



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 77, No. 84

Thursday, May 6, 1999

82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Jewish groups helping victims

Jewish groups are among local organizations coordinating relief and fund-raising efforts in the wake of Monday's tornadoes in Oklahoma and Kansas that killed at least 43 people and destroyed more than 1,500 buildings.

Checks may be sent to: Tornado Relief, The Jewish Federation of Greater Oklahoma City, 710 West Wilshire, Suite C, Oklahoma City, Okla. 73116; and Emmanuel Synagogue, 900 NW 47th St., Oklahoma City, Okla. 73118.

In addition, B'nai B'rith International has opened a relief fund to supply food, clothing and other necessities to disaster victims: B'nai B'rith Center for Community Action, 1640 Rhode Island Ave., NW, Washington D.C. 2003.

Meanwhile, the local Lubavitch emissary is distributing toys and games to children and offering counseling at relief shelters: Chabad-Lubavitch of Oklahoma City, 6401 Lennox, Oklahoma City, Okla. 73116.

### Clinton concerned about Vanunu

President Clinton expressed concern about the conditions under which Israel is holding Mordechai Vanunu, an Israeli scientist in prison since 1986 for disclosing Israel's nuclear weapons capabilities to The Times of London.

Responding to a letter from 36 members of Congress who asked Clinton to intervene on the scientist's behalf, the president promised to raise Vanunu's condition during meetings with Israeli officials.

Clinton, in a letter to the legislators dated April 22 but released this week, also said, "I share your concerns about the Israeli nuclear program" and promised to continue to urge Israel to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

### Report: Arafat waiting for July

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat has reportedly put off until July a decision on whether to declare an independent state, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Wednesday.

The paper, quoting senior Palestinian sources, said that by then, the Palestinians will have a better sense of the makeup of the new Israeli government and what its peace policy may be.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Abdullah's recent Syria courtship first departure from Hussein's path

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A recent trip made by Jordan's King Abdullah to Syria has provided a strong indication that the monarch is embarking on a new course that could upset the old certainties about the Hashemite kingdom.

While it is generally thought that Abdullah will broadly maintain Jordan's pro-Western tilt, it is becoming equally accepted that he plans to diverge somewhat from the path of his father and predecessor, King Hussein.

In recent weeks, Abdullah has assiduously — and successfully — courted the Persian Gulf states, which had shunned King Hussein over his perceived orientation toward Iraq's Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

But most significant among Abdullah's new departures is the remarkable rapprochement he has engineered with Syria, a potentially dangerous enemy that had harbored a profound hostility toward his late father, particularly after Hussein signed the 1994 peace treaty with Israel.

While the Jordanian-Syrian rapprochement appears set to deepen and strengthen, Arab sources in London are saying this week that the new relationship will not come at the expense of Israeli-Jordanian peace.

On the contrary, they say, a central Syrian interest in improving ties with Abdullah is to use Jordan as a bridge to Britain and the United States with the aim of putting Damascus back on the map of international diplomacy.

They also point out that when Abdullah recently traveled to Damascus, the Syrians asked him to use his good offices when he visits London and Washington later this month to revive Israeli-Syrian negotiations. Those talks were suspended in 1996 by former Prime Minister Shimon Peres when Syrian President Hafez Assad failed to condemn a series of terror attacks against Israel at the time.

The sources are emphatic that improved ties with Syria do not indicate that Abdullah is backing away from the 1994 treaty with Israel.

They also stress that Syria has not asked Jordan to reassess its ties with Israel.

Indeed, they add, relations between Jordan and Israel are likely to improve, particularly if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is defeated in the May 17 elections.

The first tentative steps toward a rapprochement between Syria and Jordan started shortly before the death of Hussein, who is said to have believed that after Netanyahu's election in 1996, Jordan faced the prospect of losing its relations with Syria while not winning the fruits of peace with Israel. But, say the sources, progress toward a full-blown detente was limited — as was the case with the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, the first Arab leader to make peace with the Jewish state — by the fact that it was Hussein's hand that signed the treaty with Israel.

The recent turnaround in Syria's attitude toward Jordan was signaled when Assad personally attended Hussein's funeral last February, surprising even his own officials, who had expected Vice President Abdelhalim Khaddam to represent Syria.

Relations have strengthened faster than expected because of the apparently warm relations that have developed between Abdullah and Assad's son and heir apparent, Bashar, who has been given the responsibility of fostering Syria's relations with Jordan.

One indication of improved relations was the announcement this week that Syria and Jordan are to go ahead with the joint construction of the Unity Dam on the Yarmuk

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israel strikes deep in Lebanon

Israeli jets struck a Hezbollah command center Tuesday in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley this week. Israeli air force helicopters also rocketed Hezbollah targets north of the security zone.

The airstrikes marked the second time this year that Israel has struck deep into Lebanon.

### Group calls for blank ballots

A fervently Orthodox group is calling on voters in the Israeli town of Bnei Brak to leave their ballots blank rather than vote for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The group believes that the move will enable leaders of the community, which overwhelmingly supported Netanyahu in the 1996 election, to negotiate a place in the government of Ehud Barak should the Labor Party candidate win the election.

### Arad's 41st birthday marked

The family and supporters of missing Israeli airman Ron Arad marked his 41st birthday Wednesday.

Arad's mother, Batya, called on foreign nations to condition their ties with Iran on her son's return. Arad bailed out of his fighter plane over Lebanon in 1986 and was believed to have been held by pro-Iranian troops in Lebanon. Israeli officials have repeatedly maintained that Iran is holding him.

### Hassan urges peace vote

King Hassan of Morocco urged Jews of Moroccan origin to vote for peace in Israel's upcoming elections.

"The Middle East area deserves peace," the monarch told a delegation of some 100 Israeli ministers, legislators and rabbis during an audience in his palace in Marrakech on Monday. The monarch's message was widely viewed as being directed against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom Hassan has repeatedly refused to meet.



## 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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River, a project that was first discussed in 1987 but has been on a back burner ever since.

The sources believe that Syria's model for future relations with Abdullah's Jordan is similar to those established with President Hosni Mubarak's Egypt.

Both Egypt and Jordan have seemingly irrevocable peace treaties with Israel, but — as far as Assad is concerned — the current leaders of both are untainted by personal involvement in those treaties.

Assad now wants Abdullah, like Mubarak, to persuade Britain and the United States to refocus their attention on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process and to resume negotiations at the point where the Syrians say they had reached under Israel's previous Labor government. It is also understood that all the Gulf leaders whom Abdullah has met during a flurry of Middle East visits during the past two months have reinforced this point and asked him to intercede on Syria's behalf.

Abdullah is likely to be a willing intercessor, particularly if this serves to accelerate the process of normalizing relations with Syria and expanding the circle of Arab states engaged in the peace process.

This will not only reduce Jordan's isolation and vulnerability within the Arab context, but also help to establish and legitimize Abdullah's rule.

It is also suggested that close relations with Syria could serve to buttress Jordan in the face of an ambitious and assertive Palestinian leadership that might seek to destabilize the Hashemite throne.

Meanwhile, there is another, even more sensitive, item on Syria's agenda than ending its sense of marginalization in the peace process and reinstating Damascus on the itineraries of visiting U.S. secretaries of state. Assad understands that it is in Abdullah's power to apply the brakes to Jordan's relationship with Turkey and ensure that the nascent cooperation between Israel, Jordan and Turkey does not develop into a full-blown trilateral strategic alliance that could threaten Syria.

Abdullah's response to such a proposal — which touches directly on his kingdom's vital strategic interests — will provide the most valuable clue to Jordan's future geopolitical posture in general and its relations with Israel in particular. □

## Australian chapter of Maccabi urges boycott of future games

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY (JTA) — The Australian chapter of the Maccabi sports organization is urging a boycott of future Maccabi events until further action is taken concerning a tragedy at the Maccabi Games two years ago that killed four Australian athletes.

The boycott call followed months of pressure from the families of the four Australian athletes who died and the 70 who were injured when a bridge collapsed during the opening ceremony of the 1997 games in Ramat Gan, Israel.

Maccabi Australia said last week that it would not take part in future events unless certain conditions are met, including that the president and chairman of the Maccabi World Union step down pending the completion of an Israeli inquiry into the tragedy, and that a credible offer of compensation is made to the injured and to the families of those who were killed.

The ultimatum came in the same week as the Knesset held a teleconference inquiry about the tragedy.

With families of the victims, their representatives and community leaders participating from Australia, the inquiry heard testimony marked by tears.

Lynne Zines, whose husband, Warren, died as a result of the bridge collapse, told the Knesset members of the "anger and distress that I deal with daily."

Speaker after speaker expressed pain and anger, with Peter Wertheim of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry describing the world union's response to the tragedy as a "prevarication, an attempt to avoid responsibility, buck-passing."

Participants were particularly distraught when Amir Peled, the world union's representative at the hearing, defended the group's president and chairman for remaining in their positions. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Pollster tracks trends in Israeli and U.S. opinions on the Mideast

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israelis want peace, but most are not willing to sacrifice for it.

Most Palestinians support the concept of the peace process, but fewer have confidence in specific agreements made with Israel.

These ranges in public opinion are the findings of polls that have examined attitudes in and toward the Middle East during the past decade.

Mina Zemach, director of the largest polling firm in Israel, recently presented a compilation of survey findings at a conference in New York on the state of Jewish opinion. Her talk did not directly address the upcoming Israeli election, but the polls she cited did cover many issues prominent in the campaign.

Speaking to about 75 demographers and representatives from American Jewish organizations, Zemach concluded that "the majority of Israelis support the peace process," but "are not willing to pay the price." This reluctance, she said, stems not from ideology but from security concerns. As proof, she points to two separate surveys conducted in March by her Dahuf Opinion Poll.

One indicates that 55 percent of Israelis agree with the concept of a Palestinian state. But the other shows that the number jumps to 62 percent when the question is qualified with the assurance that a Palestinian state would not have an army.

Zemach said 20 percent supported a Palestinian state in 1991 — before the Oslo accords were signed — rising to 29 percent after Oslo and 52 percent after Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated.

The April 22 conference was sponsored by the New York-based Givat Haviva Educational Foundation, which raises money for a Jewish-Arab cross-cultural education center in Israel.

Two Palestinian organizations have gotten into the polling business since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994.

At the conference, Bishara Bahbah, a member of the Palestinian delegation to the 1993 Oslo accords, presented results from periodic polls taken among residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip by the Center for Palestinian Research and Studies in Nablus and the Jerusalem Center for Media Studies.

In late January, the Nablus center found that 73 percent of those Palestinians supported the peace process with Israel.

Most Palestinians surveyed in a November 1998 poll — 59 percent — supported the Wye agreement signed last October, although 64 percent said they believed its implementation would lead to internal conflict among Palestinians. Only 19 percent believed that Israel would ever implement the pact.

Bahbah, who directs a consulting firm in Virginia, also presented results of a survey from early January that measured Palestinians' impressions of various democracies. Seventy-five percent of the respondents said they had a favorable opinion of Israel's democracy, 67 percent had a positive view of the American system and only 32 percent said the same of the Palestinian Authority.

As the Israeli elections near, Israelis can expect to be polled persistently, as they were prior to the last election for prime minister in May 1996. The race between Benjamin Netanyahu and Shimon Peres was so close that contradictory polls appeared election week, each calling a different winner by the same slim margin.

This year, the Centrist Party — under former Likud Defense Minister and prime ministerial candidate Yitzhak Mordechai — is throwing a curve ball at those who would try to predict the May 17 outcome. A number of vote-swinging scenarios has been bandied about in anticipation of a June runoff, which will occur if none of the five candidates for prime minister garner more than 50 percent of the vote in the first round.

Zemach steered clear of political polls during her appearance, but she did touch on one view that, according to her research, has remained constant since 1990. Asked whether Israel should take American Jews' opinions into account when designing its policies, most Israelis have said yes: 65 percent in 1990 and 62 percent in 1999. □

#### Insurance talks open in London

Representatives of European insurers and Jewish organizations convened Wednesday in London for two days of talks aimed at resolving claims dating back to World War II.

During the meeting of the International Conference on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, one of the insurers, Assicurazioni Generali of Italy, presented a CD-ROM containing some 100,000 names and information about policies issued in Eastern Europe before World War II.

Officials in Israel plan to use the information to determine how many of the policyholders were Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

In a series of hearings hosted by U.S. insurance commissioners last year, numerous witnesses charged that the European insurers have been stalling for 50 years to avoid payment on policies taken out by Jews before the war.

#### German firms face new suits

Mothers forced by the Nazis to work for Volkswagen plan to sue the car-maker this week for the deaths of their babies, a lawyer representing Holocaust victims said Tuesday.

"These children were killed by design and neglect," Michael Hausfeld, a Washington-based attorney told the Reuters news agency.

Similar charges will be filed later against other German firms, including Krupp and Mercedes-Benz, Hausfeld said.

#### Hillary Clinton to speak at dinner

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton is scheduled to be the featured speaker at an American Jewish Committee dinner Thursday night in Washington.

Clinton is replacing U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who traveled to Europe for meetings regarding the crisis in Kosovo.

#### TV episode causes stir

An episode of "The Practice" that aired Sunday elicited an outcry from Jewish viewers of the popular ABC television series.

Anti-Defamation League offices across the country say they have been "deluged" by calls about the show's depiction of a legal case in which a synagogue offers to settle with an African-American woman who accuses its rabbi of rape.

In a letter to the show's executive producer, David Kelley, ADL National Director Abraham Foxman chastises the program for evoking "an ages-old canard about Jews and money."

He also criticizing the episode for portraying the synagogue's board as "conniving, insular Jews, scheming and plotting."

## Wealthy Austrian family claims Albright's father stole paintings

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A wealthy Austrian family is demanding that U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and her family return millions of dollars worth of “war booty” allegedly taken from their apartment in Prague after World War II.

Philip Harmer, head of a family of former Austrian industrialists and landowners, alleges that Albright's father, Josef Korbel, took 20 17th-century Dutch paintings, antique furniture and silver from his family's apartment in Prague.

“I cannot believe that the secretary of state of the U.S. and her brother and sister enjoy eating with my family's silver, while surrounded by my family's paintings and furniture,” said Harmer, now a management consultant in Vienna.

“I find it impossible to believe that they are not prepared to make amends for this injustice.”

During the war years, the Korbel family found refuge in London, where they learned that many Jewish members of their family had perished in the Holocaust.

Albright, who was raised as a Roman Catholic and later became an Episcopalian, said she first learned she had Jewish ancestors when it was reported by *The Washington Post* in February 1997.

Immediately after the war, Josef Korbel was appointed a diplomat in the postwar Czech Foreign Ministry and the family, including daughter Madeleine, returned to the Czech capital in late 1945.

Meanwhile, the new Communist government in Prague had expelled more than 3 million Germans, and while Harmer insists that “not one member of my family ever had anything to do with the Nazis,” he says, “The climate in Prague at the time was so anti-German that my family had no option but to leave.”

Before leaving, however, they took the precaution of moving their collection of paintings to another apartment where Harmer's great-aunt, a Swiss national, was living.

When the Korbels returned to Prague, they took up residence in the Harmer family's vacated apartment, where Josef Korbel immediately noticed patches on the wall where the paintings had hung. According to Harmer, he “demanded that the housekeepers tell him where they were. He then went round to my great-aunt's flat and removed them.”

These allegations are supported by a letter written to Albright by Harmer's 89-year-old great-grandmother, Ruth Harmer-Nebrich.

“Your father did not care,” she wrote. “He threatened my sister in a very nasty way and, as she was a rather weak and sick person, she did not resist, and so the paintings had to be brought back to the place where he had moved in.”

When Korbel was posted to the Czech Embassy in Belgrade, the letter continues, “Mr. Korbel took every single item with him.

“He also took valuable silver and bed linen that Jewish families had asked us to keep for them during the Nazi occupation.”

While in Belgrade, Korbel decided to move to the United States with his family. Harmer believes Korbel sold some of the paintings, but he is convinced that several artworks are in the homes of Albright's younger brother, John Korbel, in Arlington,

Va., and her sister, Kathy. Harmer's initially cordial correspondence with the family, however, met with a rebuff from John Korbel's lawyer.

“Given the lack of evidence of ownership by Mrs. Nebrich of the items in question and the strong evidence they were expropriated by the Czech authorities, we can only conclude that your family does not have any claim against our clients,” wrote Michael Jaffe.

Harmer, however, contends that the Czech authorities have no evidence that the paintings were confiscated. Moreover, American journalist Michael Dobbs, whose biography of Albright will be published later this month, says he identified two of the paintings while interviewing John Korbel at his home.

The paintings are said to be hanging in Korbel's living room.

Korbel is said to have told Dobbs that Kathy had another painting that formerly belonged to their father, but he insisted that Albright herself had none at her home in Washington.

Korbel rejected suggestions that the paintings had been looted, insisting that his father would have paid for them or would have been given them by the Czech government.

Harmer, however, has a different version.

“Josef Korbel just told my great-aunt, ‘These are hard times,’ when he took away the family paintings.

“It was understandable, considering what the Nazis did to his family,” said Harmer, “but it was not necessarily right.”

Despite the brushoffs he has received so far from lawyers representing Albright's family, Harmer is determined to press his family's claims and has set a May 15 deadline for restitution to be made.

“We are assuming that the Albrights are honest people,” he added, “and that they will want to clear up this matter as soon as possible.” □

## Museum crisis brews in Canada

TORONTO (JTA) — A national Canadian museum commemorating genocide in the 20th century may disrupt the government's plans for a Holocaust museum in the country, according to Canadian Jewish officials.

John Gregorovich, chairman of the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association, is spearheading the campaign for the genocide museum.

He has fashioned a coalition of some 20 Canadian ethnic associations with participants from diverse backgrounds, including Asian, Armenian, Turkish and Palestinian.

The coalition, Canadians for a Genocide Museum, is proposing a museum that would focus on events such as the Turkish atrocities in Armenia during World War I, Stalin's enforced famine in Ukraine in the 1930s, the mass murders in Rwanda, Bosnia and Cambodia, as well as the Nazi slaughter of 6 million Jews.

Moshe Ronen, national president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, said his group has no objection to a separate genocide museum, but that the Holocaust museum should go ahead as planned.

While Gregorovich criticizes “Jewish lobbying” for a museum that would concentrate only on Jewish losses, Sol Littman, Canadian representative of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, said Gregorovich is manipulating the ethnic associations. □