



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

House passes religion measure

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a measure on Thursday that would permit the Ten Commandments to be posted in schools and other government buildings.

The measure, an amendment to a juvenile justice bill, is part of a package of moves that legislators are mulling to counter youth violence in schools. Some legislators maintain that the growing violence results from the absence of religion in public life.

Report: Golan was almost ceded

Outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu initially agreed in secret talks with Syria to a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the Israeli-Syrian border that existed prior to the 1967 Six-Day War, according to an article in this week's issue of *The New Republic* magazine.

Syria agreed in turn to a single 6-mile demilitarized zone and to an international monitoring station on the Golan, Middle East specialist Daniel Pipes reported, citing "several sources with firsthand knowledge" of the 1998 talks. Netanyahu, who denied the report, ultimately balked at signing the accord after his defense and foreign ministers refused to endorse the agreement.

HIAS: Let more Kosovars in

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society called on the Clinton administration to continue to allow Kosovo refugees to resettle in the United States.

"As Jews, we know only too well what it means to have to flee persecution and start over," HIAS Executive Vice President Leonard Glickman said after returning this week from a fact-finding mission in Macedonia.

Senators seek to reverse cuts

A bipartisan group of U.S. senators on Thursday introduced a bill to reverse cuts in the 1996 welfare law that barred access to Medicaid for low-income immigrant children and pregnant women.

The Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act of 1999 would restore Medicaid eligibility to 130,000 children and 50,000 pregnant women, including those who came after the 1996 welfare reform bill became law. The bill would cost an estimated \$490 million over five years.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Eastern German town celebrates Jewish rebirth, stages Weill opera

By Toby Axelrod

CHEMNITZ, Germany (JTA) — Statues of eight boys once graced the facade of the high school here, sculpted images of perfection to be admired from below.

But in 1936, the headmaster removed the top two statues and had them destroyed because they were modeled after a Jewish boy named Moritz.

He and his family had already fled Germany.

They were lucky.

By the end of the war, only 57 Chemnitz Jews returned to this small city near the Czech border, which had a prewar Jewish population of 4,500.

Now the city is part of the renaissance of Jewish life in Germany.

Mayor Peter Seifert is planning a new synagogue for the Jewish community, which now numbers 300, and a local sculptor is creating new statues to replace the two that were destroyed.

Last weekend, Chemnitz became the focus of international attention with the German premiere of a Kurt Weill opera that is a collaboration of the Chemnitz Opera, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the New Israeli Opera and the Opera Krakow.

The staging of "The Eternal Road" was a longtime dream of the New York-based Kurt Weill Foundation for Music and of John Mauceri, the principal conductor of the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra in Los Angeles.

It tells the story of frightened German Jews during the 1930s who, hiding in their synagogue, watch biblical scenes of faith and betrayal play out before them.

It is hard to believe such a premiere is taking place here, in a city stunted under 40 years of communism.

Chemnitz, which had been renamed Karl Marx Stadt, has reclaimed its name and its history — the glory and the dark side.

Amid all the fanfare, Mayor Seifert remembered the past.

"On the pogrom night [November 9, 1938]," he said, referring to Kristallnacht, "Chemnitzers burned the old synagogue. And now we are going to give it back," he told guests at a pre-opera news conference.

In many ways, Chemnitz, with 265,000 inhabitants and 19 percent unemployment, is a typical eastern German city struggling to rebuild after communism. It is also typical in terms of Jewish life.

While the general population has dropped since the fall of communism, the Jewish population of Chemnitz has grown.

A huge influx from the former Soviet Union has brought the number of German Jews to an official total of more than 70,000, double what it was 10 years ago, but only a fraction of the 1933 population of some 500,000.

To accommodate the newcomers, several cities, among them Mannheim, Heidelberg, Freiburg and Darmstadt, have renovated old synagogues or built new temples.

Along with Dresden, Chemnitz is one of the few former East German towns to do so.

The city is also one of the first in the former East Germany to invite former Jewish citizens to visit, something that former West German cities have done for decades.

And — like the cosmopolitan cities of Berlin and Munich — Chemnitz also hosts an annual week of Jewish culture, with klezmer music, readings and dance. The eighth

MIDEAST FOCUS

Clinton optimistic about talks

Israel will go forward with the peace process even without U.S. encouragement, President Clinton told reporters Thursday while traveling in Europe.

"I expect there to be a revival of the peace process generated by the parties themselves," Clinton said during a news conference in Paris with French President Jacques Chirac.

Alluding to the newly elected government in Israel, he added, "I don't believe that I will have to take any steps to revive the peace process."

Barak plans meetings with Shas

Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak is planning a series of meetings with the Shas Party to discuss its participation in his government.

Barak called for the meetings Wednesday after the Council of Torah Sages, the fervently Orthodox rabbinic leaders of Shas, accepted the resignation of the party's political leader, Aryeh Deri.

Arens proposes cuts in aid

Israel's outgoing defense minister proposed Wednesday that the United States decrease its \$1.8 billion in annual military aid to Israel in exchange for allowing the Jewish state to spend a higher percentage of the aid on its own weapons systems.

The United States currently requires aid recipients to spend more than 75 percent of the assistance on U.S.-made weapons. Israel's Finance Ministry reportedly will oppose Moshe Arens' proposal.

Legislators walk out on speech

Fervently Orthodox lawmakers in Israel walked out of the Knesset when the leader of the secular Shinui Party spoke to Israel's parliament about the situation in Kosovo. One of the 19 members who walked out when Yosef "Tommy" Lapid took the podium explained that they were protesting what they see as Lapid's "racist" attitude toward them.



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such festival began last weekend, with the opera's premiere.

Today, in the town's old tree-shaded Jewish cemetery, a stone in a flower bed marks the spot where the ashes of a Torah scroll are buried.

It is to such places one retreats for reflection. Surrounded by a wall and fence, the cemetery's stones mark the graves of rich and poor, from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Some bear the marks of vandalism, moss growing along the cracks of old wounds.

It was in the cemetery's chapel that Siegmund Rotstein had his Bar Mitzvah 61 years ago.

"It was supposed to be in the synagogue on November 30, 1938," said Rotstein, 73, who today is president of the Jewish communities of the state of Sachsen.

"Instead, I saw the fire, because I passed by on my way to my Bar Mitzvah lessons."

Rotstein, who ultimately was deported to Theresienstadt, is one of the few Chemnitz Jews who returned to live here after the war.

Mayor Seifert, 58, was inspired to build the synagogue after his first trip to Israel three years ago.

"The memorial to children at Yad Vashem was staggering to me," he explained. "I went out and said, 'We have to try a little bit to repair what can't be repaired.'"

His dream was shared by Rotstein.

The building provided by the communist state is no longer sufficient.

"We need a house of prayer with a mikvah, a library and a community room," Rotstein said.

"One must assure that in the Diaspora, Jewish life can exist."

More than \$4 million is needed for the synagogue project, says Andreas Bochmann, a spokesman for the mayor.

A fund-raising committee has been created, and a benefit concert was held earlier this month to help raise seed money.

The state will make the biggest contribution.

Mayor Seifert wants to see the project completed before the end of his term in 2001.

All is not sun and light in Chemnitz.

As in other former East German towns with high unemployment, extremist parties are gaining members here.

A membership of 1,800 in the local far-right National Democratic Party may not sound like much, "but 1,000 joined in the last year, most of them youth," said Barbara Ludwig, spokeswoman for youth policies of the Social Democratic Party in Sachsen, the party of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and of Mayor Seifert.

Last summer, when the xenophobic party planned a rally in Chemnitz, some 6,000 citizens formed a human chain so the NDP could not gather in front of the town's opera house.

Only 300 extremists showed up.

Not everyone is convinced that the synagogue is a good idea. "There are countries in Europe that Jewish people should not go to," said Ami Ma'ayani, the former director of the Israeli Academy of Music, who came to Chemnitz for the opera premiere.

"They should build no cemeteries, no synagogues, no Hebrew schools," he said, echoing the ongoing tension between Germany and Israel over Jewish emigration. "The place for Jews is in Israel," he said.

Perhaps Moritz, who posed for the statues at his high school before the war, would agree.

Today 86 years old, he has never been back to Germany, and protects his privacy.

"He heard about the destruction of the sculptures from a friend," says Erick Neukirchner, the local sculptor, who had spoken briefly with Moritz in New York. Neukirchner, 26, has not been able to find any photos of the original figures, so he has used a new model for the replacements.

"It is craziness of the Nazis that one had to tear down a statue because the model was a Jew," he said.

"One would never have known it was a Jewish person." □

JEWISH WORLD

Pope remembers hometown Jews

Pope John Paul paid tribute to the Jews of his Polish hometown during a visit there Wednesday as part of his trip to his native land.

Many Jewish residents of Wadowice were "killed in ghettos and then in camps, because of extermination acts of the Hitler regime," he said. The pontiff also speculated about the wartime fate of other Jews he knew as a child, including a boyhood friend and his family's landlord.

Moscow station airs slurs

A Moscow television station aired a show Thursday night that included anti-Semitic slurs. "Russian House," which focuses on social and political issues, included comments that Jews are part of a conspiracy to dominate the world.

A Russian writer who appeared on the show said Jews "are waiting for the coming of the Antichrist — whom they call HaShem — and they are making preparations for his coming." Known for its ultra-nationalist leanings, the TV-Center Channel that broadcast the show is controlled by the Moscow city government.

Serbs urged to turn in Milosevic

Leading Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal called Thursday for the Serbs to turn over Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to face trial for crimes against humanity.

But Rabbi Marvin Hier, the dean of the center that bears Wiesenthal's name, said he believes NATO will broker a deal that would force Milosevic to step down but not stand trial.

Pilgrims to mark rebbe's yahrzeit

Thousands of pilgrims are expected to visit the New York grave of Menachem Mendel Schneerson this weekend to mark the fifth anniversary of the Lubavitch rebbe's death.

Thousands of other followers of the rebbe around the world will also mark the anniversary with commemorations. The American Friends of Lubavitch marked the occasion by formally opening its Washington headquarters Wednesday with a reception attended by Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), Rep. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.), Washington Mayor Anthony Williams and at least five ambassadors.

Orthodox leaders forge new bloc

Orthodox Jewish leaders meeting in Jerusalem created a committee to present a united Diaspora Orthodox response to the issue of pluralism in Israel.

The group, headed by Orthodox Union President Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, agreed to sponsor an Orthodox conference in Jerusalem early next year.

Congress' initiatives on Palestinians spur Jewish support — and criticism

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Critics of the peace process have launched a campaign on Capitol Hill to reveal details about the Palestinian Authority's lack of compliance with its peace accords.

The proposals, highlighting those unfulfilled Palestinian promises made in peace deals with Israel, are drawing fire from supporters of the peace process who say the effort is aimed at hampering Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak's efforts to restart peace talks with the Palestinians.

The push for quick action on the measures has also put the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in an awkward position as the pro-Israel lobby tries to show its support for Barak while sticking to its policy favoring measures that hold Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to his commitments.

Three separate initiatives, some of which could come to a vote later this week, are making their way through Congress:

- One requires the Clinton administration to link aid to organizations operating in Palestinian self-rule areas to, among other things, the Palestinian Authority's willingness to open its books to an international audit and verification of the confiscation of unlicensed weapons;

The legislation is set to be introduced next week by a senior Republican senator, according to a Capitol Hill source who refused to reveal the name of the lawmaker.

- A second bill requires the State Department to issue a report every six months detailing "terrorist attacks and the activities of the Palestinian Authority, focusing on the status of investigations into terrorists involved in attacks that killed American citizens."

- A third measure is a nonbinding resolution that calls for U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority to be conditioned on "full cooperation in combating terrorist violence" and on investigating and prosecuting terrorist suspects involved in the murder of U.S. citizens.

Because of corruption in the Palestinian Authority, the United States began sending all aid three years ago to the self-rule areas through non-governmental organizations that directly fund specific projects. The change took away a lever used by peace process opponents who sought to cut off U.S. aid to the Palestinians based on their lack of strict compliance with the peace accords.

For now, attention is focused on the measure involving the extradition of terrorists. FBI agents have traveled to Israel and the Palestinian self-rule areas three times in the last few months to interview suspects and gather evidence.

"Our country's fight against international terrorism will take an important step forward with the passage of this legislation," said Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, who was instrumental in getting the bill introduced, according to Capitol Hill aides.

"This is the first crucial step in the process of bringing the Palestinian killers of Americans to justice," he said.

Next week, some 100 ZOA activists plan to lobby members of Congress to support the initiative in the group's first-ever Washington mass lobbying effort.

Sponsors of the measure requiring the State Department to report on the extradition of terrorists, Sens. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.), Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) and Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), hope to attach the proposal to the State Department reauthorization bill, which could come to a vote as early as Friday.

The bill, which has not passed in recent years because of unrelated fights over the payment of U.N. dues and anti-abortion language, again faces a long road in Congress.

For their part, groups promoting movement in the peace process called on all Jewish groups, including AIPAC, to weigh in more forcefully against the measure.

They charged that the push is similar to efforts that took place during Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's government, where opponents of ceding land to the Palestinians went to Capitol Hill to drum up opposition to the peace process. □

Iranian Jews are 'tolerated,' but still live in occasional fear

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylonia in 538 B.C.E., freed the Jews from captivity and provided the resources to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

Today, contemporary Persia — Iran — is one of the most virulently anti-Zionist countries, from which even a phone call to Israel is impossible.

So when 13 Jews arrested earlier this year were recently charged with spying for America and Israel, the "Zionist regime," their situation became unquestionably bleak.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, at least 17 Jews, including Jewish community leaders, have been executed since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran — many of whom were also accused of spying for Israel and the United States.

Of these executions, the most highly publicized was the death of Habib Alqanayan, a head of the Jewish community, in 1979, the ADL said. Israel and the United States have publicly denied the veracity of the charges against the 13 men, who include a rabbi, religious teachers and Jewish community leaders.

While Iranian Jews and their family members living abroad have been reluctant to talk about their daily lives — fearing retribution from Iranian authorities — some information is known about the community.

Iran's 2,500-year-old Jewish population is the largest Diaspora community in the Middle East, with an estimated 25,000 to 35,000 Jews. A recent report by the Israeli daily Ha'aretz put the number at 27,000, citing Iranian Jewish sources.

Iran's pre-Revolution Jewish population is estimated to have been 100,000, but most left for the United States and Israel as anti-Zionism and anti-capitalism heated up under the Islamic regime.

Jews are considered a "tolerated minority" in Iran, a state that is ruled by Islamic law, or Shariah.

This protection came in the form of a fatwa, or religious decree, issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini when he returned from exile in Paris in 1979 to announce the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

As do the other recognized religious minorities living in Iran — Christians and Zoroastrians — the Jewish community has its own representative in the Iranian Parliament.

In 1997, according to one news report, there were 11 functioning synagogues, two kosher restaurants, a Jewish hospital, an old-age home and a cemetery in Tehran alone. Jews are allowed to congregate and pray in synagogues, which have become for many Jews since the Revolution, a social center as well.

Jews are permitted to drink alcohol in private — unlike Muslims, for whom liquor is prohibited — but Jewish women must cover their heads in accordance with the Islamic dress code.

Jewish merchants are permitted to close their businesses on Saturday, but one of the explanations for the recent arrests is that some of the religious Jews refused to open their stores on Shabbat.

Jewish religious education is encouraged and taught by Jewish teachers, although the schools are run by the Muslim state. Hebrew is taught only in private and is popularly associated with Israel, and thus Zionism.

Nasrin Jahaverian, whose brother, Nasser Levihaïm, is one of the men in custody, told JTA that Iranian authorities might have targeted him because he frequently volunteered as a Hebrew teacher.

Most Iranian Jews live in the capital, Tehran; only a few thousand live in the regional centers of Isfahan and Shiraz, where the Jews in custody were arrested.

Shiraz is known as a more traditional city than Tehran, and Jewish and Muslim residents tend toward religious conservatism.

According to one source originally from Shiraz, more members of the Bahai religion — a minority group considered heretical by the Shi'ite Muslim leadership — have been executed in Shiraz than elsewhere in Iran.

Despite Jews' official status, several Iranian Jews living in America interviewed by JTA attested to popular, even "rampant," anti-Semitism in Iran in the form of job discrimination and the destruction of personal property.

One Tehran native who moved to the U.S. in 1982 said, "You lived quietly and into yourself," and described the communal philosophy as: "You don't bother them; they don't bother us."

Jews in Iran try to "minimize contact" with their Muslim neighbors "out of fear of exactly these kinds of incidents," he said, referring to the arrests.

An Iranian Jewish woman living in New York said, "It's a question confronting Jews in Iran: Are you loyal to Israel or Iran?"

"It's a test question non-Jewish Iranians put to Jewish Iranians," she said. Official actions against Jews suspected of Zionist ties can be severe.

In 1998 Iran executed a 60-year-old Iranian businessman for allegedly spying for Israel, according to Human Rights Watch.

In 1997 two people were hanged after they were convicted of espionage charges, according to the human rights organization Amnesty International.

In 1996, an anonymous Iranian Jew testified in the U.S. before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights that he was imprisoned for more than two years because he was suspected of spying for Israel.

The man reportedly said he had been arrested, held and then released "suddenly, with no explanation." But he said he was "under constant surveillance" and told to leave Tehran.

His case was "extreme," he told the committee, but exemplified the "constant state of fear" in which Iranian Jews live.

The tension inherent in Jewish life in Iran emerged in remarks by the Jewish representative to Iran's Parliament published Saturday. According to a news report, Manouchehr Eliasi demanded "true justice for the suspects."

"This is not the first time Jews have been arrested in Iran on charges of spying for the Zionist regime, and we hope such a thing is not true and they will be acquitted," he reportedly said in an interview with the Iranian centrist daily Entekhab.

"We have no links or contact to the Israeli government because we distinguish between Judaism and Zionism," he said, according to the report.

On Friday, Iran's chief jurist reportedly announced to thousands gathered at Friday prayers at Tehran University that the men would "receive capital punishment" if found guilty, and denounced the Israel and the United States.

Worshippers reportedly chanted "Death to Israel" and "Death to America," and called for the suspects' execution. □