



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Premier scores Shas support

The rabbinic leaders of Israel's fervently Orthodox Shas Party endorsed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in next week's election.

Wednesday's decision by the Council of Torah Sages is likely to affect the balloting of hundreds of thousands of Shas followers.

Meanwhile, the fervently Orthodox Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah parties have not yet announced their support for any candidate in the race for prime minister.

Eizenstat tapped for new post

U.S. Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat was nominated Wednesday by President Clinton to be deputy treasury secretary.

As the administration's point man on Holocaust restitution issues, Eizenstat has played a key role in recent years in helping to provide a moral and financial accounting of various countries' financial dealings with Nazi Germany.

Eizenstat is expected to succeed Lawrence Summers, whom Clinton tapped to succeed outgoing Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin.

Annan hails Israeli contributions

The United Nations secretary-general praised Israel for its years of sharing its environmental expertise, fighting drug trafficking, participating in election-monitoring operations and providing emergency aid to people in crisis.

Kofi Annan made his comments at a dinner Tuesday at U.N. headquarters in New York that honored the Jewish state's 50th anniversary as a member of the world body. [Page 1]

Controversial aide resigns

An Arab American State Department aide who has come under fire for his criticism of Israel decided to resign effective Friday as a special assistant to Martin Indyk, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs.

Joseph Zogby, who wrote at least two articles critical of Israel before he was hired last year by Indyk, rejected an offer to stay in the State Department's Middle East bureau and instead will work as an attorney in the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division.

Israeli minister bears gift for U.N. in event marking a rocky 50 years

By Julia Goldman

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) — Israel commemorated 50 years of rocky membership at the United Nations by giving the world body a symbolic gift.

At a brief ceremony Tuesday in the U.N.'s towering headquarters in New York, Israel's foreign minister presented Secretary-General Kofi Annan with a stone from a fourth-century synagogue in the northern Galilee.

The stone "only emphasizes the uninterrupted Jewish existence for thousands of years in the land of Israel," Ariel Sharon said in a speech that stressed Israel's nationhood, making only tacit reference to the United Nations.

In the years since the U.N. General Assembly admitted the fledgling nation into its ranks on May 11, 1949, Israel has faced almost continuous challenges by a majority of the U.N.'s 185 member-nations to its policies and even the ideology supporting its existence.

In what many consider to be the nadir of Israel's U.N. status, the assembly, led by the Soviet Union, resolved in 1975 that "Zionism is racism."

The anti-Israel resolution remained on the world body's books for 16 years before it was repealed.

Israel is regularly singled out at the United Nations, and Arab-Muslim member-states virtually ensure the passage of anti-Israel resolutions. Only the United States regularly votes in Israel's favor.

"Having criticism of governments is nothing new" at the U.N., said Felice Gaer, the director of the American Jewish Committee's Jacob Blaustein Institute.

"But the relentless focus on Israel has really been unparalleled," Gaer said, considering Israel's size, the scope of the criticism — which has permeated "every area of the U.N. and its specialized agencies" — its persistence and intensity.

Still, Gaer, who has been observing Israel at the United Nations for 25 years, said in an interview that she sees some subtle indications of progress and improving civility toward Israel at the United Nations, which she attributes in large part to Annan's leadership.

At the ceremony marking Israel's 50-year milestone, it was the secretary-general, generally regarded as a friend to Israel, who touched on the Jewish state's turbulent U.N. history.

Israel "has a home here at the U.N.," Annan said, "I know at times it has not seemed like a home."

Of all of the 185 U.N. member-nations, Israel alone is prevented from belonging to a regional group and is, thereby, precluded from election to the Security Council, among other significant committees.

So far even the West European and Others Group — which includes "others" as far-flung as Australia and New Zealand — has denied Israel's entry.

Speaking at an anniversary dinner Tuesday attended by Israel's first U.N. representative, Abba Eban, and former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Annan said the Jewish state could "do much more" for the U.N. if it belonged to a regional group.

He reiterated a pledge he made last year in Jerusalem to encourage a solution to this "anomaly."

The United Nations' most recent inhospitable act came in February, when the General Assembly voted in favor of an Arab-sponsored resolution to convene an

MIDEAST FOCUS

Premier rejects polls

A report in the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told friends, "It appears I'll lose" the election race is nothing but "virtual reality," the premier said Wednesday.

Netanyahu added that polls showing him trailing Labor Party leader Ehud Barak, a former army chief of staff, are unreliable.

His comments came as a poll released by Channel Two Television showed Barak taking 44 percent of the vote next week to 35 percent for Netanyahu, the Likud Party's candidate.

In a June 1 runoff, Barak would get 50 percent to 33 percent for the premier, the poll said.

Extremist to serve out sentence

An Israeli court on Wednesday ordered an extreme right-wing activist convicted of distributing anti-Islamic materials back to jail for violating her parole.

Tatyana Suskin, who was found guilty two years ago of distributing leaflets in Hebron that portrayed the Islamic prophet Mohammed as a pig, was sentenced to 24 months in jail.

One-third of that time had been commuted for good behavior.

She was ordered to return to jail for the final eight months of her sentence after the court ruled that she had left the Tel Aviv area at least six times in violation of her parole terms.

Israeli Army opens new facility

The Israeli Army recently inaugurated a new facility intended to train soldiers in the event of an uprising in the West Bank that would require troops to enter Palestinian villages there.

The exercises at the facility are also designed to help Israeli soldiers learn how to address confrontations with women, children and journalists in the event of such a crisis.

international conference to discuss Israeli construction plans for the Har Homa neighborhood in eastern Jerusalem.

If convened, the July 15 meeting would be the first-ever gathering for any reason of the parties to the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, which governs the treatment of civilians during wartime.

"The parties have never met in all these 50 years of the existence of the convention," said Schoenberg, the director of U.N. affairs for B'nai B'rith and a 30-year U.N. veteran.

"Look what's happened in Kosovo, but because Jews are building homes in Jerusalem, that's why they want to meet," said Harris Schoenberg, who attended the gift-giving ceremony.

Israeli Ambassador to the United States Zalman Shoval, U.N. Ambassador Dore Gold and Consul General Shmuel Sisso attended the ceremony, and U.N. representatives of several Arab, African and European countries looked on.

Also present were Melvin Salberg and Ronald Lauder, the chairman and chairman-elect of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and Malcolm Hoenlein, its executive vice chairman.

The Presidents Conference, an umbrella organization of Jewish groups, received a letter from President Clinton denouncing the Geneva conference as counterproductive "in that it would both damage the peace process and politicize the practice of humanitarian law."

In the April 1 letter, Clinton also said he raised the issue with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Hoenlein said the Presidents Conference is launching a "worldwide campaign" to educate international leaders about the issue.

He said Jewish leaders had already met with officials from Greece, Nigeria, Azerbaijan and Pakistan.

The implications of the unprecedented Geneva meeting are unclear, Hoenlein said in an interview. It could "become a forum for 'Zionism is racism' in a 21st-century form."

Annan reportedly held a "very constructive" meeting with American Jewish leaders early this week to discuss their concerns over the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Palestinians' increasing reference to U.N. Resolution 181 as a source of Palestinian sovereignty.

Last month, the U.N. Human Rights Commission passed a resolution supporting the Palestinians' right to self-determination based on that resolution and Resolution 194, which calls for the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

Also known as the 1947 Partition Plan, Resolution 181 proposed dividing British Mandatory Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state, with Jerusalem under international control.

In the past, such support was based on U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, which call for the exchange of land for peace and for negotiating recognized borders.

These resolutions served as the basis for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the Oslo accords.

With these storm clouds looming on the United Nations' horizon, Annan called for a "new climate" of cooperation between Israel and the United Nations.

This cooperation, he said, should be based on their shared values of "freedom, democracy and tolerance" and shared goals of "peace, security and an end to fear and upheaval."

Speaking moments after he and Sharon together removed the dark blue cloth to reveal the stone from Kfar Yasif — which bears carved Jewish symbols, including a seven-branched menorah — Annan drew parallels between Israel's mission to be "a light unto nations" and the United Nation's role as "a torch of peace, freedom and human rights."

Many member-states have made similar gifts to the U.N. headquarters. Israel's stone now stands on a pedestal facing Iraq's 1977 gift, a pillar depicting the code of Hammurabi from 1792-1750 B.C.E.

Just across the hallway is the corridor that leads to the chambers of the Economic and Social Committee — which Israel is ineligible to join. □



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JEWISH WORLD

WJC: Holland may owe billions

Holland failed after the war to return to Jewish victims of the Holocaust as much as \$3 billion in assets that had been looted by the Nazis, the World Jewish Congress charged Tuesday.

The WJC made the estimate, citing a report written in 1946 by the U.S. vice consul in the Netherlands.

ADL criticizes school candidate

The Anti-Defamation League criticized on Tuesday a candidate for a Brooklyn school board seat who said that if elected she "cannot and will not represent any other group" than Christians.

A school board candidate should "represent the interests of all students" in the district, "regardless of the students' race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity," the ADL said in a letter to candidate Arlene Rutuelo.

Note targets Jewish pupils

A note threatening Jewish students at a New Jersey high school helped lead to the recent arrests of several teen-agers.

"A bomb is in the school to kill Jews," read the note found at Shawnee High School in Medford, N.J., a town 20 miles south of Trenton.

The arrests came as high school officials increased their vigilance of such acts in the wake of last month's Columbine High School massacre in Colorado that killed 15 people, including the shooters.

JTS presses voters on pluralism

The Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary is placing an advertisement in Friday's edition of two Israeli newspapers urging voters to consider the issue of religious pluralism when they vote next week.

The ad, which will run in *Ma'ariv* and the Hebrew and English editions of *Ha'aretz*, urges Israelis to vote with "your head — and your heart."

The ad also features photos of prominent Jews across the ideological spectrum who have received honorary degrees from the seminary.

"We just wanted to remind" the Israeli voter that "religious pluralism is one of the central issues that has to be decided" in the May 17 election, said the chancellor of JTS, Ismar Schorsch.

Coke reacts to Passover criticism

Coca-Cola agreed to produce kosher-for-Passover two-liter bottles of the soft drink in time for next year's celebration of the holiday.

The decision came in the wake of complaints after only one-liter bottles were available during Passover this year.

Jesuit priest champions cause of Jews at site of Auschwitz camp

By Michael J. Jordan

KRAKOW, Poland (JTA) — Though a longtime Jesuit priest, Stanislaw Musial says it was only later in life that he saw the light.

It was in 1985, a year after a Carmelite convent was built adjoining the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Musial, in his comments to a Jewish journalist from Belgium, joked at the time that the nuns would "pray in Hebrew." Ensuing protests and growing outrage from Jewish groups over the convent's location led Musial to believe that the Catholic Church was insensitive to Auschwitz as a prime symbol of Jewish suffering.

Since then, that sensibility has governed his life. Musial became a leading Jewish supporter in Poland, relatively rare in a country known more for its deep-rooted anti-Semitism.

From 1986 to 1994, Musial was secretary of the Commission of the Polish Episcopate for Dialogue With Judaism. He was a key figure in negotiations with Jewish groups that led to the convent's relocation several years ago.

Musial is a forceful voice in the current conflict between Poles and Jews over some 300 wooden crosses that have been planted near Auschwitz, close to where the convent once stood. More important, perhaps, the 61-year-old priest says he is now on a crusade for the church to come clean on its role before and during the Holocaust.

While Jewish groups prod the Vatican to open its wartime archives, the soft-spoken Musial raises daring, painful questions within the church itself.

"We prepared the way for Hitler with our anti-Semitism over the centuries," he recently told JTA. "Of course, Christianity didn't create the idea of camps or of physical extermination; rather, of the spiritual extermination of the Jews through conversion."

"For this, I'm asking the Catholic Church to offer a clear declaration of apology."

Musial has allied himself with Jewish groups in the drive to prohibit the use of religious symbols at Auschwitz. A law signed this week by Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski is expected to force the removal of all the crosses but one — the so-called "papal cross," which is linked to Pope John Paul II's historic visit to Poland in 1979.

But Musial says no crosses should remain, describing them as "offensive" and a "provocation" to Jews. The 24-foot "papal cross" is visible from one point inside the Auschwitz camp.

"For me, these are not crosses," he said. "Anyone can put together two pieces of wood, but it's the religious authorities who determine what is a cross."

Musial, for years an editor and contributing writer for the Krakow-based Catholic newspaper *Universal Weekly*, has been denounced by leading church officials and told to keep quiet. And the public, in a stream of hate mail, can't fathom why a Polish Catholic of proud peasant stock would be such a fan of the Jews.

Still, Musial persists in what he calls "my fight." Besides, he says, there's whiff of hypocrisy to the cross-planting campaign.

"We were in silence during the Shoah," he said. "Maybe Pope Pius XII was a good man, but he did not lead as a shepherd, or help form a consciousness of 'Thou shall not kill.' And for this reason, we should not falsify the historical perspective as if we were always there. We were not, so now we have no right to put up these crosses."

Auschwitz, he said, must be remembered primarily as a Jewish tragedy. It was there, and in neighboring Birkenau, that the Nazis killed 1.5 million people, most of them Jews.

There were, however, also tens of thousands of Poles murdered.

Musial suggests a simple monument, flat on the ground, as a more appropriate commemoration of the Polish victims.

"Six million Poles died during the war — half of them Christian, half of them Jewish," Musial said. "We have our places of martyrdom everywhere."

"But for Jews, Auschwitz is the symbol. In the future, they must have the biggest say of what happens there, because it was predominantly Jewish blood that was lost there." □

Serbian Jewish activists horrified by the war, stress common history

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — When Dusica Savic Benghiat makes her daily phone call to her mother in Belgrade, she can frequently hear the air raid sirens as a backdrop to the 78-year-old woman's increasingly discouraged voice.

"My mother tells me she doesn't care anymore. She just stays in bed. If the bombs miss her, that's fine, and if they hit, somebody will pick up what's left," says Benghiat, an activist for Serbian-Jewish friendship.

The Los Angeles resident understands her mother's mood. "If I had to go to the shelter every day, I don't know what state I'd be in," she says. "How long can you go on before you go crazy and give up on life completely?"

During the fighting in Bosnia during the first half of this decade, Benghiat, who came to the United States in 1974, served as regional president of the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society.

She often called the Jewish and other media, championing the cause of the Serbian people and contrasting their resistance against Nazi Germany to the Croatian collaboration with Hitler.

But now, she says, the society's membership in Los Angeles is practically dormant because "it has become uncomfortable to support anything in favor of the Serbs. And I guess we're weary of fighting the same battle over and over again."

As to the mood in her native country, "people feel ostracized and demonized, but once you're bombed, you have no choice but to resist," Benghiat says.

Like many Serbian Americans, she charges the American media with bias and ignorance of history. While most Western observers assign much of the blame for the conflict to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's 1989 edict abolishing the autonomy enjoyed by the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, Benghiat has a different perspective.

"My uncle lived in Kosovo in the 1970s, but had to leave because of the persecution by Albanians," she says. "They were expelling the Serbs; that's why autonomy was revoked."

As a Jew, Benghiat particularly resents comparisons of the Serb action in Kosovo to the Holocaust. "The Holocaust is unique," she says, "It is unjust and dangerous to use the term in the present situation."

Judith Kurz also opposes the U.S. policy in Yugoslavia and takes it almost as a personal insult.

"I was a liberal. I always voted Democratic and I defended President Clinton in the Monica affair," she says.

Born in northern Yugoslavia near the Hungarian border, she survived Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen and came to Los Angeles, via Israel, in 1957.

She believes Americans don't appreciate the emotional significance of Kosovo, where, in 1389, Serbian forces were wiped out by the victorious armies of the Ottoman Empire.

Drawing on Jewish history, she says that to Serbs, Kosovo is not only their Jerusalem but also their Masada.

She says the conflict in Kosovo was caused by the migration of Albanians from their poverty-stricken country who settled illegally in parts of Yugoslavia. "It is as if Mexican migrants set up their own Spanish-speaking enclave in California and then demand

that it be recognized as an independent country," she says.

Kurz retired as a bookkeeper last year and now volunteers for the Jewish Family Service.

While Benghiat said that Serbs do not blame American Jews for Clinton's policy, Heather Cottin, spokeswoman for the New York branch of the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society, writes that Serbs "are horrified at the overwhelming Jewish American support for widening the war."

Similarly, David Mladinov, artistic director of the Jewish Theatre of New England in Boston, bitterly attacked the American Jewish Committee and American Jewish Congress in an "Open Letter to My Jewish Friends" for what he views as "their full support for the NATO bombings." He also notes that one of the first casualties of the air raids was the "Bridge of Sorrow," spanning the Danube River at the city of Novi Sad.

The bridge was the site of a Holocaust memorial commemorating the 1942 execution by the Nazis of 1,219 people of whom 809 were Jews. After the shooting, the victims' bodies were thrown into the Danube, Mladinov says. □

Swiss high court ruling favors Jewish man handed over to Nazis

By Fredy Rom

ZURICH (JTA) — The Swiss Supreme Court has called for opening an investigation into the case of a Jewish refugee whom Swiss border guards handed over to Nazi Germany in 1943.

Joseph Spring, 72, who now lives in Australia, had demanded about \$67,000 in compensation from the Swiss government, which denied his request last June.

In its recent decision, the high court ruled against the government, which had said Spring's claim had no legal basis.

Spring charged that in 1943 he was turned away twice at the Swiss border.

The first time, Swiss border guards sent him back to occupied France, but on the second occasion he and three others fleeing with him were handed directly over to the Germans.

In his second attempt to cross the Swiss border, Spring and his companions had false papers to mask their religion. But when they arrived in Switzerland, they showed their real papers, thinking that they would get asylum more easily as Jews.

After they were handed over to the Germans, they produced their false papers to avoid detection as Jews. But German officials knew they were Jewish — because, Spring charged, the Swiss border guards gave the Germans their real identity papers.

Spring was sent to Auschwitz, where he survived the war.

In a separate development, the right-wing Swiss Popular Party recently called for a referendum on using a portion of Switzerland's gold reserves to help the aged and sick rather than create a foundation to help Holocaust victims.

The call came after Swiss voters approved a new constitution which eliminates the requirement that the country's currency be backed by gold. The vote cleared the way for the Swiss government to sell some of its gold reserves to create a \$5 billion foundation to help victims of genocide, war and natural disasters.

The foundation was first proposed in 1997 Germany, but it has since become unclear whether any of the foundation's moneys will be used to help Holocaust victims. □