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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

12 Iranian Jews arrested

Twelve Iranian Jews who were arrested last month remain in custody. The arrests stem from an internal dispute between the Jewish communities of Tehran and Shiraz, according to sources familiar with the situation. [Page 2]

State Dept. questions Israel

The U.S. State Department questioned Israel's commitment to the Middle East peace process and accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of violating a pledge made to U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on West Bank settlements.

"Contrary to what we were told, we have seen an accelerated pattern" of settlement-building, said State Department spokesman James Rubin on Wednesday. "The issue is whether the government of Israel is serious about doing its part to create the proper environment for peace."

Nazareth conflict escalates

The director general of Israel's Religious Affairs Ministry was fired amid an escalating Muslim-Christian dispute regarding a proposed mosque in the Israeli city of Nazareth. Avi Blustein was fired after he claimed that Christian representatives threatened to shut down their churches for the millennium year if the mosque was built. A representative of one of the churches said the claim was an attempt by Israel to deflect its own responsibility for the conflict.

WJC to ask for sanctions delay

The World Jewish Congress was expected to ask U.S. state and local finance officials meeting Thursday in New York to delay by 60 days a decision on sanctions against German banks and firms for their Holocaust-era dealings. The move comes as the group continues to negotiate the establishment of a compensation fund for survivors with German officials.

Russia cancels arrest order

Russian prosecutors canceled an arrest warrant for a wealthy businessman with Jewish roots after he agreed to return to Russia from France to face money-laundering charges.

Boris Berezovsky has been losing political clout in recent months since Yevgeny Primakov became prime minister.

Jewish attorney to sue CIA; claims rampant anti-Semitism

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A Jewish attorney on forced leave from the CIA has decided to file a lawsuit claiming that rampant anti-Semitism at the spy agency has destroyed his career.

Armed with memos from top CIA brass and horror stories from other Jewish government officials, Adam Ciralsky is suing for unspecified damages.

He plans to file the lawsuit in federal court in Washington later this month, according to his attorney, Neal Sher.

The allegations have touched a raw nerve with many current and former Jewish federal employees who have faced routine CIA background investigations.

Many believe that the 1987 conviction of Navy analyst Jonathan Pollard for spying for Israel places them under heightened suspicion.

The CIA put the 27-year-old Ciralsky on leave with pay in October 1997, after he failed a lie-detector test that centered around his support for Israel and past contacts with Israelis. Internal CIA memos released by Sher show an agency bent on dismissing Ciralsky and appear to question his loyalty to the United States based on his family's support for the United Jewish Appeal and Israel Bonds.

"They trot out all the old canards and put into question any Jew who participates in the most lawful of activities, giving to charity," said Sher, a former head of the Justice Department's Nazi-hunting unit and a past executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

In an effort to settle the dispute out of court, the two sides engaged in settlement talks, according to Sher. As the talks heated up last month, the CIA revoked Ciralsky's pay, according to Sher. The talks have now broken down altogether.

The CIA refuses to talk specifically about the case, citing federal privacy law that prevents them from discussing current employees without their permission.

But after Sher launched a publicity blitz about the case last week, the CIA vehemently denied any charges of anti-Semitism.

Amplifying denials made last June when Ciralsky's charges were first reported, three former CIA directors released a joint statement last Friday condemning anti-Semitism and denying any anti-Jewish bias at the agency.

Former director John Deutch went one step further, adding, "I am Jewish and during my entire experience with the CIA — since I first came into contact with it in 1975 throughout my tenure as [director] which concluded in 1997 — I never encountered any hint of anti-Semitism at any point."

After National Public Radio reported on the case last Friday, CIA Director George Tenet issued a statement to employees.

"I will not tolerate anti-Semitism or any other form of discrimination at the agency," he said in the statement. "Anti-Semitism is repugnant to me and to all that our agency and our country stand for."

In a letter sent Tuesday to the Anti-Defamation League, Tenet criticized agency employees for "insensitive, unprofessional and highly inappropriate" language in internal memos concerning Ciralsky.

But a CIA panel that included former CIA Director William Webster and retired Adm. William Crowe established to investigate the Ciralsky allegations and the charges of anti-Semitism found no evidence to support the accusations, Tenet said.

The memos that Ciralsky is using to make his case paint a different picture. As the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Candidates trade barbs in debate

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Center Party challenger Yitzhak Mordechai faced off in the first televised debate between Israeli candidates for prime minister in the May 17 elections.

The Israeli premier saved his sharpest barbs Tuesday evening for Labor candidate Ehud Barak, who refused to participate in the debate.

Mordechai, meanwhile, repeatedly challenged Netanyahu, portraying him as an untrustworthy leader whose impulsive policies had "endangered the State of Israel."

Panel awards Israel \$31 million

A U.N. committee dealing with reparation claims against Iraq dating to the 1991 Gulf War approved more than \$31 million to be paid to Israeli businesses and individuals.

The decision stems from a 1992 U.N. Security Council decision calling on Iraq to compensate victims of the Gulf War.

Survivors' memorial dedicated

The Jewish National Fund on Wednesday dedicated a memorial for Holocaust survivors killed in Israel's War of Independence near the battle site where many of them died.

The memorial near Latrun listed the names of 466 individuals identified from the estimated 700 casualties who were believed to be killed after being sent into battle in 1948 soon after disembarking from boats from Europe.

Gaza crossing re-opened

Trade through a border crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip resumed after Israel and the Palestinian Authority resolved a trade dispute. Palestinian trucks had boycotted the Karni crossing since April 5, saying Israel had tripled the fees imposed on trucks.

CIA was investigating Ciralsky, who was hired in December 1996, one senior CIA official wrote, "From my experience with rich Jewish friends from college, I would fully expect Adam's wealthy daddy to support Israeli political/social causes."

Another memo lays out the strategy for questioning Ciralsky. "I think that it is important that he state openly he and his family's support for the Likud Party," it says.

"We are sophisticated enough and broad-minded enough to understand the unique ties that bind American Jews to their brethren in Israel," the memo says.

Sher said the Ciralsky family has no ties to Israeli politics.

Another memo that Sher believes is central to the case says that CIA director Tenet had decided to get rid of Ciralsky even before the investigation of him was completed.

"Tenet says this guy is outta here because of a lack of candor," said the Sept. 17, 1997, memo stamped "restricted handling, handcarry only, eyes only."

During one lie-detector test and interrogation, Ciralsky was asked why he did not disclose that an Israeli chaperoned a trip to the Jewish state he took with the Milwaukee federation when he was 15 years old. He also was asked about his connection to his great-grandfather's first cousin, Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first president.

"There's a dirty little secret within America's security apparatus. Jews who support Israel are held to a different standard," Sher said.

Ciralsky is not the only Jew who has experienced anti-Semitism in government positions, according to Sher. At least two other Jewish employees of the CIA who require security clearances have run into trouble with the agency.

Others who do not work at the CIA reportedly have been blocked from positions because the CIA, which handles many background checks for government employees, would not grant the necessary clearances. One such person, an employee at the State Department, has failed to receive his promotion to serve on the National Security Council, reportedly because he failed a lie-detector test about his contacts with Israelis.

Other former CIA officials dispute the claims of anti-Jewish bias. They point out the record number of American Jews serving in high-level jobs that require security clearances and in many cases deal directly with Israel.

One former foreign service officer wondered how one can claim rampant anti-Semitism when Dennis Ross, the chief U.S. Middle East negotiator, and his deputy Aaron Miller, who have both lived in Israel, received clearances without trouble.

In addition, President Clinton's national security adviser, Sandy Berger, and State Department spokesman James Rubin both maintain the highest-level clearances. □

Recent arrest of 12 Iranian Jews apparently linked to internal feud

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Twelve Iranian Jews were arrested in Iran last month, but the specific charges remain unclear, according to sources familiar with the situation.

Although Iranian authorities carried out the arrests, they apparently stem from an internal dispute between the Jewish communities of Tehran and Shiraz, in southwest Iran, according to the sources.

Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said he was in contact with people involved with the Iranian Jewish community and that efforts are under way to resolve the situation. Another source said he hoped the dispute could be resolved internally.

The Conference of Presidents is an umbrella organization of 55 Jewish groups, which represents communal concerns to the U.S. administration.

A widely distributed alert circulating on the Internet said 23 Jews, including three rabbis, had been arrested for "teaching and learning Torah."

Hoenlein and other sources said the report was "exaggerated."

Contrary to the cyber-rumors, Hoenlein said none of the Jews arrested was facing execution. The United States government is aware of the situation, he said, but not involved in any negotiations.

The American Jewish Year Book puts Iran's total Jewish population at 12,500; other estimates have put the current number as high as 35,000. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Australian survivors file suit

Australian Holocaust survivors filed a lawsuit in New York District Court accusing three German firms of profiting from slave labor during World War II.

New York-based attorney Ed Fagan filed the lawsuit against Volkswagen, Siemens and Thyssen Krupp on behalf of between 60,000 and 70,000 Australian Holocaust survivors.

The companies have already been hit with similar lawsuits by survivors living in other countries.

Labor threatens AIPAC boycott

Israeli Labor Party officials plan to boycott the annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference in Washington after the pro-Israel lobby refused to invite Ehud Barak, the party's candidate for prime minister in Israel's May 17 elections.

Citing tradition, AIPAC has invited only Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the conference, scheduled to begin May 23.

Canadian Jews help West Bank

Canadian Jews and Palestinians purchased a bus and supplies for the West Bank town of Sabastieh.

"Often the Diaspora is more xenophobic than the homeland. We have tried to promote peace, not fuel hatreds," said Robert Eisenberg, a representative of the Canadian Friends of Peace Now, which helped organize the delivery along with the Palestine House in Toronto. The bus and supplies were scheduled to be delivered this week by representatives of the two groups.

Soviet Jewish editor dies

A longtime editor of a Soviet Yiddish-language magazine died recently at the age of 80. Aron Vergelis was the editor of *Sovetisch Heimland*, or *The Soviet Homeland*, the only Yiddish-language magazine that existed in the Soviet Union from 1961 to 1991.

Since 1992, when the magazine was renamed *Di Yiddische Gas*, or *The Jewish Street*, it has struggled for financial survival and is likely to fold after Vergelis' death.

During the era of Leonid Brezhnev in the 1960s and 1970s, Vergelis participated in official anti-Zionist and anti-Israel propaganda campaigns launched by the Soviet leadership. But his magazine was the only forum for many Soviet Jews on Jewish issues that were otherwise neglected by the official media.

Kosher fans cheer in Cleveland

The Cleveland Indians is featuring a kosher concession stand at the team's games this season.

The stand, which serves hot dogs, peanuts, drinks and beer, makes the Indians the fourth baseball team to offer such a concession.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

German Jews link Shoah memory with concern for Kosovar refugees

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — As Jewish communities across Germany observed Holocaust Remembrance Day this week, their words of mourning mingled with fears about the killings and forcible deportations of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo.

Concern about the fate of the Kosovar Albanians prompted the Central Council of Jews in Germany to create a fund totaling some \$28,000 for the refugees.

"We feel it is our duty to help them," said Ignatz Bubis, the organization's president and a Holocaust survivor. "As Jews, we know what deportation and being refugees means."

A decision on how the fund will be distributed will be made soon, according to board member Michael Friedman.

Calling Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic "a murderer and a war criminal," Norma Drimmer, deputy director of the Berlin Jewish community, said, "One should always help any minority who is in distress."

Mourners who gathered at the weekend commemoration of the Allied liberation of Buchenwald heard speeches referring to the plight of the Kosovars.

And, during Berlin's main Holocaust commemoration, which began Monday evening and consisted of a 24-hour reading of the names of 55,696 Jewish Berliners deported to their deaths, current headlines were not far from the thoughts of some in attendance.

Considering "the situation in Yugoslavia, we must not be allowed to forget this time in our history, in German history," said Walter Briedigkeit, 67, who survived the Holocaust with his mother in Germany because his father was a non-Jew who protected them.

"I think in Kosovo it is nearly the same as it was in Germany," said Hannes Pfeifer, 16, a non-Jewish high school student.

"Maybe this ethnic cleansing is the same," said classmate Janin Taubert.

Most Jewish leaders have openly rejected the comparisons between the Nazi years and the current events in Yugoslavia that have been made this week and last by German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer.

The German government has drawn particularly sharp criticism from a group of concentration camp survivors opposed to the current NATO action.

In an open letter sent Sunday to Fischer and Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping, a group called Survivors of the Nazi Death Camp Auschwitz accused the German leaders of invoking the memory of the Nazi genocide to pursue an "inexcusable violation against the United Nations' Charter."

The letter's authors said anyone who weakens the United Nations' role in protecting human rights has "given up the right to use such anti-fascist postulates as 'No More Auschwitz.'"

In general, Jewish leaders in Germany have not criticized the NATO action, although they do find fault with historical comparisons to the Nazi era. Such comparisons are not necessary "in order to become involved and engaged," said Friedman, whose parents survived the Holocaust because they worked for Oskar Schindler.

"It's not that Milosevic would want to destroy or mutilate every Albanian person from the baby to the grown-up," said Drimmer, whose family lost hundreds of members in the Holocaust.

"If they would leave the country he couldn't care less," she added. "But that does not make it less terrible for the people who are suffering. I would compare this with the pogroms and murder of innocent people. For me, this is bad enough."

Germany is expecting to receive 10,000 refugees from Kosovo. About half that number arrived early this week, according to a government spokesperson in Bonn.

Last week, NATO members agreed to temporarily house some 100,000 Kosovar refugees. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israeli election promising gimmicks along with issues

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Boring it won't be.

With five candidates likely to run for prime minister and some 33 parties running for the Knesset, Israel's upcoming elections will be a jamboree of jingles, gimmicks and slick copy-writing.

So certain is the outlook for lively color and top-flight entertainment as the campaign heats up that the country barely bothered to grieve this week at the news that Rabbi Yosef Ba-Gad, one of the most entertaining figures in Israeli politics, is expected to be disqualified from the prime ministerial race.

Ba-Gad, a legislator from the religious far right in the 1992-1996 Knesset whose creative gimmickery gave him lots of air time, had the air taken out of his latest bid for national eminence when the Central Elections Committee found that many of the signatures on the petitions supporting his candidacy were forged and recommended that he be disqualified.

Every candidate for prime minister needs to have the names and addresses of 50,000 citizens on the petitions, or, as an alternative, have the backing of 10 Knesset members.

"At 23,000 forgeries, we stopped counting," an Elections Committee official said April 4 of Ba-Gad's petitions.

Another prime ministerial hopeful who professed shock and outrage last month at the discovery of rampant improprieties in his list of 50,000 names was Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, leader of the Herut Party.

In desperate straits as the midnight deadline for submitting the petitions loomed on March 30, Begin was eventually bailed out by the five Knesset members of the immigrant-rights party, Yisrael Ba'Aliyah. They, together with some of the legislators on Begin's list, a grouping of rightist parties, provided the requisite 10 Knesset supporters and saved his candidacy.

Interestingly, Rehavam Ze'evi, the Moledet leader and No. 2 man on Begin's joint list, refused to sign. Ze'evi opposes Begin's run for premier, believing it would weaken the re-election chances of incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Interestingly, too, the Knesset corridors were full of rumors that a last-minute intercession by Ehud Barak, the Labor Party leader, had persuaded Sharansky and his party to come forward and sign for Begin.

Barak, according to these rumors, is anxious to keep Begin in the ring, thus sapping Netanyahu's potential strength in the May 17 first round of voting. If none of the candidates wins more than 50 percent of the vote, a runoff is scheduled to be held June 1.

Begin, always seen as the "Mister Clean" of Israeli politics, appeared mortified at his brush with impropriety.

"We shall investigate this without letup," he vowed.

Observers suggested that Moledet loyalists may have been behind the spoiled petitions, signing false and duplicate names in a deliberate effort to derail Begin's candidacy.

According to the polls, Begin can look forward to picking up some 4 percent of the vote in the first round. This would place him fourth behind Netanyahu, Barak and Yitzhak Mordechai, leader of the Center Party, known in Israel by its Hebrew name, Mercaz.

Fifth and last in the present ratings is legislator Azmi Beshara, the first Israeli Arab to run for premier.

He, like Begin, faces strong opposition to his candidacy within his own camp.

Arab leaders from both the Hadash Communist bloc and the Islamic bloc — the two main movements in the Arab sector — accuse Beshara of egotism, saying he will weaken Barak's candidacy and in the process hurt the entire Israeli Arab community.

Political observers, working feverishly to decipher this complex situation, say Beshara is intent on helping Mordechai by trying to siphon Arab votes from Barak in the first round and increase Mordechai's chances of getting through to the runoff.

Mordechai is said to be the preferred candidate in Palestinian Authority circles, mainly because of his important role in bringing the negotiations surrounding the Wye accord to their successful conclusion last October — and because of his subsequent falling out with Netanyahu when the accord ran aground late last year.

Beshara, for his part, says he will not allow his candidacy to prejudice in any way the prospects for bringing Netanyahu down.

He says that if Mordechai quits, he will also quit — in order to afford Barak a better chance of getting 50 percent of the vote in the first round.

Meanwhile, the Elections Committee is now examining the credentials of the 33 parties and would-be parties that signed up by last week's registration deadline to run in May.

The number, which broke the previous record of 27, could change as the committee makes a final winnowing of the list before April 22.

Most are likely to survive, and to run. The newcomers include such special-interest groups as:

- The Casino Party — which seeks to legalize gambling;
- The Green Weed Party — whose platform calls for the legalization of marijuana and other recreational drugs;
- The Pnina Rosenblum Party — named for the cosmetics manufacturer, TV personality and former socialite who supports social issues, including women's rights;
- Strength to the Pensioners — a group that ran previously and was short by a whisker of getting the percentage of votes needed to enter the Knesset;
- Several environmental parties: the Greens, Law and Nature, and Voice of the Surroundings.
- Heritage of the Forefathers — led by Ba-Gad.

The messages of many of these parties remain veiled for the moment in tantalizing obscurity.

But they will explode upon the nation in full force three weeks or so before polling day, when the televised campaigning begins.

Each party gets a slice of the action on the small screen, though the parties in the outgoing Knesset get far more than the hopefuls and the unknowns.

The High Court of Justice recently ordered that both channels of Israel Television will be required to broadcast the pre-election ads. So non-political viewers will have to flee to the cable channels to escape the campaigns.

In fact, though, few people do.

Traditionally, the viewing public gets an enormous kick out of the often weird and sometimes wacky ads screened by some of the more esoteric parties. Often the next morning, people are whistling their jingles on the street or quoting their slogans in conversation.

But on polling day, in the large majority of cases, the new little one-issue parties that spring up each election season fall by the wayside, their songs and skits soon forgotten. □