



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 77, No. 85

Friday, May 7, 1999

82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Shells land inside Israel

Shells fired from southern Lebanon landed inside northern Israel Thursday, moderately wounding an Israeli citizen. Initial reports suggested that the shells might have been targeted at Israeli army positions along the border.

Earlier in the day, a salvo directed at Israel Defense Force positions also landed near the northern border, but did not cause any damage or injuries.

### U.S. steps in on Orient House

The United States stepped into a dispute between Israel and the Palestinian Authority over Israeli demands that three offices in Orient House, the Palestinians' de facto headquarters in eastern Jerusalem, be shut down.

During a meeting Thursday, U.S. Ambassador Edward Walker persuaded Israel's public security minister, Avigdor Kahalani, to postpone the closure order by a day. U.S. officials are concerned the dispute could lead to violent protests.

### Insurance agreement reached

Jewish groups and European insurers agreed Thursday that policies dating back to the Holocaust should have interest and present-day currency values factored in when the policies are paid out. [Page 3]

### N.Y. approves bank merger

The New York State Banking Board approved Deutsche Bank's \$10.1 billion takeover of Bankers Trust. Thursday's approval came after Jewish groups and New York City's top financial official, Alan Hevesi, dropped their opposition to the proposed merger, saying Germany's largest bank was making progress in handling Holocaust-era issues.

### Russian shul attacked twice

Vandals attacked a synagogue in the Russian region of Birobidzhan twice during the past week.

In the first attack, a menorah in the synagogue was damaged; in the second, a window was broken, a metal Star of David was ripped out of the synagogue wall and swastikas created out of stones were set up outside the synagogue.

Authorities in the area, declared a homeland for Jews by Stalin some 70 years ago, said the attacks were the works of hooligans.

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### Jewish parents turn to medical technology to conceive children

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Dr. David Barad talks about “the birds and the bees,” his subject matter has more to do with petri dishes and test tubes than romantic embraces.

On any afternoon, Barad, director of reproductive endocrinology at New York's Montefiore Medical Center, can expect a visit from some among the one in 10 American couples affected by infertility — defined by most experts as the inability to conceive after one year of unprotected intercourse.

Speaking at a recent conference in New York, Barad summed up the typical questions couples ask.

“What can be done? How much does in-vitro fertilization cost? Why does insurance not cover it? What are the risks? Can you make sure we have twins?”

Barad's audience at the April 14 conference, “Assisted Reproductive Technologies and the Jewish Community,” had come to learn the answers to those questions.

Organized by the American Jewish Congress' Commission for Women's Equality, the meeting was cosponsored by representatives of eight national Jewish women's organizations — Women of Reform Judaism, Na'amat USA, Jewish Women International, Women's League for Conservative Judaism, Women's American ORT, UJA-Federation of New York, the Leadership Conference of National Jewish Women's Groups and the AJCongress — that have traditionally been advocates for Jewish women's health issues.

Concerns of “family and women combined with religious and ethical aspects are a commonplace on our agenda,” said Ellen Rosenberg, executive director of Women of Reform Judaism. Now these issues are becoming part of bioethical and religious debates about making babies.

Statistically, Jews are no more prone to infertility than are members of other ethnic or religious groups, but anecdotal evidence indicates that many turn to medical technologies to conceive children.

Highly educated and professionally accomplished, Jewish women tend to marry late in life. The Jewish feminist magazine *Lilith* has reported that Jewish women, at 15 percent, are twice as likely as non-Jewish Caucasian American women to remain unmarried into their 40s.

Newsweek recently reported that the incidence of infertility is evenly split between men and women, with about 10 to 20 percent of cases remaining “unexplained.” Still, the report says, doctors see “advanced maternal age” as a “formidable enemy of fertility.”

Judaism's emphasis on children and a theological sense that Jews should play an active role in improving the world also contribute to the pursuit of expensive, time-intensive and emotionally draining cycles of hormone injections, in-vitro fertilizations or artificial inseminations.

Rabbi Aaron Mackler, another conference speaker, attributed some of the Jewish openness to reproductive therapies to “a general sense of valuing medicine, valuing human improvement of the world and valuing children.”

In Israel, which has the most fertility clinics per capita in the world, socialized medicine covers a full range of infertility treatments for all citizens, according to Susan Kahn, the research director of the International Research Institute on Jewish Women

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### 2 candidates refuse to bow out

Officials within Israel's Center Party and the right-wing National Unity Party are calling on their candidates to drop out of the race for prime minister, citing poor polling statistics.

But centrist leader Yitzhak Mordechai and rightist leader Ze'ev "Benny" Begin said Wednesday they intend to remain in the running. Polls indicate that Labor Party candidate Ehud Barak is widening his lead over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

### Balloting request rejected

Israel's Election Commission this week denied a request from a diplomat to nullify the ballots that were filled out this week by employees at Israeli missions around the world. The diplomat, who said he had voted for Yitzhak Mordechai, said his vote would be meaningless if the Center Party candidate decides to drop out of the race before elections are held in Israel.

### Premier mediates party feud

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu elicited apologies Thursday from the immigrants-rights Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party and the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, which had attacked each other in recent campaign ads.

In its campaign ads, Yisrael Ba'Aliyah has been urging that it take over the Interior Ministry after the elections, saying Shas has been insensitive to immigrant needs during its tenure at the ministry's helm.

Shas has countered that Yisrael Ba'Aliyah wants control over the ministry so that "shops that sell pork won't be closed" and so "escort girls" and others will have an easier time entering Israel illegally.

### Likud calls ad a 'mistake'

Israel's Likud Party pulled a radio ad that compared the Oslo accords to a 1938 agreement aimed at appeasing Hitler. "It was a mistake," a Likud spokesman said Thursday.

at Brandeis University. Israeli women, regardless of marital status, are entitled to up to seven rounds of in-vitro fertilization treatment until they have two live children, Kahn writes in a recent study, "Rabbis and Reproduction: The Uses of New Reproductive Technologies Among Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel."

Moreover, Israeli fertility specialists lead the field in research and development.

In the United States, reproductive procedures can run into the tens of thousands of dollars, and insurance coverage is rare, making infertility treatment available only to wealthier citizens, and no American federal funds support clinical trials. Thus couples, in essence, pay for their own experiments in which they serve as the test cases.

Lois Waldman, the director of the AJCongress' commission, said Jewish women's organizations could play a role in providing updated medical information and evaluations of the more than 300 clinics around the country. They could also help push for legislation to increase insurance coverage for reproductive services in the United States.

Participants at the AJCongress conference also came from nonprofit education, referral and support groups: the Brooklyn-based ATIME, A Torah Infertility Medium of Exchange, and Resolve, a national, secular advocacy organization.

Most participants left the conference ready to highlight the issue on the communal agenda, providing information and referrals in brochures, newsletters, magazines and Web sites, or serving as resource centers for their members.

As the technologies advance, there is an awareness among secular bioethicists and "increasingly among Jews" that there are "real challenges involved," said Mackler, a professor of theology at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

There are real risks as well, including the potential for tremendous financial and emotional costs, the dangers of repeated hormone injections and invasive surgical procedures, and a high rate of multiple births.

When reproductive technologies were first developed, they were embraced by the medical and Jewish religious communities.

Mackler, who has been studying the subject for five years, cites talmudic and medieval sources examining theoretical cases of artificial insemination, and rabbis have been pondering the issues surrounding assisted reproduction for decades before the first "test-tube" baby was born in 1978.

In her study, Kahn notes that "rabbinic debates about reproductive technology began in the 1940s with debates about artificial insemination and continue until today."

The most widely accepted uses of reproductive technology from the vantage point of halachah, or Jewish law, involve couples using their own genetic materials.

Greater ethical complications arise when donor sperm or eggs are used, spawning complex discussions of adultery and Jewish identity.

To circumvent the biblical admonition against implanting one's "seed" in a neighbor's wife, Kahn explains, some Orthodox rabbis advise using in-vitro fertilization since there is no such prohibition against implanting an embryo.

Many rabbis advise using sperm from non-Jewish donors. This method reduces the possibility of the child marrying a close blood relative; it also avoids any risk of adultery, when that is defined as sexual intercourse between a married Jewish woman and a Jewish man.

"Artificial insemination with Jewish donor sperm is entirely prohibited in the ultra-Orthodox world," writes Kahn, whose book, "Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel," is due out later this year.

Using donor eggs presents another set of complex circumstances pertaining to maternity and Jewish identity. Is the mother the ovum donor or the birth mother?

For Mackler, "the more important concern would be that the child will have genetic and biological ties to one parent and not the other."

"Kavod habriot," Hebrew for "respect for persons," is a central tenet in Mackler's discussion of assisted reproductive technologies. The concept extends not only to considerations of the hoped-for children's well-being, but also to the potential parents' emotional and physical health.

Despite Judaism's bent toward childbearing — "Be fruitful and multiply, God commanded Abraham" — "people should not feel pressured into utilizing any of these technologies," he said. □



## Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*  
 Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*  
 Lisa Hostein, *Editor*  
 Howard Lovy, *Managing Editor*  
 Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

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).  
 © JTA      Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

## JEWISH WORLD

### Insurers, Jewish groups reach deal on Holocaust-era policies

By Helen Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Justice may soon come to Holocaust victims and their heirs who took out insurance policies with major European companies in the pre-Holocaust era.

In London this week, five of those companies made significant concessions that should open the way to real progress on claims that have lain dormant for five decades.

A last-minute breakthrough Thursday at the final meeting of the seven-month-old International Commission on Holocaust Era Claims averted a crisis that seemed certain to plunge the commission, chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, into disarray.

After the first full day of talks Wednesday, Jewish and Israeli representatives were speaking gloomily of failure.

"We will not be party to a process that is not bringing a genuine measure of justice," warned Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress. "If there is not significant progress, we all agree that we will have to go back to our constituents — the Jewish people and the Holocaust survivors — and tell them the truth; that we thought we had a credible process in place, that this is not the case and that we will not try to paper over the cracks."

Steinberg had only compliments for the efforts made by Eagleburger but said those efforts were being frustrated by insurance companies who "were repeating the errors of the Swiss banks, offering a token solution, thinking that the Jewish side will grab it and go home." By Thursday afternoon, however, the outcome of six bruising hours of negotiations with the insurance companies — Assicurazioni Generali of Italy, Allianz Holding of Germany, AXA Group of France and the Winterthur and Zurich insurance firms of Switzerland — transformed Steinberg's gloomy prognosis.

Eagleburger, he reported, had "pulled a rabbit out of a hat" by bluntly stating his intention to go before the media and pronounce the conference a failure.

At the end of the final meeting, the insurance companies agreed to key issues that had threatened to torpedo the entire claims process.

The first agreement reached was that unpaid policies dating back to the Holocaust era should have interest and present-day currency values factored in when the policies are paid. As a result, a policy worth \$3,000 when it was taken out could be worth as much today as \$100,000.

While the exact amount of the outstanding claims is unknown, insurance industry analysts were quoted as saying it could total between \$1 billion and \$4 billion.

The second stumbling block to be overcome was the insurance companies' acceptance of liability for policies issued before company assets were nationalized after World War II. The commission also obtained agreement on extending the lifetime of the claims process from one to two years and will institute a "fast-track" policy that will get enable aging Holocaust survivors and their heirs to receive money without prejudicing final claims and revaluation of their policies.

There was also progress on the issue of financial credits paid to people with insurance policies by the German government as part of the restitution process.

The position of the Jewish organizations and Israeli government is that if the new valuation process for policies increases their value, the claimants should be compensated accordingly. A meeting on this issue will take place May 12 in Washington.

The commission will also establish a claims process and begin work on an "outreach process" to inform potential insurance claimants that they can file claims.

Bobby Brown, Diaspora affairs adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, returned to Jerusalem with a CD-ROM, given to him by Assicurazioni Generali, containing a list of 100,000 unpaid policies from prewar Eastern Europe.

Brown plans to pass the information on to officials at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem for analysis. The officials will then pass the names of Jewish policyholders back to the commission for publication.

The next meeting of the commission will take place June 23 in Jerusalem. □

#### Shoah tax exemption backed

U.S. House and Senate lawmakers called for quick passage of legislation that would exempt restitution paid to Holocaust survivors from federal income taxes.

The bill would apply to all settlements reached with survivors, including payments already made.

At a news conference Thursday, the lawmakers said the U.S. government would be wrong to profit from the pain and suffering of Holocaust victims.

#### Holocaust commission hires staff

A presidential advisory commission set up to investigate Holocaust-era assets in the United States has opened its offices and hired staff. Kenneth Klothen, an international human rights consultant and the outgoing general counsel for AmeriCorps, will serve as the commission's executive director.

The 20-member commission, chaired by World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman, has approved a plan to search for gold, art, cultural property and other assets that were turned over to state governments after World War II.

#### Republican group restructures

The National Jewish Coalition announced Thursday a restructuring that includes the founding of a political action committee to funnel political contributions directly to Republican congressional and presidential candidates.

As part of the reorganization, the pro-Republican group changed its name to the Republican Jewish Coalition and plans to provide volunteers to work for Republican candidates.

#### Religious freedom envoy sworn in

Robert Seiple was sworn in Wednesday as U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom. The position was created by last year's International Religious Freedom Act, which mandates the ambassador to advise the president on matters concerning the persecution of religious minorities abroad.

Seiple has served as president of World Vision, the world's largest privately funded relief and development agency.

#### Nazi clinic trial postponed

The trial of a prominent Austrian psychiatrist suspected of murdering children in a Nazi clinic during World War II could take months to begin after the doctor's lawyer filed a motion objecting to the charges this week. Heinrich Gross, 84, was charged in April with acting as an accessory to the murder of nine physically and mentally handicapped children while he was head of the clinic in 1944.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Centrists: Rumors of campaign's demise are greatly exaggerated**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The four founders of the Center Party are making it clear they are determined to fight to the end, with Yitzhak Mordechai as their candidate for prime minister.

The centrist leaders called a news conference last Sunday to defend their candidate vehemently despite poor showings in the polls and a call by Labor leader Ehud Barak for Mordechai to drop out of the race and support him.

Political observers here have been predicting this past week that the centrists were about to merge their party into One Israel — Barak's Labor Party-plus movement — and effectively turn the expected two-round election into a one-round make-or-break drama between Barak and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on May 17.

The polls have been unkind to the centrists, showing a steady decline from the early days when Mordechai, in the words of the party's election slogan, seemed "the only man able to win big against Bibi."

The party's entire strategy has centered around the fear that Labor, however it dresses itself up with catchy new names like One Israel, is incapable of beating Netanyahu and Likud.

This, after all, has been the pattern of Israeli elections — barring Yitzhak Rabin's victory in 1992 — for the past two decades.

After Mordechai was fired by Netanyahu in January and overnight became the leader of the centrists, the polls were upbeat: If he could send Barak into third place in the first round — only the top two runners pass into the second round — Mordechai would beat Netanyahu in the runoff.

But since then, Barak has opened an ever-widening gap, making it increasingly unlikely that the Center Party leader can make it into the runoff.

Crowning the centrists' frustrations, Mordechai's status as the anti-Netanyahu candidate in the second round has evaporated, too. Polls consistently show that Barak would fare better than Mordechai in a two-way fight against Netanyahu.

If the trend continues, some insiders say, Mordechai may yet be prevailed upon by his three colleagues — Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Dan Meridor and Roni Milo — to quit the race for premier before the first round and pool his party with One Israel in a sort of pre-election coalition against the Likud.

Others, however, take Mordechai at his word.

The former defense minister insists it would be unthinkable and politically inadvisable, to — as he puts it — "abandon" his supporters at this stage.

He says he will fight through the first round, and even if he loses, his followers will remain loyal to him and his party as coalition negotiations begin after that round.

It is widely assumed here that Mordechai and his colleagues would, in that scenario, urge their supporters to vote for Barak in the second round — or at least not to vote for Netanyahu.

Center Party officials point with bitter irony to the televised debate between Netanyahu and Mordechai last month as the turning point in this election. Since that night, when Mordechai

trounced the premier on his home turf — the TV studio — Netanyahu and Likud have been declining in the polls.

The beneficiary, however — hence the bitterness — has been the Labor leader, who had refused to take part in that bruising screen battle.

A poll released Wednesday showed that Barak would beat Netanyahu by 47 percent to 38 percent in a runoff — the best showing the Labor leader has achieved so far.

Fifteen percent of the 502 voters polled were undecided in the survey, which has a margin of error of 4.4 percent.

But there are still almost two weeks to go before the first round and, as Mordechai and his colleagues warned, a lot can change in that time.

Coincidentally, things may have begun to change just when the centrists were making their pitch to the media last Sunday. Well-known Israeli actress and comedian Tikki Dayan, appearing the night before at a pro-Barak gathering of stage artists, had mocked Likud voters as "riff-raff" and spoke of them as "the other nation."

Netanyahu pounced on this gaffe like a puma. Barak had been present at the event and, said Netanyahu, "had laughed along with everyone else. He found it funny."

Barak, belatedly, demanded an apology from the actress — and she duly told the media she regretted the word "riff-raff."

But the damage was done.

Many recall that Labor lost the 1981 election after a popular entertainer, Dudu Topaz, referred to Likud supporters using a derogatory epithet for uneducated Sephardim, and Menachem Begin, the Likud leader, exploited that mistake.

"They haven't changed," Netanyahu told a cheering crowd of Likud supporters last Sunday night.

"They can call themselves One Israel, but they're the same condescending elitists," he said.

"I'm proud to be part of the rabble," Netanyahu added.

What is grist for Netanyahu's mill is manna for the Center Party, too. With a Sephardi at the helm — Mordechai was born in Iraq — the party is well placed to pick up the support of voters who may now turn their backs on Barak and One Israel.

One centrist pundit said anti-Netanyahu voters may yet bless the day that Mordechai rejected the pressures to quit.

With more disasters like Dayan's gaffe, Barak's candidacy could yet founder — and Mordechai could come back into his own as "the only man able to win big against Bibi." □

**Man jailed for wartime activities**

NEW YORK (JTA) — A Florida judge ordered on Tuesday the jailing of a 77-year-old man whom prosecutors want to question about his activities during World War II.

The judge ordered that Vytautas Gecas be held for up to 18 months or until he responds to allegations that he served with a Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian unit that murdered thousands of Jews and others during the war.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Justice Department reported developments regarding two other men who belonged to the same unit: A Chicago court ordered the deportation of Juozas Naujalis of Chicago for his wartime activities, and Kazys Ciurinskas of Indiana agreed to leave the United States permanently next week rather than face deportation. □