



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 77, No. 88

Wednesday, May 12, 1999

82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israeli high court defuses crisis

Israel's High Court of Justice on Tuesday delayed implementation of a government order to close three offices at Orient House, the Palestinians' de facto headquarters in eastern Jerusalem.

The ruling, which postponed a potentially explosive situation until after Israel's elections, came after Israeli officials served closure orders on the offices the night before.

The U.S. State Department applauded the ruling and called on both sides to continue negotiating to resolve the issue peacefully.

### Premier calls on former loyalists

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu implored former Likud loyalists to back him in next week's elections.

"I never claimed that I am free of errors," the premier, whose support has been declining in opinion polls, said in an ad broadcast Monday night and Tuesday.

"You who are partners in our principles, in our path, I beseech you to put aside every other consideration. I beseech you to come back home."

### Israel marks 50 years at U.N.

Israel commemorated its 50th anniversary of participation in the United Nations on Tuesday by giving the world body a symbolic gift.

Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon presented U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan with a stone from a fourth-century synagogue in the northern Galilee that, he said, "emphasizes the uninterrupted Jewish existence for thousands of years in the land of Israel."

In his brief remarks, Sharon made only passing reference to the United Nations itself, which has passed many anti-Israel resolutions.

### Court rules against Kiryas Joel

New York State's highest court ruled Tuesday that an attempt to create a special school district for disabled Jewish children is unconstitutional.

The decision marked the third time that courts had ruled against the plan for Kiryas Joel, a Chasidic community located some 50 miles from New York City. The American Jewish Congress hailed the decision, saying attempts to set up the district were an attempted "merger of religion and political power."

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Polish law on Auschwitz crosses may not end the camp controversy

By Michael J. Jordan

OSWIECIM, Poland (JTA) — A proposed zone of "peace and silence" that would encircle the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp was anything but peaceful and silent this week.

On Sunday, a windy, overcast afternoon, two dozen Polish Catholics gathered defiantly to pray and sing before nearly 300 wooden crosses, planted adjacent to the camp that many Jews refer to as the largest Jewish cemetery in the world.

The crosses are just beyond — but clearly visible from — the camp's notorious Block 11, known as the "Death Block" for the years of torture and executions carried out there.

A day earlier, President Aleksander Kwasniewski signed a bill into law that would set up protective zones around Auschwitz and other former Nazi death camps in Poland.

The law, which would enable the government to remove the crosses, came into force as Polish leaders hope to end a bitter dispute that has further strained relations between Poles and Jews — and caused strife within the Catholic Church itself.

The timing of the bill's signing is not surprising, coming ahead of a visit next month by Pope John Paul II.

It may be the ailing pontiff's last trip to his homeland.

For three years, a number of Jewish groups have fought against the use of any religious symbols at the camp. Some hailed the law as forcing the removal of all the crosses.

"This is a bill we were looking for," said Miles Lerman, chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's council.

Yet the law is worded ambiguously, raising questions as to what it truly means. Indeed, the law may allow for one cross to stay — the so-called "papal cross" that sparked the controversy in the first place.

Such a move reportedly has the support of Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek — a Protestant said to be leery of being branded anti-Catholic.

As a result, Rabbi Avi Weiss, the leader of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns — Amcha, described the law as "a terrible defeat for the Jewish community."

He has long decried the "Christianization" of Auschwitz, and said it would be "an absolute outrage" for the towering, 24-foot cross to remain.

So it is unclear how Polish officials will carry out the new law.

Complicating matters is Kazimierz Switon, the militant who initiated the cross-planting campaign last August.

Switon camps out at the site in his beige caravan, chatting with his cohorts under a large blue-and-white tent.

He refuses to budge, and has even threatened self-immolation if the crosses are removed.

But his rhetoric is less patriotic and religious than it is anti-Semitic.

In an interview with CNN last August, Switon said, "Jews cannot tell Poles what to do."

On Sunday, he declined an interview with JTA.

However, this controversy is more than a simple case of deep-seated Polish anti-Semitism.

Though the scene of unparalleled Jewish suffering, Auschwitz — Oswiecim in

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Peres: Labor will implement Wye

Israel's Labor Party will implement the Wye agreement if it wins next week's election, former Prime Minister Shimon Peres said Tuesday. Implementing the accord is a "matter of immediacy," he told the Reuters news service. "Then I think we will stop the crazy policies of settlements."

### Settlers claim West Bank hilltop

A group of Jewish settlers set up a dozen mobile homes Tuesday on a windswept hill near the West Bank settlement of Efrat, taking over land claimed by residents of a nearby Palestinian village.

The move came with the approval of the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which said the land falls within the boundaries of Efrat. The hilltop, Givat Dagan, was the site of disturbances four years ago, when Israeli police forcibly removed Jewish settlers and demonstrators trying to claim the hilltop.

### Panel moves to halt voting fraud

Israel's Central Election Commission requested that a list of all citizens who died during the past three months be distributed at polling stations to prevent election fraud in next week's vote.

The move is intended to prevent people from voting in the names of those who died in the period after voter registry books were completed three months ago.

### Report: Laser system delayed

Israel's development of a laser-based anti-ballistic missile defense system was delayed after one of the main U.S. contractors went over budget by some \$30 million, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Tuesday.

As a result, the development of the Nautilus system, intended to counter Katyusha rocket attacks, will be set back by at least a year, the paper said.



## Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*  
 Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*  
 Lisa Hastein, *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.

Polish — also resonates with Poles, said Joachim Russek, director of the Judaica Foundation in Krakow.

It is well known that for Jews, Auschwitz is a searing symbol of the Nazi genocide. Of the 1.5 million who perished at Auschwitz — and nearby, at the Birkenau death camp — at least 90 percent were Jews.

Often forgotten, however, is that in 1940 the Germans converted the compound, a former military barracks, into a concentration camp specifically for Polish prisoners. Tens of thousands of Poles — perhaps as many as 70,000 — died there, as well as Russians, Gypsies and others.

Today, these crosses are said to commemorate the site — an enormous pit, actually, now covered over with grass — where the Nazis executed an untold number of Poles.

"What we have at Auschwitz is a dramatic clash between two collective memories, and not enough knowledge of the experience on either side," said Russek, who is not Jewish.

"What is so painful is that in a place of so much tragedy, you have competition between two categories of victims.

"And Jews clearly were the more numerous victims."

Collective memories aside, the case of the "papal cross" is widely viewed as an anti-Jewish provocation.

It began in 1979, when Pope John Paul II made his first trip home. The large cross was erected for a mass he held at Birkenau, which was attended by 300,000 Poles.

It was then dismantled and stored in a local parish.

Meanwhile, in 1984, a Carmelite convent was installed flush against the Auschwitz camp's northeastern wall, across from Block 11. By 1988, Jewish groups were pressing for the convent to be relocated. It was then that the large "papal cross" reappeared and erected next to the convent as a sign of resistance.

Though the pope never presented it as a cross given to his followers, it quickly became known as the "papal cross."

That doesn't sit well with one of his Polish adherents, Father Stanislaw Musial. He is among the most outspoken activists against the crosses.

Musial, who has refused orders by his church superiors to keep quiet, receives batches of hate mail from the public for his pronouncements.

"The cross is the greatest of religious symbols. Maybe I would even die for the cross, but not for this one," said the 61-year-old Jesuit. "This was put up out of hatred for the Jews. If this cross is allowed to stay, then we're back to the point at which we started."

This may have been the strategy all along, say observers: As a bargaining chip in the convent issue, extremists inserted the "papal cross," likewise, to gain leverage in the "papal cross" issue, they added the smaller crosses.

Musial instead proposed a new monument to the Polish victims of the Nazis.

Meanwhile, a prominent member of Krakow's tiny Jewish community suggested specifying certain areas at Auschwitz for Jewish worship, Christian worship and joint worship.

"For me, the issue is not the crosses, but the atmosphere the situation created," said Henryk Halkowski, a Jewish activist and writer.

"Opinions were manipulated by extremists on both sides — Jewish and Polish. Here, it gave some people an opportunity to vent their anti-Semitism and to be on the front pages."

"But the territory of Auschwitz is so big, it should be divided so that there are places where the Poles and other nations can commemorate their victims." □

## Croatian government blamed for clashes

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish groups and opposition politicians are blaming the Croatian government for clashes that broke out Sunday in Zagreb when neo-Nazis broke up a peaceful demonstration commemorating the defeat of fascism in World War II.

The clashes resulted from the "tolerance exhibited by the Croatian government toward right-wing extremists," the Jerusalem office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center charged Tuesday. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Groups weigh in on hate crimes

Jewish groups called on Congress on Tuesday to pass a tougher hate crimes law.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which has the support of President Clinton and a bipartisan group of lawmakers, would give federal law enforcement officials greater authority to investigate and prosecute bias-motivated crimes, while expanding the definition to include crimes committed because of a victim's sexual orientation, gender or disability.

The appeal by the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and other groups for passage of the bill came as the Senate Judiciary Committee held hearings on the issue.

### Legislature backs religion bill

The Arizona state legislature approved a bill Monday to protect free religious practice from government intrusion.

The legislation, which the Jewish community helped push through, is one of a handful of bills pending in state legislatures around the country aimed at restoring the religious liberty protections that the Supreme Court struck down in 1997 when it ruled the Religious Freedom Restoration Act unconstitutional.

### ADL backs Clinton initiative

The Anti-Defamation League hailed President Clinton's initiative to reduce violence among youth.

ADL National Director Abraham Foxman, who was invited to participate in a brainstorming session on the issue at the White House on Monday, said violence and hate "have become so pervasive that we are desensitized to the violence, and are becoming desensitized to hate."

### German minister arrives in D.C.

German Chancellery Minister Bodo Hombach arrived in Washington on Tuesday for two days of talks regarding the creation of a fund aimed at resolving class-action lawsuits filed by former Nazi-era slave laborers. At least a dozen German firms have already agreed to participate in the fund, which the German government is trying to organize.

### Islamists blamed for 1992 bomb

Members of Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad were responsible for the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina's Supreme Court said Monday.

The statement came days after a tape-recorded conversation was discovered in which police officers are heard ordering a patrol car away from the embassy minutes before the explosion, which killed 29 people. Israel, which has long maintained that both groups were involved, said the court's statement was overdue.

## Israel policy caught in the middle of partisan politics on Capitol Hill

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Incensed at President Clinton's plans in March 1998 to pressure Israel with a public blueprint for peace with the Palestinians, Jewish Republicans turned to Capitol Hill.

But as Republican senators lined up to voice their opposition to the White House, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee stepped in.

The effort could not be partisan, the pro-Israel lobby argued, pushing the pro-Republican National Jewish Coalition aside.

It took a two-week, bruising lobbying campaign by AIPAC before 81 senators would sign a letter to Clinton pledging to oppose U.S. pressure on Israel.

As partisanship rises in Washington, AIPAC has been forced to deal with more episodes like this one. Indeed, even as the group is preparing for its annual policy conference May 23, a partisan spat over U.S. policy toward Jerusalem has scuttled the group's plans to lobby members of Congress to support a new bill forcing the Clinton administration to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Instead, the group is searching for a bipartisan compromise.

As hundreds of AIPAC activists prepare to gather in Washington, the pro-Israel lobby is facing greater obstacles keeping Republicans and Democrats united on U.S. policy toward Israel.

The task is a matter of paramount importance for the U.S.-Israel relationship, activists say. If Israel becomes embroiled in party politics, they explain, support could erode for foreign aid, Israel's position in the peace process and the Jewish state's qualitative military edge.

For its part, AIPAC downplays the increased partisanship.

"We believe that these issues are not meant to be partisan issues," said Howard Kohr, AIPAC's executive director. "The story is that in this incredibly partisan atmosphere, it's not more partisan than it is."

But across a broad spectrum of Jewish activists and Capitol Hill insiders, there is growing concern about partisanship when it comes to Israel.

"Those who have observed Congress have to be concerned about the breakdown in the bipartisan approach," said Martin Raffel, associate executive vice chairman of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, a Jewish umbrella group.

While matters concerning Israel's security bring lawmakers together, other issues, "particularly the peace process," have in "recent years split Democrats and Republicans in ways that have been unhelpful," he said.

The partisanship coincided with the proliferation of Jewish groups lobbying Congress on the peace process, according to Capitol Hill aides and Jewish officials.

The Zionist Organization of America regularly lobbies members of Congress to slow the peace process. Their allies are primarily on the Republican side of the aisle. At the same time, the Israel Policy Forum and Americans for Peace Now work to move the process along. Democrats have been most sympathetic to their calls.

AIPAC is often left in the middle trying to hold the parties together — and so far, the pro-Israel lobby is receiving high marks from some Jewish activists and politicians.

These tensions are not new. The president's party always feels the need to protect him from partisan attacks. At the same time, the party out of the White House looks for ways to make political inroads. But partisan strains over Israel, as well as other issues, are likely to increase as the 2000 election campaign heats up.

Jewish Republicans are seeking to use Israel as a "wedge issue" in the campaign to win Jewish campaign contributions and votes.

The Republican Jewish Coalition, as the National Jewish Coalition is now called, plans to run ads and work with candidates to accuse Democrats of being soft on Israel, according to Matt Brooks, executive director of the group.

It's this type of action that has AIPAC concerned about the future of U.S.-Israel relations. And with top American political consultants working for Israel's political parties in its upcoming elections, many are closely watching to see if such a split could become more pronounced. □

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Arab parties expected to play major role in election, coalition**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Arabs are determined to be a force in next week's elections.

With some 500,000 eligible voters, some 12 percent of the Israeli electorate, they hope to flex their political muscle — and in the process win greater rights for themselves.

Traditional supporters of the Labor Party, Israeli Arabs for the first time have one of their own running in the race for prime minister, Azmi Beshara.

As'ad Ghanem, a political scientist at the Jewish-Arab Center for Peace at Givat Haviva, described Beshara's run as "the most important political development in the history of Israel's Arabs in the past 20 years."

Beshara "signaled to both Arab voters and the Jewish left that the Arabs are not a marginal political group, but rather a national group whose interests should now be taken into account more seriously than before."

Israel's Arab community can be expected to pursue those interests in the race for the Knesset as well as in the hotly contested race for the premiership.

Beshara heads his own political party, Balad — known in English as the National Democratic Coalition.

There are two additional Israeli Arab parties fielding candidates for the next Knesset: the formerly Communist Hadash Party and the United Arab List.

In the Knesset race, the three parties are expected to win some 62 percent of the Arab vote, with the rest going to the Zionist parties, according to a recent poll conducted by the Jewish-Arab Center.

The Arab contenders for the incoming legislature are convinced that even if Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wins reelection, they could still play a major role in the post-election coalition negotiations.

Together with the Zionist parties representing the left and center, they say, they could form a parliamentary bloc that could prevent Netanyahu from forming a coalition in the next Knesset — a situation that could lead to yet another round of elections for prime minister.

While Beshara is making history with his decision to run in the May 17 elections, his fellow Israeli Arab politicians are concerned that his campaign may help the one candidate they want to lose the race — Netanyahu.

Indeed, officials with the Hadash Party and the United Arab List were expected to endorse Labor Party leader Ehud Barak's candidacy this week.

According to the Jewish-Arab Center poll, 83 percent of Israel's Arabs will vote in the coming elections, compared with 77.3 percent in the 1996 elections.

"I think there will be a larger Arab turnout this time because of overwhelming resentment for Netanyahu," Ghanem said recently.

That resentment stems from two sources: the belief that Netanyahu stands firmly against the peace process and the widespread concern that their community is not getting a fair share

of Israeli social services and employment opportunities.

But the center's poll indicated that if there is a second-round runoff vote on June 1, only 74.6 of the Israeli Arab community will turn out for the balloting if Netanyahu and Ehud Barak go head-to-head in the runoff.

This drop-off in the Arab vote would be good news for the premier, but bad news for Barak, who is relying heavily on the Arab vote. While recent polls show Barak leading Netanyahu in the first round of balloting and beating him in the second, the Labor leader knows that every vote will count.

Last week, Labor officials spoke with Beshara about his dropping out of the race prior to next week's elections — a move that would give Barak a greater portion of the Arab vote.

Beshara indicated he might withdraw, but only after gaining commitments for Israeli Arabs from the Barak camp.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Monday that Labor leaders expect Beshara to withdraw by the end of the week.

Beshara's tactic reverses the one previously used by Israeli Arab politicians: His negotiations on behalf of his people are coming before the elections rather than after them, when coalition talks are held.

As Barak mounts a drive to win Arab votes, a televised campaign ad his backers are running is working against that goal.

The ad plays heavily on Barak's past as a much-decorated soldier who engaged in a number of daring raids against Palestinian terrorists in the years before he became army chief of staff.

The ads, which are intended to show that Barak will be as firm a defender of Israel's security as Netanyahu, have angered some Israeli Arabs.

"What about the Arab voters?" said Karen Sand, 23, a psychology major at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba.

"Don't they understand that Arab voters will not rush to the polls to vote for the man boasting of having killed so-and-so many Palestinians?"

Riad Ali, an Arab journalist, made a similar point.

"I understand the need to appear tough on security," Ali said.

"But one could expect Barak to stress peace along with security, to say that he would be dedicated to peace just as he has been to security."

Ali's resentment spilled over into an article he recently wrote for the Israeli daily Ma'ariv: "Jews repeatedly preach to us that this is a Jewish state. So why does the Israeli left expect our help in getting rid of Netanyahu?"

Just the same, bowing to political realities, he also conceded that the Israeli Arab community will ultimately go to the polls — if only to protect their own interests. Beshara, who has campaigned on the platform that Israel should be a state for all of its citizens, not only a Jewish state, also criticized the ad.

"This is but another example why the Arabs should signal to Barak that they are not in his political pocket," he told JTA. □

**Israel builds underwater parks**

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel is building underwater archaeological parks for scuba-diving tourists off the Mediterranean coast.

The parks, one of which is being built off the southern coastal city of Ashkelon, will feature ancient shipwrecks and submerged Neolithic villages.

Waterproof plastic pages will describe the exhibits. □