



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 77, No. 78

Wednesday, April 28, 1999

82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### **Arafat nearing postponement**

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat gave his strongest indication yet that he will postpone a unilateral declaration.

"We are going through a very delicate period in the history of our people, a period during which we cannot afford making any mistakes," he said Tuesday before a meeting of the Palestinian Central Council. "We don't need to affirm our state because we are actually exercising statehood." [Page 1]

### **German war crimes trial begins**

A war crimes trial began in Germany of a former Gestapo agent who has admitted to killing some 500 people at a Nazi concentration camp during World War II.

Alfons Goetzfried, who admitted to the shootings at Majdanek when he was a witness in other trials, now denies the charges.

### **Arafat frees 3 prisoners**

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat freed from jail three Islamic militants involved in a series of suicide bus bombings in Israel, an Israeli newspaper reported Tuesday.

The paper quoted Palestinian security sources as saying Arafat released the prisoners last week to score points with Hamas in case Arafat does not declare statehood on May 4 and to secure a commitment from the Islamic group not to carry out terrorist attacks before the Israeli elections on May 17.

### **Israeli, U.S. defense chiefs meet**

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens met in Washington with U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen to discuss bilateral defense issues.

Arens was to meet with President Clinton's National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and congressional leaders before traveling to St. Louis to inspect U.S. fighter jets that Israel is considering purchasing.

### **Israelis sign deal with China**

Members of an Israeli delegation visiting China signed commercial deals worth a reported \$95 million Monday.

The deals cover agriculture, telecommunications, chemicals and medical equipment.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### **No matter what Arafat decides, Netanyahu will try to take credit**

*By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, battling for all he is worth to retain power in the upcoming elections, is trying to put a favorable spin on this week's diplomatic maneuvering between the United States and the Palestinians.

As President Clinton sent off a letter to Yasser Arafat urging both sides to "avoid unilateral acts and declarations," the Israeli premier was hailing his own steadfastness in facing down the threat of a unilateral Palestinian declaration of independence.

Netanyahu is seeking to make Arafat's stance on statehood a central issue of his campaign. This issue, along with his Cabinet's decision to reassert control over Jerusalem by closing the Palestinians' offices at Orient House in eastern Jerusalem, gives the prime minister what he sees as a no-lose situation in the elections.

If Arafat goes ahead and declares independence, then Netanyahu will argue that "a strong leader" — his election slogan — is required to face down the Palestinians. "[Ehud] Barak [the Labor Party candidate for premier] will sell out to Arafat," is another Likud Party election slogan, plastered on billboards across the nation.

If Arafat takes the advice of the international community and defers a declaration for now, Netanyahu will trumpet the victory in forcing the Palestinian leader to climb down from his widely publicized assertions that May 4 will be the Palestinians' independence day. Similarly, if the Israeli High Court permits the closure of offices in Orient House, and such action passes off without violence — Netanyahu will argue that he has kept his promise, originally made in the 1996 election campaign, to close down Orient House.

The government is seeking closure of Orient House on the grounds that the Palestinians conduct official Palestinian Authority business from there, which is forbidden by Israeli law and a violation of the Oslo accords.

If the police encounter resistance and mass violence ensues, Netanyahu, again, will underscore the "strong leader" rhetoric and point to Labor's alleged equivocation on the future of Jerusalem.

Aware of these considerations, Arafat is expected to bob and weave his way past May 4, and indeed past May 17, Israel's election day, without sustaining a knockout punch either from Netanyahu or from his own formidable domestic opposition.

On Tuesday, Arafat gave an indication that he will postpone a unilateral declaration.

"We are going through a very delicate period in the history of our people, a period during which we cannot afford making any mistakes," he said. "We don't need to affirm our state because we are actually exercising statehood."

Some observers on the Palestinian side predicted this week that the Palestinian Central Council's deliberations on a state declaration — which began on Tuesday — would drag on for many weeks without a decision, precisely to bypass the danger dates.

Others suggested the veteran Palestinian leader would succeed in persuading his tense and divided constituency that the American president's letter, with its broad hints at eventual Palestinian independence with U.S. support, is worth another year's delay.

The U.S. letter, along with similar coaxing by governments in the Mideast and around the world — and tough threats from Netanyahu — are expected to persuade Arafat to agree to defer the planned declaration. Clinton's letter, leaked in the Israeli

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Arab candidate stays in race

Israel's High Court of Justice on Tuesday rejected a petition requesting that the prime ministerial candidacy of Arab legislator Azmi Beshara be disqualified.

The petition was brought by an Israeli citizen who said Beshara had declared in an interview that Israel did not have the right to exist as a Jewish state.

### Sentence stiffened for teen

Israel's Supreme Court on Monday stiffened the sentence to four years in prison of a youth convicted of killing an Arab man near Hebron by hitting him in the head with a wooden board.

The perpetrator killed the man by sticking the board out of the window of the vehicle in which he was riding.

The Supreme Court explained its move by saying he had singled out the victim because he was an Arab.

### Army officer refused position

The Israeli army's chief of staff decided Monday not to advance a senior officer who had an affair three years ago with a soldier serving under him.

Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz decided not to allow Brig. Gen. Nir Galili to lead an army corps after the Supreme Court recently ruled that Galili should not be promoted to major general because of the affair.

### Report: French suspects in Israel

French police believe that four masterminds of what is believed to be the largest fraud scheme in France in the 20th century, all of whom are dual citizens of France and Israel, are hiding out in Israel, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The four include the ringleader of the scheme, who is suspected of setting up more than 700 straw companies that were used to defraud some 33 banks of an estimated \$88 million. Israel's Knesset last week amended a law, making the extradition of citizens who had committed crimes abroad easier.



## Daily News Bulletin

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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).  
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newspapers Ha'aretz and Yediot Achronot on Monday, is reported to contain a new target date: May 2000. The U.S. reportedly pledges in the letter to work for a quick resumption of accelerated final-status negotiations after the Israeli elections next month.

The Yediot report of the letter was particularly resonant: It had Clinton paraphrasing the words of "Hatikvah," the Israeli national anthem: "Am hofshi b'artzam" (a free people in their land), to define Washington's vision of the Palestinian future.

"It's a Balfour Declaration to the Palestinians," said Knesset Member Shlomo Ben-Ami of the Labor Party, congratulating Netanyahu on his role in the creation of Palestinian sovereignty.

But government officials signaled they could live with the letter, since the target date seemed more in the nature of a hope than a binding deadline. The Israeli position is that the final-status talks have no binding cutoff date, and that Palestinian rule in parts of the West Bank and Gaza continues in effect unless and until replaced by a new agreement.

Official sources also point to the apparent fact that Arafat's negotiators in Washington failed to get from the U.S. administration what it most wanted — a commitment to recognize a Palestinian state if it is declared in May 2000, or indeed whenever it is declared. The Americans insist, apparently, on leaving their options open at this stage and Clinton's letter carefully avoids pre-empting future decisions.

The ruling Likud, under Netanyahu, opposes Palestinian statehood, though some of its members have conceded that this is the likely outcome of future peace negotiations.

The main opposition Labor Party does not oppose statehood, though it says it would only agree to an effectively unarmed state hedged with security constraints.

Beneath the surface, however, there was consternation among government officials here at the extent of Clinton's reported presidential promises to Arafat.

Observers here noted that this was the first instance of such a letter of assurances from Washington to the Palestinians without parallel assurances being offered to the Israeli side. These observers saw this as evidence of the poor state of relations between the Netanyahu government and the Clinton administration.

Netanyahu, however, insists that it was he who brought about the recent diplomatic events in the first place. He assured a radio interviewer on Monday that Arafat's apparent decision not to make a unilateral declaration was the result of his own dire threats to take swift and tough action in response if Arafat went ahead with his proposed declaration.

"As a result of this statement and our stance for the past few months, the Palestinian Authority realized that it had to back down," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu's Likud Party reiterated that determination Sunday in its official election manifesto, asserting that a unilateral declaration of independence by the Palestinian Authority would constitute a material breach of the Oslo and Wye accords and would effectively nullify them.

The platform stopped short, however, of previous statements by party leaders that Israel's response would be to annex unilaterally parts of the West Bank. □

## Warsaw Jews hire rabbi

ROME (JTA) — Marking a milestone in efforts to revive Jewish communal life in Poland, the Jewish community in Warsaw has hired a rabbi to serve as a spiritual leader in the Polish capital.

Rabbi Baruch Rabinowicz will be the first rabbi believed to be employed by the Warsaw community in at least 40 years.

Rabinowicz, a centrist Orthodox rabbi who was born in Russia and educated in Denmark, and who attended yeshiva in Israel, will take up his post next month, a community representative said.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation — which support most Jewish religious, educational and social welfare activities in Poland — will contribute the necessary funds.

Thousands of Jews around the country, most of them born after World War II, have reclaimed their Jewish identities in the past decade. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Russia charges tycoon

Russian prosecutors charged a tycoon with Jewish roots with money-laundering and barred him from leaving Moscow.

After President Boris Yeltsin's 1996 re-election, Boris Berezovsky briefly held a post in the Kremlin as deputy secretary of Russia's advisory Security Council.

Berezovsky, as well as the other so-called financial oligarchs, have seen their influence wane since the collapse of the Russian economy last August and the subsequent appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as the country's prime minister.

### Clinton praises Reform leader

President Clinton praised Reform leader Rabbi David Saperstein as a passionate defender of religious liberty and a moral leader who "does his dead-level best" to turn his words into action.

Clinton was among 700 people, including members of Congress, administration officials, religious leaders and Jewish activists, who paid tribute on Monday night to Saperstein, who is marking 25 years as the director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

### Groups merge in South Africa

The three major Jewish organizations in Johannesburg will centralize many of their functions during the next six months. The move involving the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the South African Zionist Federation and the Israel United Appeal-United Communal Fund was taken because of the decrease in the past decade of the South African Jewish community, which now numbers 90,000.

All three groups will continue to have their own professional and lay leaderships.

### Trial ordered for neo-Nazis

An Italian judge recently ordered a trial for 25 neo-Nazi skinheads for spreading racist ideology.

The judge's move followed an investigation, launched after a December 1996 desecration of one of the main Jewish cemeteries in Rome, turned up a group of neo-Nazis called the Hammerskins.

According to the investigation, the group has members in several Italian cities and has links with similar groups in other countries.

### Wiesenthal Center issues CD-Rom

The Simon Wiesenthal Center recently released a CD-Rom documenting extremism on the Internet. "Digital Hate 2000" surveys 1,400 online hate sites targeting a range of religious and ethnic groups.

A version of the CD designed for law-enforcement officials and educators includes a database that can be updated.

## Britain's Jews warned they may be next targets of neo-Nazi attack

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Britain's Jewish community has gone on a state of high alert following two bombings, apparently by a neo-Nazi group, in ethnic areas of London on consecutive Saturday afternoons.

The alert, issued to Jewish organizations last Monday by the Jewish Community Security Trust, followed widespread speculation that the bombers would aim next at a Jewish target.

In a message to Jewish organizations, the trust — which provides a low-profile defense of the community — said it was "extremely concerned that the Jewish community may be a potential target." It urged the 350,000-strong community to be "extra vigilant during this potentially volatile period."

The first bomb, which was placed in a busy shopping area of the predominantly black London district of Brixton, left 39 people injured, 14 seriously.

The second, last Saturday, was placed in the market street of Brick Lane, a mostly Bangladeshi area of the East End. Seven people were injured in that attack.

The police are now convinced that the bombings are racially motivated, and the commissioner of London's Metropolitan Police, Sir Paul Condon, said he had "very serious fears" that there will be "a continuing series of vicious attacks."

Speaking in Parliament this week, British Home Secretary Jack Straw deplored the "pernicious" bombings and promised that the perpetrators would be apprehended.

"Any attack on these communities is an attack on all British people and on all British society," Straw said.

Police believe the bombings were conducted by Combat-18, a small, violent organization that broke with the far-right National Front, now virtually defunct, in the mid-1980s. Combat-18 — the first and eighth letter of the alphabet corresponding to Hitler's initials — has claimed responsibility for the bombings in calls to police.

Another leading suspect is a Combat-18 splinter group, the White Wolves, which is thought to consider Combat-18 too soft.

The White Wolves have warned Jews, as well as black and Asian immigrants, to leave Britain by the end of the year or face extermination.

A 15-page document produced by the White Wolves provides its members with details of a strategy for provoking racial conflict: "Our main line of attack must be the immigrants themselves," said the document.

Community Security Trust Director Mike Whine said it was logical to anticipate that after attacks on the black and Asian communities, the next bombing would be directed against a Jewish group. □

## Anti-fascist festival held in Moscow

MOSCOW (JTA) — Performers from Russia, the United States and Israel have kicked off an anti-fascist festival in Moscow.

The performance, held last week at Moscow's giant Olympic Sports Complex and timed to coincide with the 51st anniversary of the state of Israel, launched a nine-day festival named after Solomon Mikhoels, a Russian Jewish actor murdered in 1948 at Stalin's orders. The festival comes as Russia faces a surge of anti-Semitism that began after the collapse of its economy last August.

The cross-cultural spirit of the festival was highlighted at the kickoff event by such diverse performers as the popular Russian Jewish singer Josef Kobzon, American singer Art Garfunkel and a Jewish rap artist named Remedy, whose recordings on the subject of the Holocaust have sold millions of copies worldwide.

In addition to fighting fascism, the festival also seeks to raise the status of Jewish culture in Russia, said Mikhail Gluz, a Russian Jewish composer and musical producer who organized the event.

The festival is scheduled to include the premieres of several dramas on Jewish-related themes directed by Russians, as well as a klezmer competition. □

## Flap over Arab appointee reignites debate over Jews

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Controversy swirling around the views of an Arab American aide at the U.S. State Department has reignited debate about the large number of Jews handling Middle East affairs for the Clinton administration.

The flap stems from a campaign by the Zionist Organization of America to oust Joseph Zogby, who wrote at least two articles critical of Israel before he was hired by Martin Indyk, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs.

Indyk, one of at least five Jews working in senior Clinton administration positions that deal with Arab-Israeli relations, has been attacked in the Arab world since 1997, when he became the first Jew to be in charge of U.S. Middle East policy.

Zogby is the first Arab American to work for the Near East bureau in decades, according to Arab American activists.

As news of Zogby's views spread, the ensuing controversy opened some old wounds in the Jewish American and Arab American communities.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, accused Indyk of hiring Zogby in an attempt to silence criticism that too many Jews control U.S. Middle East policy.

At the same time, Zogby's father, James Zogby, the president of the Arab American Institute, said that because of the "disproportionate number of Jews," the State Department should hire more Arab Americans.

Somewhere in this debate rests the fate of a 29-year-old lawyer who was appointed for a one-year term to serve as an aide to Indyk, writing speeches and memos.

Indyk, who did not respond directly to Foxman's charges, said Zogby is not working on issues that affect Israel.

"There are very few Arab Americans working in the State Department in any area," Indyk told the Associated Press. "The Clinton administration is committed to a diverse workplace, and in that context we do feel it is important to have Arab Americans in the State Department."

After initially telling Jewish officials that Zogby was planning to leave the State Department when his term was up in August, Indyk now says he is up for a promotion.

Contrary to what ZOA has reported, Zogby "has not been fired or ousted nor will he be," Indyk said in response to a question at the ADL's annual Washington leadership conference on Monday.

Although Indyk expressed support for Zogby, he criticized to the ADL gathering his aide's views on Israel as "distasteful and disturbing" and said that "the views he expressed then are not acceptable to me or to this administration."

In two published letters written in 1998 from Israel and the West Bank, Zogby criticized the Oslo peace accords for producing "swiss-cheese cantons and de jure discrimination." It is "undeniably accurate" that the Palestinians live in an "apartheid state," he wrote.

He also criticized the United States for "willful ineffectuality" and for not acting to "level the power imbalance between the two parties, allowing Israel to unilaterally impose its interpretations of the Oslo accords."

Zogby also accused Israel of abusing human rights and acting

like a colonizer, similar to the "genocidal treatment of the Native Americans and enslavement of African-Americans."

Zogby grew up in the United States but spent two years in Israel and the West Bank. He founded the Palestine Peace Project, which brings American lawyers and law students to land under the Palestinian Authority's control to volunteer with local legal and human rights organizations.

While critical of Zogby's views, Indyk defended him for writing "in anguish, not in anger."

"He was not then and is not now an Israel-hater," said Indyk, who having anticipated questions on the subject at his ADL appearance, read from a lengthy prepared statement.

Indyk's response prompted Foxman to declare the issue "closed," but he expressed hope that Zogby would leave the State Department when his term was over.

Morton Klein, the ZOA president who lobbied against Indyk's nomination when he was up for his post in 1997, attacked him last week at a meeting convened by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Klein accused Zogby of holding "extremist, anti-Israel views" and said that those views "should disqualify him" from being involved with U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Klein vowed to "do all we can" to ensure Zogby's ouster if he decides to stay at the State Department.

Joseph Zogby declined to comment on the situation.

But Zogby's father, James, a prominent Arab American activist, attacked Klein for quoting his son's writings out of context and for leading a campaign "worse than McCarthyism."

The elder Zogby also lambasted the Jewish community for not standing up to Klein.

"Why is it that everyone in the Jewish community rolls their eyes at him but two days later they're all reading off the same page?" Zogby asked.

Klein is well known in the Jewish world for having launched campaigns — some successful and some not — against nominees for a variety of posts because of their views on Israel, including John Roth, a candidate to run a department of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Roth eventually resigned from the post at the Holocaust museum before he took office.

While some Jewish leaders privately criticized Klein's tactics, they defended their views that Zogby should not be at the State Department.

Meanwhile, some Jewish officials softened their rhetoric against Zogby.

"I'm troubled by what he wrote," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents.

At the same time, "it's gotten blown out of proportion," Hoenlein said after the New York Post wrote in an editorial last week that Zogby "shouldn't be working as a dogcatcher."

Many activists expressed hope that the passions over the controversy would eventually give way to substantive debate over who should be setting Middle East policy.

James Zogby expressed concern that the State Department is viewing the Middle East only through a Jewish lens.

"You would not want people there who do not understand the Holocaust, the history of persecution of Jews, anti-Semitism," he said. At the same time, "we need somebody who understands not just the Palestinians but other countries as well." □