



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Iranian Jews charged with spying

A group of Iranian Jews arrested in March have been charged with spying for Israel and the United States, according to a report broadcast Monday on state-run Iranian radio.

The accusations of spying for the "Zionist regime" come after the 13 Jews from southern Iran had been held 10 weeks without being charged with a crime.

Jewish organizations, international officials and human rights groups had been assured of the prisoners' release by the Iranian government, but those promises "have not come to fruition," said Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. [Page 4]

### New Knesset convenes

The 120 members of Israel's 15th Knesset were sworn in at Monday's inaugural session of the new legislature.

Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, the most senior legislator, presided over the session as acting speaker.

### Barak speaks out on settlements

Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak pledged Monday to curtail Jewish settlement activity.

Barak also told Israel Radio that he would establish a ministerial committee to review settlement projects approved by the outgoing government and hinted he might cancel some of them.

### Papal meeting with priest denied

Pope John Paul II did not meet with an anti-Semitic priest on the first day of his current trip to Poland, the chief Vatican spokesman and a Jewish leader in Warsaw said.

Stanislaw Krajewski, a member of the board of the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland, told JTA on Monday that on Saturday the pope had visited an ecumenical center in Gdansk that had been built by Father Henryk Jankowski, but "he did not meet with the anti-Semitic priest."

Reports of the meeting apparently originated from Jankowski himself.

After making anti-Semitic statements on several occasions, Jankowski was barred in 1997 from preaching for a year.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### Groups upset at the slow progress in bringing Ethiopian Jews to Israel

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — For the past year, the Israeli government has pledged that it would step up its efforts to bring a group of Jews remaining in Ethiopia to Israel.

Disappointed with Israel's progress on this front, and concerned about the welfare of emigrant hopefuls waiting in limbo, some American Jews, and even American Christians, have coupled their vocal advocacy with direct financial support.

Last month the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston donated \$15,000 to help feed Jews from the Kwara region in northern Ethiopia who are waiting to emigrate. The funds will go to the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, a New York-based non-profit organization that assists the Ethiopian community in Israel and provides humanitarian relief in Ethiopia.

In February, a Chicago-based interfaith foundation pledged hundreds of thousands of dollars to enable Israel's Interior Ministry to expedite the processing of the Kwara Jews' applications to make aliyah, or immigrate to Israel.

Israel has recognized the right of the Kwara Jews to immigrate — in contrast to the estimated 15,000 or more Falash Mura, who consider themselves Jewish, but are not accepted legally as Jews by the Israeli government.

The election of Ehud Barak has raised hopes in America, but the place of Kwara Jews on his administration's agenda has yet to be determined.

Despite recent signs of activity and Israeli assurances that the numbers of Kwara Jews coming to Israel will soon increase, American groups monitoring the situation are growing impatient.

"I long ago stopped believing in speeches and stopped believing in 'You'll see.' I just want to see numbers of people on planes," said Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, the founder and president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, the foundation in Chicago. "That, for me at this point, is the only criteria I will use to determine whether or not they are coming out: how many are on the plane to Israel."

The estimated 2,000 to 3,000 Kwara Jews were left off the registers of legal immigrants airlifted out of Ethiopia as part of Operation Solomon in 1991. Today some 900 have gathered outside of Gondar City, where an Israeli Consulate is located.

Thousands of Falash Mura have also congregated there, and some observers have counted as many as 5,000 people gathered near Gondar, in conditions that have been described by relief agency officials as "appalling" and "awful."

On several occasions over the past year, the Israeli government pledged to representatives of the American Jewish community that it would work to expedite the evacuation of Kwara Jews.

At the General Assembly of Jewish community federations last November, Israeli officials promised to make relocating Kwara Jews a priority. Israel's absorption minister, Yuli Edelstein, reiterated that commitment in a February conference call organized by the association of federations, now known as the United Jewish Communities.

Israel's goal, he reportedly said during the call, was to move 200 Kwara Jews each month, with the eventual hope of relocating every Kwara Jew who wishes to come by the end of 1999.

Nearly 100 Kwara Jews arrived in Israel in May, an influx that more than doubled the meager 35 arrivals in April. Representatives of Israel's government in the past have

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Arrow system to go on display

Israel will display a model of its Arrow anti-missile system at the Paris Air Show next week, Defense Ministry officials said Monday.

This will be the first time the system is displayed abroad, they said, adding that it will not be for sale.

India and Turkey are among several countries that have expressed interest in buying the system.

### Hassan refers to his dismissal

Jordan's Prince Hassan publicly acknowledged for the first time that he was upset by the way his late brother, King Hussein, abruptly dismissed him in January as heir to the Jordanian throne.

"What hurt me was not the change in the line of succession, but rather the way it was carried out — which was totally unjustified and simply confined to an insult letter full of calumny," Hassan was quoted as saying in an interview that was published this week in the London-based Arab-language al-Majalla magazine.

### Miss Israel testifies in rape case

The 18-year-old Israeli who is the reigning Miss World testified for four hours Sunday in Tel Aviv against the man who allegedly raped her last October.

Under a law that protects the privacy of rape victims, Linor Abargil's testimony was given behind closed doors.

During her testimony, the defendant, the Egyptian-born Israeli Shlomo Noor, complained that he would not receive a fair trial.

### E.U. calls for talks

European Union leaders called on Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to renew negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and Syria.

In a statement issued after their summit Saturday in Cologne, Germany, the E.U. heads of state also reiterated their support for Palestinian statehood.

cited staff and budget limitations as the primary reasons for the delay in processing the Kwara Jews' immigration applications.

Despite the fact that the Kwara Jews' right to immigrate is beyond doubt, questions arise when determining who is a Kwara Jew.

Because of fraud and forged documents, every application must be validated, which is a time-consuming and labor-intensive procedure, said Avi Granot, the minister of public and interreligious affairs at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, who served as Israel's ambassador to Ethiopia from 1995 to 1998.

This process involves verifying each person's name and village of origin, and double-checking with relatives in Israel when possible, he said.

An initial donation of \$100,000 made by Eckstein's group enabled Israel's Interior Ministry last month to hire additional staff specifically for this purpose. The group pledged a total of \$500,000 to help cover the costs of bringing Kwara Jews to Israel. Eckstein said his interfaith fellowship has raised an additional \$1 million in the past few weeks specifically for Ethiopian Jews.

In May, an official of Israel's Interior Ministry began work in Ethiopia interviewing about 151 families — 638 individuals — to begin their application procedures.

Last week, Granot said, 100 more Kwara Jews had been approved for aliyah. If activity continues on that level, he said, "then it could come to a situation where 200 or even more" Kwara Jews could emigrate each month.

Moreover, the absorption center in the Israeli town of Mevasseret Zion, which has room for 1,000 people, has been opened specifically to house Kwara Jews.

These hopeful signs, however, have not yet dispelled concerns that even at this rate hundreds of Kwara Jews will languish in Ethiopia waiting to board a plane to Ben-Gurion Airport.

Until now, "I don't think the political will has been there in Jerusalem," said Martin Raffel, the associate executive vice chair and director of international concerns for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella organization of Jewish groups and local Jewish community relations councils.

The JCPA has held regular conference calls with Israeli government officials and representatives of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which is responsible for resettling Jews in Israel, NACOEJ and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to update its members on the latest developments regarding the Kwara Jews.

"Israel over and over has shown that when it wants to take effective action it can do it," Raffel said in a telephone interview. "It brought over a medical unit to Kosovo on short-term notice and performed remarkably well. Israelis are can-do people."

Barry Shrage, the president of Boston's CJP, said in a telephone interview that the Jewish community in Boston is sympathetic to the Israeli government's constraints, "but we're sympathetic too to the hungry people on the ground."

Barbara Ribakove Gordon, the executive director of NACOEJ, said her organization has been providing \$5,000 worth of tef, a grain for making bread, per month to about 4,400 people living near Gondar.

But more people are coming every day, she said. "We don't have the budget to take on thousands more in Gondar." The money from the Boston, she said, could buy more grain and help "provide eggs and other essential nutrition for children."

The Joint Distribution Committee, a worldwide relief organization based in New York, is providing emergency food rations and overseeing medical clinics in Gondar and in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, where between 8,000 and 10,000 Falash Mura are waiting in the hope of moving to Israel.

Ethiopian doctors working for the JDC also make periodic site visits in the Kwara region. NACOEJ and the JDC are the only organizations providing such humanitarian relief, according to officials from those organizations.

The Boston community hopes to propel other local Jewish communities toward similar action. Its Jewish Community Relations Council has issued a public statement expressing disappointment with the way Israeli authorities have handled the issue so far.

"With the meager numbers of people coming out of Ethiopia, it will take a few years before they all come out," Barbara Gaffin, the JCRC's associate director said in a telephone interview. "Conditions in Ethiopia are so difficult that we may lose a lot of lives." □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Jewish-led party takes its place as the opposition in South Africa

By Suzanne Belling

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — For the first time in the history of South Africa's Parliament, a Jewish legislator will lead the opposition.

The final results from the nation's second democratic elections indicate that the Democratic Party, led by Tony Leon, will replace the New National Party as the official opposition to the ruling African National Congress. The ANC won a landslide victory under President-elect Thabo Mbeki. Running closely behind the Democrats was Zulu Chief Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party.

An elated Leon said he was "thrilled with the results. We've done so well — much better than our expectations and than in the 1994 elections."

His party, which campaigned under the slogan, "The Guts to Fight Back," obtained more than five times the votes it received in 1994.

"We will now take the fight forward," Leon added. "People voted for us because they are concerned about the ANC and want a strong opposition, which any decent democracy needs."

The Democrats "overwhelmingly attracted the Jewish vote, because we stand where their concerns are — but it was not just Jewish people who voted for us," Leon said, adding that his party had also attracted black and Indian voters.

Commenting on what it is like to be the first Jewish leader of an official opposition party in South Africa, Leon said, "It feels good. Being Jewish is part of me — but I neither make a fuss over it nor deny it."

Leon said the New National Party had published scathing reports about him "because I am not a Christian," but added that this did not affect voters, whom he described as "mature" and for whom a candidate's "religion seems to be of secondary importance."

At Leon's side throughout the campaign was his Israeli fiancée, Michal Even-Zahav, whom he met when he visited Israel several years ago to attend a conference for Jewish legislators.

Even-Zahav and her two children, aged 14 and 12, will be settling in South Africa in August.

She betrayed her sympathy for Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak when she said last week, on the day South Africa's elections were held, "We were lucky in the Israeli elections. I hope I have brought the luck with me."

Leon's brother, Peter, is leader of the Democrats in the Gauteng Province, which includes Johannesburg and Pretoria. As a result of the voting, the party will lead the opposition there as well.

"In a sense, we did get a lot of Jewish support," said Peter Leon. "Tony resonates well in the Jewish community."

"In a country which is largely Christian, the fact that Tony is Jewish did not harm him. Jews in South Africa have never been as unthreatened as they are now."

South Africa has between 80,000 and 90,000 Jews out of a total population of some 43 million. The approximately 45,000 Jews eligible to vote represent less than 1 percent of the total electorate.

Meanwhile, a Jewish member of Parliament from the ruling party claimed the election results indicated that President-elect Mbeki's party had received significant support from Jewish voters.

"I think the election results say it all — especially the support we've received from Jews," said Andrew Feinstein.

"There are a fair number of Jewish representatives who have been voted in through the ANC," he said. "It is important that Jews engage with government and feel part of the changes in the country. The implications for the Jewish community are very good."

Echoing the sentiment of Peter Leon that the country's Jews have a proud record of fighting for democracy, Feinstein urged the Jewish community to "continue to put their shoulder to the wheel and become a full part of the process of reconstruction and development." □

#### Legislators approve El Al report

The Dutch Parliament approved a recent report on the 1992 El Al airline crash on the outskirts of Amsterdam.

The report deared the airline of negligence in the incident, in which an estimated 43 people died, but it said Israel was not forthcoming enough during investigations into the plane's cargo.

#### Group votes to return artworks

A German foundation deared the way Friday for Holocaust survivors to recover millions of dollars worth of art that was looted by the Nazis and then hidden away for decades behind the Iron Curtain.

The board of the Foundation for Prussian Cultural Heritage, which oversees several museums in and around Berlin, voted to give its new president the authority to negotiate returns directly with prewar owners or their heirs.

The move comes in an effort to avoid lengthy court cases.

Meanwhile, Vienna will soon return 700 artworks that came into the city's possession during and after World War II, according to the city's mayor.

Michael Haupl made the vow to Jewish leaders last Friday at a meeting in New York hosted by the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

A commission he appointed to look into the matter will make its decisions about the 700 works known within a few weeks, he said.

Haupl also said he supports building in Vienna a proposed museum of tolerance whose main function would be to educate people about the Holocaust.

#### KKK sets up shop Down Under

The Ku Klux Klan recently established chapters in Australia for the first time.

An Australian newspaper quoted Peter Coleman, the chapters' founder, as saying that "there is a Jew under every rock" and that homosexuals are abnormal.

Coleman was expelled from Australia's extremist One Nation Party after party officials learned of his Klan activities.

#### Athlete who shunned Hitler dies

An Austrian Jewish swimmer who refused to take part in Hitler's 1936 Olympic Games died last month at 77.

Ruth Lawrence was 14 when she broke the Austrian records for the 100-meter and 400-meter freestyle.

She was one of three Jewish girls who were to have represented their country at the games, which Hitler staged in an attempt to showcase Aryan superiority.

## Iranian Jews charged with spying amid stepped-up efforts for release

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — A group of Iranian Jews who were arrested in March in Iran have been charged with spying for Israel and the United States.

Iran's state-run radio broadcast the news Monday, according to a report by the Associated Press quoting the British Broadcasting Company.

The 13 people from southern Iran "were accused of spying for the 'Zionist regime' and 'world arrogance,' references to Israel and the United States respectively," the AP report says.

The announcement of the charges has lent urgency to a situation that Jewish groups have been monitoring for several months.

Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said much has been done during the past 10 weeks to press the Iranian government to release the detainees, who were being held without charges.

"We've had intercessions by every government, by every person possible," said Hoenlein, whose organization represents 55 Jewish groups.

Advocates had worked with the utmost discretion in the hope that such cover would give Iran the "chance to back off."

Now, he said, those involved are preparing to "go all out to respond to what's happening."

The "high-level intercessions" also included representatives of the United Nations, human rights groups, Jewish organizations, humanitarian agencies and business people with interests in the region, Hoenlein said, without elaborating.

The Iranian Jewish community in the United States has also been involved, he said.

"We received assurances all along" that the Iranian government would "take certain steps" and that "people would be released," Hoenlein said.

"They promised all along different things, none of which have come to fruition."

Both Israel and the United States have denied that the espionage charges have "any validity whatsoever," Hoenlein asserted.

Espionage is punishable by death in Iran, the AP report said, noting that in 1997 Iran hanged two people convicted of spying for Israel and America.

Hoenlein said Iran may have made the charges public at this point due to international pressure.

"They had people arrested and held for 10 weeks without anybody being charged," Hoenlein said.

Although the Iranian radio report apparently did not specify the suspects' religion or nationality, it did say the 13 were living among the Jewish community in the southern Fars province and cited an unidentified official, according to the Associated Press report.

But Hoenlein said there could be no doubt that the arrests were directed against "only Jews. They have not arrested anybody else."

Some sources had earlier suggested that an internal dispute among Jewish communities in Iran triggered the arrests.

Hoenlein said specific details remain unclear, but he believed

that an internal dispute "doesn't appear to be the issue, even though it might have been at some point or for some people.

"Once you're charged with espionage, everything else pales in comparison." □

## Legislators take oath of office as 15th Knesset holds session

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With a record 15 parties in attendance and all but guaranteed to provide fireworks in the weeks and months to come, Israel's 15th Knesset convened this week for its inaugural session.

The incoming Knesset, whose members were sworn in Monday, is expected to operate on a limited basis until Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak forms his government.

President Ezer Weizman opened the session and then turned the podium over to former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who as the most senior legislator, presided over the session as acting speaker.

Peres and other legislators were slated to meet this week to discuss what limited forms of business should come before the Knesset until Barak's government is approved.

After being sworn in, Peres swore in the other 119 Knesset members.

Each legislator took the pledge of office separately.

Among them was Barak, who soon left the house to continue coalition negotiations.

Barak has another month before presenting his government for legislative approval.

Outgoing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also took the oath.

Netanyahu had previously announced he was resigning his Knesset seat, but he subsequently postponed his departure until Barak presents his Cabinet.

In an address before swearing in the legislators, Peres said the peace process is irreversible.

"I believe that the dream of peace will be like the dream of independence, a dream that became a reality," he said.

Peres recalled the legacy of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, "under whose leadership we began a revolutionary process of making peace in the Middle East."

Rabin's daughter, Dalia Rabin-Philosof, one of 37 newcomers to the Knesset, later welcomed the reference to Rabin's achievement as "overdue."

During his address, Peres also made an appeal for unity among legislators and the Israeli public as a whole.

"Democracy is not just a matter of respect for the rule of law, but also of respect for minorities," he said.

But this advice apparently went unheeded when hard-line legislators heckled Dr. Ahmed Tibi, who formerly served as Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's adviser on Israeli affairs, when he took the oath of office for his first Knesset term.

Rehavam Ze'evi, a member of the far-right National Unity bloc, shouted at Tibi, "Do you indeed intend to stand by this oath?"

Tibi later made a show of not singing Hatikvah, Israel's national anthem, with the other legislators.

"I'm not a Jew. It speaks of a 'Jewish heart beating,'" Tibi explained later. "It's a pretty melody, but the words mean nothing to me." □