for by local Jews near the Bulgarian capital of Sofia.

The men, all of them college students, expressed fears that they may become involved in the conflict in neighboring Yugoslavia if the war spills over the Serbian-Macedonian border.

Israel attacks E.U. statement

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu angrily attacked the 15-nation European Union for issuing a declaration that reaffirms the "unqualified Palestinian right to self-determination, including the option of a state."

Invoking the memory of the Holocaust, Netanyahu said last Friday, "It is a shame that Europe, where a third of the Jewish people was killed, should take a stand which puts Israel at risk and goes against our interests." [Page 4]

U.S. to sell jets to Israel

The Pentagon plans to sell 50 F-16 fighter planes to Israel for \$2 billion. The deal announced last Friday also includes radar and navigation systems, as well as support equipment and contractor services. A Defense Department statement said Israel needs the aircraft to supplement its present fleet of fighter planes and improve its defenses.

U.S. said to back Israeli stance

The United States accepted Israel's position that it is not required to carry out any more redeployments in the West Bank until the Palestinian Authority fulfills its obligations under the Wye agreement, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Sunday.

The paper said U.S. officials refrained from coming out publicly in support of the Israeli position, in part out of concern that it could play into Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's re-election bid.

Russian lawmaker faces probe

Russia's top prosecutor ordered his staff to reopen a criminal investigation into the recent anti-Semitic remarks of a Communist lawmaker. The prosecutor said last Friday that an earlier probe of Albert Makashov should not have been halted.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Lessons of Holocaust demand action in Kosovo, many Jews say

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When President Clinton seized on the lessons of two world wars and the Holocaust as he made the case for U.S. military intervention in Kosovo, he was laying out an argument that many American Jews and Holocaust survivors would have been happy to have made for him.

Explaining the rationale behind the attack launched by the United States and its NATO allies aimed at forcing Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to halt attacks on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, Clinton invoked the appeasement of Hitler and the Allies failure to act sooner in World War II.

"Just imagine if leaders back then had acted wisely and early enough, how many lives could have been saved? How many Americans would not have had to die?" Clinton said in a nationally televised address on March 24, amid the first wave of bombings against Serb targets in Yugoslavia.

For American Jewish groups and Holocaust survivors, the moral imperative to end Serb atrocities against the ethnic Albanians is clear.

"We must come to the defense of defenseless victims," Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel said in expressing his full support for the NATO action.

"We cannot allow people like Milosevic to go on killing men and women and children," he said in a telephone interview. "We should have done it earlier, but it's not too late."

Although there can be no comparison between the atrocities committed by Serbia against ethnic Albanians and the Nazis' systematic extermination of 6 million Jews, Holocaust survivors and scholars say the Jewish experience and the lessons of the Holocaust helps to shed light on what is at issue in Kosovo.

"I don't like to compare anything to what we have been through, but if the world had reacted then the way we are reacting now, many tragedies would have been prevented," Wiesel said.

Hyman Bookbinder, a longtime Jewish activist in Washington and a member of the Committee on Conscience of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, agreed.

"As Jews we dare not be indifferent to mass tortures like we've been seeing here," he said.

For its part, the organized Jewish community has declared unwavering support for U.S. intervention in Kosovo.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella group representing national Jewish organizations and local Jewish communities, expressed its hope that the action would pave the way for a diplomatic solution to the conflict and said it would urge local community relations councils to help build support for the action at the grass-roots level.

The Jewish War Veterans of America, never an organization to take the commitment of U.S. troops abroad lightly, expressed support for the air strikes but made clear it would oppose any commitment of ground forces into a "civil war in a sovereign nation."

"We should get in and get out as soon as possible and we should have a firm exit strategy," said Bob Zweiman, past national commander and international liaisons officer for the group.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, said that

MIDEAST FOCUS

Minister censured over Sabbath

An Israeli court censured the country's labor minister for what it termed his "cynical" enforcement of a law barring work on the Sabbath. The judge said Eliyahu Yishai, a member of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, was abusing his power by selectively enforcing laws that suited his religious outlook.

The judge noted that while ministry officials were actively seeking to prevent businesses from operating on the Sabbath, little or no action was being taken to enforce other laws intended to protect the well-being of workers. Yishai said he would appeal the ruling.

In a related development, several dozen fervently Orthodox demonstrators marched outside a Jerusalem supermarket over the weekend, protesting its being open on the Sabbath.

The protesters smashed bottles in front of Drug-store 2000, but left before police arrived at the scene. The store, located on the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall, has become a focus of secular-religious tensions in the capital.

Strike disrupts Ben-Gurion Airport

Traffic disruptions were expected at Israel's Ben-Gurion Airport on Sunday as some 400,000 public sector workers continued their strike over wage demands.

The strike, coming days before the Passover holiday, coincides with one of the busiest travel periods in Israel.

The walkout, which began last week, is also affecting government offices, ports and hospitals.

Palestinians release militants

Palestinian security officials freed 10 Islamic militants Saturday after determining that they had not been involved in illegal activities.

A day earlier, Palestinian police freed a Hamas spokesman, Mahmoud Zahar, after he had been detained for 45 days.

if Jews remain silent in the face of atrocities committed against other ethnic or religious populations, "we will lose all our credibility.

"Otherwise, people will say Jews only cry when Jewish blood is spilled," the rabbi said.

At least one Holocaust scholar feels that an important lesson of the Holocaust was being ignored as NATO carried out the biggest allied military assault in Europe since World War II.

Deborah Dwork, director of the Center for Holocaust Studies at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., said she was troubled that there had not been a greater response to the humanitarian needs of the tens of thousands of refugees on the borders of Kosovo.

Focusing solely on military action against the Serbs as a means of addressing the Kosovars' plight, she said, was tantamount to the argument the Allies made in World War II that the best way to rescue Jews was to win the war.

"We don't think so highly of that rationale," Dwork said. In addition to the bombing campaign, she said there should be a simultaneous focus on humanitarian assistance because "I don't know whether this military intervention will ameliorate the lot of those individual people."

The Clinton administration, meanwhile, made clear that it was well acquainted with the lessons of World War II and the Holocaust, summoning images of Nazism and referring to "genocide in the heart of Europe."

As Secretary of State Madeleine Albright emphasized in an interview on PBS' "The Newshour With Jim Lehrer," blood has been spilled before on the European continent because "free people did not understand well enough how to stop tyranny and evil and ethnic cleansing and genocide early enough."

"We now have an opportunity," said Albright, who discovered in 1997 that her grandparents died in the Holocaust, "to gather together the lessons of the 20th century and stop this before it totally spins out of control." □

British school bans books by Jews from its campus in the Persian Gulf

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A British university has banned Jewish authors from courses at its campus in the United Arab Emirates.

The University of Lincolnshire and Humberside has confirmed that books by Jews, as well as those that mention Jews in their bibliographies, are banned by its affiliate in the Gulf state.

In addition, the British Council, a state-run organization designed to promote British cultural achievements abroad, also conceded that it acquiesces in censoring works by Jews to accommodate "local political, religious or moral publishing laws."

The Board of Deputies of British Jews, the umbrella organization of the Jewish community, expressed outrage and is seeking to have the matter raised in Parliament this week.

One Jewish official accused the university — one of the newest in Britain — and the council of "putting profits before principles."

The ban on Jewish authors was discovered by the Quality Assurance Agency, a British government standards watchdog, when it inspected the Skyline Institute in the United Arab Emirates, which teaches the British university's degree courses.

The agency has warned the university against "excluding its students from a body of scholarship on the grounds of the authors' race or creed."

Leading academics are privately critical of the "new" universities, which they have long suspected of sacrificing quality to gain contracts abroad.

This is the first time, however, that a university was found to be censoring work for political reasons.

A university official, Derek Crothall, initially insisted that the school had never allowed censorship in the United Arab Emirates, but he later admitted that "there is a small amount of censorship which applies to all universities in the UAE." □



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Caryn Rosen Adelman, President

Mark J. Jaffe, Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein, Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein, Business Manager

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JEWISH WORLD

Mormons to help name victims

An accounting firm assisting a Swiss commission in its search for Holocaust assets has turned to the Mormon Church to help identify Holocaust victims.

The Mormons, who posthumously baptized more than 400,000 Jewish victims of the Holocaust, maintain extensive records of Jews. The church stopped the ritual practice in 1996 after Jewish groups objected.

'Yale Four' appeal to begin

An appeal is slated to start Monday in the case of a group of Orthodox Yale University students who are protesting the university's requirement that they live in coed dormitories.

In July 1998, a federal judge dismissed the case brought by the "Yale Four" against the Ivy League school. The students say the requirement forces them to violate their religious beliefs.

El Al to hand over documents

El Al agreed last Friday to give Dutch investigators documents the Israeli national airline said would clear it of any allegations that dangerous goods were on board a Boeing 747 when it crashed in an Amsterdam suburb in 1992.

Israel has come under fire for not disclosing the plane's cargo after residents of the suburb complained of serious health problems. El Al said U.S. customs officials last week allowed the airline to release copies of contracts involving other companies that will shed light on the plane's cargo.

Austrians get payment guidelines

An international committee representing world Jewry on Holocaust restitution issues involving Austria presented top Austrian government officials last week with a set of principles designed to ensure the return of assets stolen from Jews during World War II. Jewish groups — led by the Committee for Jewish Claims on Austria, a branch of the Claims Conference — are seeking the release of Holocaust-era Austrian bank files and compensation from Bank Austria.

Group: No fees for Shoah suits

Lawyers who are suing European companies over claims they profited from the Holocaust should not receive legal fees, according to a leader of U.S. Holocaust survivors.

Roman Kent, chairman of the American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors, said earlier this month that the awarding of legal fees "is simply incomprehensible since it comes from the very assets stolen from us." The gathering passed a resolution opposing any such fees and is considering urging its 125,000 members to mail postcards expressing their concerns to all judges who are handling the Holocaust suits.

Political partisanship thwarts congressional move on racism

By Matthew Dorf

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

A partisan political dispute derailed the resolution when House Democrats voted March 22 against the bill after their Republican colleagues blocked a different measure that also condemned racism but singled out 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.) and Bob Barr (R-Ga.), for appearing before the Council of Conservative Citizens.

The vote disappointed many Jewish activists who had lobbied on behalf of the Democratic-sponsored measure that condemned the council.

"This should not be made a political football," said Michael Lieberman, associate director and counsel of the Anti-Defamation League's Washington office.

While his group supported the Republicans' bill because "it's always good to have civic leaders standing up and speaking out against racism," Lieberman said the ADL would continue to press for action on the resolution that specifically condemns the council.

While a majority of members, 254, voted in favor of the GOP version of the resolution, House rules required a two-thirds vote.

Many of the House Democrats arguing most strongly for the resolution condemning the council had opposed on free speech grounds a 1994 measure to condemn Nation of Islam leader Khalid Abdul Mohammad for making anti-Semitic and racist remarks at New Jersey's Kean College.

According to an ADL report, the Council of Conservative Citizens, which spun off from a group known as a white-collar version of the Ku Klux Klan, "has cloaked itself in the mantle of mainstream conservatism to mask its underlying racist agenda."

Essays in the council's newsletter "speak of the 'victimization' of whites who are at the mercy of minorities and the liberal 'elite,'" which is often used as a code word for Jews, the ADL said.

Council officials have denied that their group is racist or anti-Semitic and in a statement called the House resolution "the product of left-wing partisans who seek to silence all conservative expression."

Both Democratic and Republican leaders said they will try to resolve their differences and take up the issue at a later date. □

Uzbekistan issues visa to rabbi

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Uzbekistan has officially accredited a center run by the Lubavitch movement and has ended a visa crisis for the Chasidic group's local representative.

Following a meeting here two weeks ago between Lubavitch officials and the Uzbek foreign minister, Abdulaziz Kamilov, Rabbi Abba David Gurevitch received a full one-year visa.

Gurevitch, who has been in Uzbekistan since 1990, had been receiving successive one-year visas until recently, when authorities issued him only temporary visas.

The uncertainty endangered his mission, Lubavitch officials here said.

Hailing the foreign minister's swift action, Rabbi Levi Shemtov, director of the Washington office of the American Friends of Lubavitch said, "The permanence of the center will allow Lubavitch to pursue long-term humanitarian and Jewish education programs."

Jewish officials suspect that local infighting in the Jewish community and widespread corruption contributed to the visa problem. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Arafat gambit nets big payoff with E.U. 'Balfour Declaration'

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Palestinian people have gotten a Balfour Declaration of their own.

But while the original declaration, which recognized the right of the Jewish people for a national homeland, was the work of Great Britain alone, the statement backing Palestinian statehood emerged last Friday from the 15 members of the European Union.

Predictably, this broad show of support for Palestinian national aspirations was hailed by Palestinian officials, but denounced in Israel.

Capping a three-day summit of European leaders meeting in Berlin, the declaration reaffirmed the Palestinian "continuing and unqualified right to self-determination, including the option of a state." The declaration, in which the European leaders stated their "readiness to consider the recognition of a Palestinian state in due course," called on Israel to conclude final-status negotiations — which touch on issues including statehood — with the Palestinian Authority within a year.

With their unequivocal backing, the E.U. leaders are giving Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat a reward — international recognition for a Palestinian state — in exchange for his willingness to postpone a unilateral declaration of statehood.

In this respect, observers noted, a strategy crafted by Arafat appears to have reaped a major payoff.

For months, Arafat has been threatening to unilaterally declare statehood on May 4, the end of the interim period in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking under the terms of the Oslo accords. The final-status talks, which have barely gotten off the ground, were supposed to have been completed by that date.

During a meeting with Arafat last week in Washington, President Clinton fell short of giving such an assurance, reiterating U.S. policy that a state can only emerge through negotiations with Israel. But at the same time, Clinton said he would press Israel to engage in "intensive, serious and credible" peace talks that would have a deadline.

Clinton's statement, and the E.U. declaration, came as a result of Arafat's threat to make a unilateral pronouncement. Never mind that Arafat might never have followed through on the threat. A unilateral declaration in early May, coming weeks before the Israeli elections, could have played directly into the hands of the one politician Arafat does not want to see re-elected — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Just the same, Palestinian analysts were almost unanimous in saying that whatever Arafat does, Netanyahu will exploit it for his own benefit. If Arafat unilaterally declares statehood, they said, Netanyahu would use it to prove that Arafat is an extremist. If Arafat does not issue the declaration, the premier would announce that he, Netanyahu, had prevented the move.

Whether or not he ever intended to follow through, the threat of a unilateral declaration allowed Arafat to play a leading role on the international diplomatic chessboard.

Palestinian officials believe that in the wake of the E.U.'s statement of support, and the meeting with Clinton, it is now highly unlikely that Arafat will make the unilateral declaration.

"Theoretically, there is still the option of proclaiming a state on May 4," Ziad Abu Ziad, a member of the Palestinian Cabinet, told JTA. "But one can assume that we will opt for a postponement."

The postponement, even for a year, involves a simple calculation on Arafat's part: Better to wait and have international support for Palestinian statehood, which will prove a valuable card indeed in the final-status talks with Israel. In addition, perhaps there will be a new Israeli leader to negotiate with after the May elections.

Just the same, a postponement of Palestinian aspirations will undoubtedly test Arafat's standing among his people at a time when his political stock has been falling.

The response he gets from his people will likely mirror their reaction to the E.U. declaration. The rejectionists, including leftists and Islamic fundamentalists, saw nothing special in it. Arafat supporters rejoiced.

In Israel, meanwhile, the reaction to the declaration was harsh indeed.

The Israeli leadership — preoccupied with the coming elections — was caught off guard by the declaration, which came just weeks after E.U. officials reiterated that they view Jerusalem as a separate entity from Israel under the terms of the 1947 partition plan that called for the internationalization of the city.

Although there were clear indications that the Europeans were about to give their unequivocal support for a Palestinian state, no efforts were made by Israeli officials on the diplomatic front to prevent the move. But once the declaration emerged from the Berlin summit, Israeli leaders from all sides of the political spectrum came out against it.

Invoking the memory of the Holocaust, Netanyahu said last Friday, "It is a shame that Europe, where a third of the Jewish people was killed, should take a stand which puts Israel at risk and goes against our interests."

He also said that E.U. officials had "reduced their possibility" of being an honest broker in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

The European Union "has already taken sides. Not only has it taken sides, it has even given a date," the premier said.

"We cannot accept this attempt at an external dictate, a Palestinian state with a deadline by the year 2000."

His stance was echoed by members of the opposition Labor Party. Even Labor Knesset member Yossi Beilin, a key architect of the Oslo accords, said he regretted the E.U. declaration.

"I don't have a problem with the substance," Beilin said. "I am also in favor of Palestinian self-determination." But "the question is whether I come to that point by way of an agreement with the Palestinians on a demilitarized state, on red lines, on limitations, or whether someone from outside dictates the rules."

Meanwhile, within the Palestinian self-rule areas, the coming weeks will witness a shift in political power from the institutions of the Palestinian Authority — a product of the Oslo accords — to the organs of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

With the powers of the Palestinian legislative council set to expire on May 4, Arafat will soon be calling a meeting of the PLO's Central Committee to announce what happens next.

The anticipated scenario: Arafat will use his authority to extend the powers of the existing institutions and call for new elections for a Palestinian legislature. He will also start setting the scene for a declaration of independence, but that move is now not expected until May — of next year. □