



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israel plans more aid to refugees

Israel plans to send additional aid to refugees fleeing Kosovo, including a medical team of eight doctors to set up a field hospital in either Albania or Macedonia.

The decision, reached during a meeting Sunday convened by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, came after an Israeli plane carrying warm clothes, tents, medicines and other equipment was sent to Macedonia last Friday.

Meanwhile, the small Jewish communities in Kosovo and Macedonia continue to report that they feel safe and do not wish to be evacuated despite the worsening situation there, according to the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee. Meanwhile, the numbers of Jews who have left Serbia for Budapest reached at least 250 by the end of the weekend.

In the Yugoslav capital of Belgrade, Yugoslavia's chief rabbi celebrated Passover at a small community seder. Rabbi Yitzhak Assiel, who had been drafted into the Serbian army, was released so that he could spend Passover with his family and the community.

### Envoy hosts Russian seder

The U.S. ambassador to Russia hosted a first-night Passover seder at his Moscow residence. Leaders of Russian Jewry, including Russian Jewish Congress President Vladimir Goussinsky, and Jewish Americans working in the Russian capital attended the March 31 event.

The seder hosted by James Collins reinstated a tradition maintained by American diplomats during the Soviet era.

### Britain convicts war criminal

Jewish groups hailed the conviction in London of a 78-year-old man charged with killing Jews in Nazi-occupied Lithuania. The Jerusalem branch of the Simon Wiesenthal Center said it welcomed the April 1 conviction of Anton Sawoniuk and urged the "continuation of the efforts to prosecute Holocaust perpetrators in Great Britain and elsewhere."

Because of the Passover holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Thursday, April 8 and Friday, April 9.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Having fled to nearby Hungary, Yugoslav Jews hold lonely seder

By Michael J. Jordan

BUDAPEST (JTA) — It was March 31, the first night of Passover, and his native Yugoslavia was again convulsed by war.

So it was fitting, perhaps, that young Ismael chose melodies from the repertoire of the old Sephardi rabbis of Bosnia and Kosovo while leading his first seder.

In Bosnia, during the Yugoslavian civil war earlier this decade, and now in Kosovo, the policy of ethnic cleansing had prompted the exodus of local populations.

Yet any parallels with the Exodus recorded in the Haggadah were lost on Ismael's audience, Yugoslav Jews who are now into their second week as refugees in Budapest.

They were preoccupied with thoughts of family and friends back home, where NATO's intensifying air assault is aimed at ending President Slobodan Milosevic's repression of 2 million Albanians in the southern Yugoslav province of Kosovo.

All of which made for a pretty gloomy seder. Despite the glittery Christmas decorations hung by their well-meaning Hungarian hosts, the 150 Yugoslav Jews were crammed shoulder to shoulder in a dimly lit hall, eating with plastic cutlery and off paper plates. Fortunately, someone had the foresight to bring three Serbian-language Haggadahs with them from Yugoslavia.

Since he is studying to be a cantor, Ismael was pressed into service.

"It's the first one I've led, but I'm not really in the mood for it," said the amiable 22-year-old, who asked to be identified by his Hebrew name, rather than his Serbian one. "We're all tired and everyone's nervous."

Indeed, the seder underscored the pain of people separated from their families.

Olga, her parents and two older sisters traditionally celebrate Passover with their local Jewish community. But when NATO began shelling on March 24, her father didn't take any chances. He sent away his wife and youngest daughter.

The Nazis had killed his father in 1941, when they invaded Serbia.

"After his experience with World War II, this frightens him," said Olga, a 23-year-old sculptor. "People are confused and panicked, and the sirens are on most of the time. So tonight, he's not celebrating Passover. He's in a bomb shelter."

As the war heats up, it's unclear how many more Jews will head north to Hungary. Some 250 to 300 of Yugoslavia's 3,000 Jews are now waiting out the conflict in quiet Budapest. Most are teen-agers and 20-somethings. But the Yugoslav government has now ordered all men 16 to 60 years old to stay put — in case they are needed for combat if NATO sends in ground troops. Women and children are freer to go.

Nothing epitomizes the disruption of the lives of Yugoslav Jews more than the story of Branka and Stephane. Branka, a single mother from Yugoslavia, was slated to marry Stephane, a Frenchman, on April 8 in her hometown of Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. When missiles began raining down, Stephane insisted that Branka take her 5-year-old, Brian, by train to Budapest; he flew from Paris to meet her.

This week, however, they failed to get the requisite permission from Hungarian and Yugoslav authorities to marry in Budapest.

The only bit of luck was that they didn't plan a lavish wedding. Few people even knew about it.

"I was so superstitious, I only told a few friends," said Branka, a university Hebrew teacher. "And I guess I was right."

Like the others here in Budapest, they are in limbo. But at least the Yugoslav Jews

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israelis visit Western Wall

Thousands of Israelis visited the Western Wall on Sunday as part of a pilgrimage traditionally observed during Passover.

Israel's two chief rabbis were present for the bestowing of the blessing by the Kohanim, who trace their ancestry to the priestly class in ancient Temple times.

Meanwhile, a group of Jewish activists seeking to rebuild the Temple was allowed to climb up to one of the gates leading to Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

But police prevented the group from entering the site out of concern they could provoke confrontations with Muslims in the Temple Mount complex.

### Pollard demonstration held

Some Israeli Knesset members joined several dozen people who demonstrated outside the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem on Sunday, demanding the release of convicted spy Jonathan Pollard.

Among the protesters were far-right Moledet Knesset member Rehavam Ze'evi and left-wing legislator Anat Maor of Meretz.

Maor said that it was fitting that Pollard should also be released on Passover, the holiday marking the Israelite exodus from Egypt.

Pollard, a former U.S. naval intelligence analyst, is serving a life sentence in the United States for spying for Israel.

### Army dispute has tragic end

A dispute between two Israeli army soldiers, apparently over guard duty, ended in both of their deaths, according to Israel Radio.

The incident, which the military allowed to be published Sunday, occurred at an army base near the Lebanon border.

Cpl. Alexander Resnikov, 19, of Kiryat Arba, opened fire on Sgt. Ronen Kimchi, 20, of Jerusalem, and then fatally shot himself.



## Daily News Bulletin

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are welcomed with open arms, unlike the Kosovo Albanians, who are pouring into the neighboring countries of Macedonia and Albania each day with nowhere to go.

"What we are doing is nothing more than Jewish solidarity," said Gusztav Zoltai, executive director of the Hungarian Federation of Jewish Communities.

The Yugoslav Jews are indeed grateful, but they are anxious to get home. Some are concerned for the security of cars and apartments they left behind. Most of them, though, are anxious to resume their lives.

"We have so many problems with our lives, with our futures," said Olga.

"What the Hungarians have done for us is great, but we want to go home. This is not a solution."

Others are actually looking for a fresh start. Even before the NATO campaign, Yugoslavia's economy was already in ruins, and Milosevic had cracked down on most forms of freedom. One Jew already found her way to England, another to Italy. Seven have made aliyah to Israel, including a family from Kosovo.

Ismael, also a theater student and talented pianist, is looking toward Israel as well. He may accept a one-year offer to continue his cantorial studies there.

"Even if the bombing is over in a few days," he said, "Yugoslavia was a rough place before. Now it'll be even rougher." □

## 'Practice surgery' by IDF doctors prompts outcry among Israeli public

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The disclosure that the Israeli army allows military-doctors-in-training to practice emergency surgery techniques on the bodies of fallen soldiers has sparked a public outcry — and could lead to a criminal investigation into the practice.

The practice came to light in a report published several weeks ago in a northern Israeli newspaper, which told the story of an Israeli family that had learned such surgery had been performed on the body of its son, Ze'ev Buzaglo, after he was killed in an army training accident two years ago.

The disclosure comes on the heels of another public controversy involving run-ins between the Israel Defense Force and the bereaved families of fallen soldiers. Earlier this year, the families of two naval commandos killed in Lebanon petitioned the High Court after learning that parts of their sons' bodies had been added to the graves without their knowledge, and that no DNA testing on the remains had been conducted.

In the latest controversy, the Buzaglo family made the discovery after Dr. Haim Buzaglo, the father of the fallen soldier, asked to view the body. Haim Buzaglo said he noticed an incision in his son's neck that he assumed was the result of a resuscitation attempt, but a report he received later from an army inquiry into the accident quoted an army medical officer as saying that no such attempts had been made in the field.

Brig. Gen. Arye Eldar, the army's chief medical officer, confirmed that the army has long allowed doctors to train on the bodies of fallen soldiers whose families had granted permission for an autopsy to discover the cause of death.

Eldar said that while no specific consent had been sought from these families to allow the surgery, the practice "had never been a problem," adding that if army doctors were not allowed to practice these techniques, they could lack the necessary skills in a real-life situation.

But Eldar admitted that in the case of Ze'ev Buzaglo, the family had never consented to an autopsy.

Dr. Shuki Shemer, the director general of the Health Ministry and a former chief medical doctor in the IDF, said that, after consulting with the legal counsel to the ministry, he decided last month that army doctors would be able to practice the emergency surgery techniques only with the explicit consent of the families.

In the wake of the report, Israeli police are considering launching a criminal investigation into those civilians involved in the surgeries.

Police are also consulting with military police to decide whether the practice represents a breach of military law. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Jewish groups helping refugees

At least two Jewish organizations are accepting contributions to help the refugees from Kosovo. Donations may be made to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee at: JDC Kosovo Mailbox, 711 Third Ave., 10th Floor, New York, N.Y., 10017; or to UJA Federations of North America, 111 Eighth Ave., Suite 11E, New York, N.Y., 10011.

### Swiss task force closes down

The Swiss government announced it is shutting down the special task force that oversaw efforts to examine the nation's wartime past.

The controversy regarding the nation's Nazi-era financial dealings "has been settled," the government said, explaining the March 31 decision.

The settlement last August "between the major Swiss banks and the World Jewish Congress together with the class-action plaintiffs has finalized all financial claims on Switzerland."

The head of the task force, Thomas Borer, was later named Switzerland's ambassador to Germany.

### Lufthansa offers to join fund

Germany's national airline said it is prepared to pay into a fund to settle claims against German firms that profited from slave labor under the Nazi regime.

Lufthansa officials acknowledged that the company had used prisoners of war and others living in occupied countries at the airline's wartime plants.

### Californian governor joins suit

California Gov. Gray Davis joined a lawsuit by former Holocaust-era slave laborers seeking compensation from Ford, General Motors and four German companies. The lawsuit, filed March 31 in a California Superior Court by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, charges that German subsidiaries of the two U.S. auto makers reaped illicit profits through the slave laborers, who now live in California.

The case seeks reparations under the California Unfair Competition Act, which is aimed at firms doing business in California that allegedly gained competitive advantages through illegal practices.

Davis joined the suit as a private citizen.

### Alleged war criminal to leave U.S.

An alleged war criminal agreed to return to his native Lithuania. Last year, the U.S. Justice Department accused Vincas Valkavickas of guarding 3,700 Jews who were shot in Lithuania in 1941.

Under the terms of an agreement completed last Friday, Valkavickas acknowledged that he failed to disclose his wartime activities when he applied to enter the United States after the war.

## World's largest Islamic state may establish ties with Israel

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Indonesia, the most populous Islamic state in the world, appears set to establish formal diplomatic relations with Israel after Indonesian elections are held in June.

The Israeli ambassador to Singapore is reported to have made several unpublicized visits to Indonesia in recent months to meet political and military officials, including aides to President Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, the favorite in the elections.

The visits were apparently aimed at establishing an Israeli diplomatic presence in Indonesia in the post-Suharto era.

Suharto was forced to resign in May of last year after popular protests.

Recognition of Israel by Indonesia, which has a population of 210 million, could clear the way for the establishment of ties with Israel by such Asian Muslim states as Malaysia and oil-rich Brunei.

The London-based daily Asharq al-Awsat reported last week that Israel had created relationships with the Indonesian military and business elites earlier in the decade, culminating in visits by former Israeli prime ministers Yitzhak Rabin in 1993 and Shimon Peres in 1995.

One of the key figures in the Suharto regime, Gen. Benny Mordani, who was defense minister from 1988 to 1993, publicly advocated the establishment of relations with Israel, a proposal that was enthusiastically embraced by some politicians from the minority Catholic, Chinese and Buddhist communities.

Mordani is believed to have made several secret visits to Israel and to have concluded various intelligence and military cooperation accords, some of which are understood to be still operational.

Israeli expertise is understood to have been used by the Indonesian army against separatist rebels in the early 1990s.

Veteran Foreign Minister Ali Alatas is known to oppose diplomatic ties with Israel before it resolves its dispute with the Palestinians, but he is unlikely to remain in office after the election.

The Saudi-owned Asharq al-Awsat noted that a leader of the Nahdat-ul-Ulema movement — an Indonesian Islamic society with an estimated 35 million members — has been advocating diplomatic ties with Israel, but has been opposed by others, including many within his own movement. A recent article in the Catholic-owned, English-language Jakarta Post, which supports ties with Israel, said the United States has been putting pressure on Jakarta to agree to the ties. □

## 'Secular conversions' proposed

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Labor Knesset member Yossi Beilin has touched off a fresh storm in the religious-secular debate with a controversial proposal for "secular conversions."

Beilin details the idea in his latest book, "The Death of the American Uncle," an examination of Israel-Diaspora relations on the eve of the 21st century.

Beilin, who raised a storm several years ago when he declared that Israel was no longer dependent on financial contributions from world Jewry, outlines in his book a new structure for Israel-Diaspora relations.

In addition to calling for civil marriage in Israel, he proposes "secular conversions" to help guarantee Jewish continuity.

In an interview with the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Beilin expressed concern over the shrinking size of the Jewish population in the Diaspora amid continuing intermarriage and assimilation. He said secular conversions would attract some non-Jewish mates of Jews who want to join the Jewish people but are unwilling to undergo a religious conversion.

Deputy Housing Minister Meir Porush, of the United Torah Judaism bloc, denounced Beilin's proposal as "dangerous and irresponsible." □

**AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD****Crafting a legacy in Morocco:  
Jews, officials share same goal***By Peter Ephross*

CASABLANCA, Morocco (JTA) — On a recent sunny day outside the Jewish elementary school here, Boris Azran watches as his two oldest children join hundreds of others colorfully celebrating Purim.

A clothes manufacturer, the 35-year-old Azran, his youngest child sitting in his lap, says he is content with the education his daughters Melissa, 10, and Jordanna, 8, are receiving at the Narcisse-Leven elementary school.

But as soon as they are older, he expects that they, like other young Moroccan Jews, will move abroad for their education — most likely to the United States. He and his wife, he says, will follow them. The reason he expects his family to leave is simple: "There are not a lot of Jews here."

Azran's assessment is accurate: Morocco's Jewish community, which stood at a robust 250,000 in 1948, has dwindled to approximately 5,000 today; most of its members are older than 50.

As Moroccan Jewry becomes a remnant of what it once was, the Jews who are still there have a goal: crafting a tribute to the 2,000 years of Jewish life in this North African country. Judging by the words of top government officials and their participation in recent Jewish events, Morocco's leadership shares that goal.

The slow death of Morocco's Jewish community is nothing new. The exodus that began soon after Morocco gained its independence from France in 1956 and accelerated during the 1960s has continued unabated since.

The once-flourishing communities of Fez, Rabat and Marrakech, all of which once boasted thousands of Jews living intimately in walled medieval areas, now have only a few hundred members. Only Casablanca, which still supports more than 20 synagogues, has enough Jewish students to keep a Jewish day school system alive.

"I used to work a lot with children. Now I work a lot with older people," says the soft-spoken David Dayan, a longtime principal at the now-closed Jewish high school in Marrakech.

Moroccan government officials boast of what they call the "2,000 years of peaceful Arab-Jewish coexistence" — and it is true that Jews have been treated better here than in many other parts of the Middle East or Europe.

The historical record is more complex. As is true elsewhere around the globe, the Jewish experience in Morocco has been cyclical. During World War II, then-King Muhammad V told the country's Jews he refused a request by the pro-Nazi Vichy France regime to round up the country's Jews for deportation.

But several years later, Moroccan Jews, like others in the Arab world, were attacked by the local population during the period surrounding the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel.

In more recent times, Moroccan King Hassan II, Muhammad V's son, attempted to steer a King Hussein-like heterodox course between Israel and the Palestinians.

Indeed, after the 1993 handshake on the White House lawn between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, Israel was allowed to open up a consular office in Rabat.

Hassan, upset with the policies of current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has frozen relations with Israel.

And the number of Israeli tourists — Moroccan officials say 40,000 visited the country annually in 1995 and 1996 in the euphoria that followed the Oslo accords — has been cut at least in half.

Moroccan officials say they hope that once peace is reached in the Middle East, Jews will return to this country just south of Spain, a land where just a few minutes' walk takes one from city streets featuring sleek professionals dressed in Parisian black fashions to medieval marketplaces filled with labyrinthine alleyways where donkeys tread.

But when pressed, government officials speak mainly of the importance of Moroccan Jewry in the development of their country, a nostalgia for a time when Jewish and Muslim children played side by side — and of a desire for economic benefits through tourism and through increased trade with Israel.

Indeed, Moroccan officials, once unwilling to mention the State of Israel, now speak of their readiness to establish a direct Tel Aviv-Casablanca flight if peace is achieved.

"What is important is to share business, joint ventures, large cooperation together," said Andre Azoulay, a former banker and the chief economic adviser to Hassan.

Azoulay is believed to be the only Jewish minister in the Arab world.

In private, members of Morocco's Jewish community admit that the history of Jews in Morocco will soon, for all intents and purposes, be over.

In the meantime, much of what remains of Morocco's Jewish past is nostalgia, but there are also physical reminders.

In addition to cemeteries filled with tombstones, there are synagogues — some run-down and defunct, others, replete with chandeliers and cedar wood Torah arks, still holding daily minyan — and a host of Jewish artifacts that like the prayer books, kipot and wedding dresses at one museum in Fez, are scattered in disarray. To its credit, the Moroccan Jewish community appears to be successful as it attempts to create a legacy of monuments.

It has formed the Foundation for the Preservation of Morocco's Jewish Heritage. One of the group's current projects is a yet-to-be-filled museum in a residential section of Casablanca — what Jewish leaders call the "first formal Jewish museum in the Arab world."

In late February, several hundred people crammed into a Fez synagogue to attend a synagogue rededication, which was attended by government officials and given extensive positive coverage by Morocco's official government newspaper.

Funded mainly by a Jewish family whose members mostly live elsewhere, the renovation of the 300-year-old Danan synagogue, which will now serve as a museum, was sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

The night of the ceremony, hundreds of Jews, most of them born in Morocco and now living abroad, gathered for a gala dinner in Fez to celebrate the rededication.

As the 450-odd people in attendance ate the traditional Moroccan dish of chicken and couscous, one guest, a Moroccan-born Jewish singer who now is based in France, said she is addressing the issue by singing melodies that blend the traditions of the region's Muslims and Jews. "I see the emergency," said Francoise Atlan. "This community is very fragile. I wanted to make something as a testament to it." □

*(JTA Staff Writer Peter Ephross recently visited Morocco as a guest of the country's Tourist Ministry.)*