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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Strategy changed on Iranian 13

The organized American Jewish community decided to put on hold its high-profile campaign to convince Iran to free 13 Jews arrested earlier this year and charged with spying for Israel and the United States.

An ad hoc task force formed to coordinate the Jewish community's strategy agreed in a conference call on Monday to "put in abeyance" their campaign in the hope that "the public outcry combined with the major diplomatic offensive will bring positive results," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"We can't go back to quiet, private diplomacy," he added. "However, one can try to calibrate the amount of public activity." [Page 1]

Shul arsons prompt rally

Some 4,000 people gathered in Sacramento to dedicate themselves to fight bigotry in light of last Friday's arsons against three synagogues in the California capital. [Page 4]

Barak resumes talks with Likud

Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak began a new round of coalition negotiations Monday with the Likud Party after having trouble wooing fervently Orthodox Jews and leftists into the government he is forming.

Barak has until July 8 to present his government for Knesset approval.

House passes MIA bill

The U.S. House of Representatives approved Tuesday by a vote of 415-5 a non-binding resolution that asks the State Department to raise the fate of Israeli soldiers missing in action with Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian officials.

The measure is named after Zachary Baumel, a citizen of both Israel and the United States who was captured by forces affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1982 while serving with the Israeli army in Lebanon.

76 Ethiopian Jews arrive in Israel

Seventy-six Jews from the Ethiopian region of Kwara arrived at Israel's Ben-Gurion Airport on Tuesday. [Page 3]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Iranian Jews in the United States change tactics, raise their voices

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The plight of 13 Jews in Iran who could face execution as alleged "Zionist spies" has marked a turning point in the Iranian Jewish community in the United States.

They will no longer keep silent.

"From now on, you'll see more activism and involvement," said George Haroonian, a spokesman for the Council of Iranian Jewish Organizations.

Traditionally, Iranian Jews living in the United States have refrained from making public statements about the situation inside Iran for fear of endangering family and friends in the Islamic republic. But during the present crisis the strategy of quiet diplomacy came into conflict with a desire for more active protest. These fissures were revealed in the 30,000-strong Iranian Jewish community in Los Angeles, the largest such concentration in the United States.

The split is basically between two groups, the more establishment Iranian American Jewish Federation, and the upstart council.

During the three months between the arrests in March and the spy charges in June, the federation pursued a policy of quiet diplomacy as the most effective way to influence Tehran, as did major American Jewish organizations.

The council, which includes organizations that split off from the Federation, advocated highly visible pressure tactics from the beginning. It was largely the council members, organized as the Committee for Religious Minority Rights in Iran, who flooded the office of Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.) with calls and letters urging congressional action.

Sherman was among the 600 men and women attending Shabbat services at the Eretz Cultural Center who stood for a minute's silence as a man on the bimah slowly read the names of the 13 Jews.

It was a quiet moment for the congregation of Iranian Jewish immigrants, who have been on an emotional roller coaster for the last three months, fearing and hoping for the fate of relatives and friends imprisoned in the city of Shiraz. The comments of Sherman, who has spearheaded a congressional resolution calling for national and international pressure on Iran to release the prisoners, reflected the anxiety.

"A great atrocity may occur," Sherman warned. "The government of Iran must be shown that it will pay a severe price for every day that the hostages are held."

Sherman's voice joined that of several major Jewish organizations, who have mobilized their contacts on behalf of the Iranian prisoners. An official with a Jewish organization took up the issue June 17 with six Iranian journalists visiting the United States.

At the closed-door meeting, the Jewish group sought to convey the seriousness with which officials in the United States take the fate of the 13 Jews.

The journalists, all loyal to Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, said they believe the arrests are an effort to thwart the president's policies. No world pressure will lead to their release, the reporters said.

"Once they've been charged, they have to be tried," the journalists told a source at the Jewish organization.

"Their only hope is to have an open trial, open to public scrutiny," they said.

Meanwhile, the House and Senate have scheduled votes later this week on

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arab legislator wounded

The first Israeli Arab to run for prime minister was wounded by Israeli police during a demonstration Monday near Tel Aviv.

Legislator Azmi Beshara, who dropped out of the race two days before the May 17 elections, was hit in the shoulder by a rubber bullet. Seven other Israeli Arabs were also wounded when Arab stone-throwers protested the demolition of an Arab-owned home that police said was built without a permit.

Soldier wounded in Lebanon

An Israeli soldier was wounded by Hezbollah shelling in the southern Lebanon security zone.

The incident raised to 30 the number of Israeli soldiers wounded in the region this year. Ten have been killed during the same period.

Explosives kill Palestinian boy

A 13-year-old Palestinian boy was killed and a 17-year-old lost a leg Tuesday after they picked up explosives near an Israeli firing range located near Hebron, according to a Palestinian security official.

Court rejects Vanunu petitions

Israel's High Court of Justice rejected two petitions filed by a man serving an 18-year sentence for leaking Israeli nuclear secrets.

The court refused Mordechai Vanunu's requests to release him to the country where he was captured in 1986, which is reportedly Italy, and to publish confidential documents related to his case.

Arafat launches cellular service

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat on Monday launched the first Palestinian cellular telephone service.

In the first call carried by the Palestine Telecommunications Company, he said, using his revolutionary nickname, "Hello, Abu Ammar is speaking."



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resolutions calling on Iran to free the 13.

In contrast to the active protests by some in the U.S. Iranian Jewish community, the rest of the organized American Jewish community has decided to put its high-profile campaign on hold. An ad hoc task force formed to coordinate the Jewish community's strategy agreed on Monday to "put in abeyance" their campaign in the hope that "the public outcry combined with the major diplomatic offensive will bring positive results," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"We can't go back to quiet, private diplomacy. However, one can try to calibrate the amount of public activity," Foxman said.

Like the Iranian journalists, most observers believe that the prisoners are pawns in a power struggle between Iran's fundamentalist hard-liners and the relatively moderate views of Khatami. The split was illustrated by two news items on Sunday.

One story, citing senior British officials, reported that Khatami was seeking secret talks with Israel and had proposed a series of confidence-building steps between the two countries. The report has been denied by Iran's foreign ministry.

On the same day, a top Iranian cleric, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, stated that the 13 Jews deserved to be hanged if they're found guilty and dismissed any suggestion that Western governments might work out a deal for their release.

Iran maintained Tuesday that it would not buckle to pressure from Western countries for the Jews' release.

"The pressure and propaganda by the West will have no effect on the court proceedings against the suspects," a Foreign Ministry spokesman was quoted as saying by the state-run IRNA news agency. "This is an internal affair and the arrests of these people have nothing to do with their religion. They will be guaranteed justice as suspects in other cases."

The fight for their release, Haroonian said, finally has the entire Iranian Jewish community in the United States speaking with one voice. But the antagonism between the factions is of longer standing.

The federation consists of 16 organizations, said Sam Kermanian, its secretary-general, while the council is made up of seven organizations. Each side claims to represent the larger part of the Iranian Jewish community.

While Kermanian sought to minimize the friction between the groups, and deplored any "public fighting," council leaders were more outspoken.

Council spokesmen Pooya Dayanim and Haroonian both described the federation group as "elitist" and mainly representing the wealthy Iranian enclave in Beverly Hills.

"Our divergence with the federation goes deeper than the matter of the 13 prisoners, but the case highlights the failure of a philosophy of keeping silent," said Dayanim, a 27-year-old lawyer.

The Union of Councils of Soviet Jews has launched a 100,000-name petition drive on behalf of the Iranian prisoners and has lobbied the Russian government to intercede with Tehran through its offices in St. Petersburg and Moscow. □

(JTA Washington Bureau Chief Matthew Dorf contributed to this report.)

Communities asked to help Kosovars

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The work for Jewish federations that have agreed to resettle refugees from Kosovo is just beginning now that NATO peacekeepers have taken control of the region.

Local Jewish federations are likely to be asked to shift in the coming months from family reunification efforts to helping resettle medically needy refugees, according to Leonard Glickman, executive vice president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

Last Friday, Glickman reported to the State Department on his visits earlier in the week to refugee camps in Macedonia.

While "it's very important to focus on the safe return of refugees to Kosovo," Glickman said, "we are very concerned about people not able to go back."

Since the war against Serbia began, Jewish agencies in 36 communities have resettled some 250 refugees, all with relatives in the United States, according to Glickman. Another 200 who have already been processed are expected to arrive in the coming weeks, he said. □

JEWISH WORLD

High court rules on Kiryas Joel

The U.S. Supreme Court granted a temporary reprieve on Monday in the long-running battle over a New York state school district created for Orthodox Jews with learning disabilities.

Acting on an emergency appeal after New York's highest court ordered that the school for Satmar Chasidim in the upstate village of Kiryas Joel be closed, the justices agreed to meet later this summer to decide whether the high court will hear the appeal.

If the court takes the case, the school will likely be allowed to remain open through the 1999-2000 school year.

Delay seen in slave labor pact

A U.S. lawyer representing Nazi-era slave workers demanding compensation from some of Germany's largest firms said Tuesday he doubted a settlement could be reached this year.

The companies' belief that a compensation fund would shield them from all future claims could be an obstacle to reaching an agreement soon, Melvyn Weiss said before talks in Bonn that included lawyers for the firms, Chancellery Minister Bodo Hombach and U.S. Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat.

Meanwhile, the Claims Conference on Material Claims Against Germany, which is involved in the negotiations, issued a position paper Monday that spells out what it seeks in restitution.

The paper includes the demand that all slave laborers, whether they worked for Germany's public or private sectors, be paid the same amount at the same time.

Bombers denied new trial

A U.S. judge rejected a request for a new trial by four Islamic terrorists convicted in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

The four men, sentenced to life in jail for their role in plotting the February 1993 attack that killed six and injured more than 1,000, had received a fair trial, U.S. District Judge Kevin Duffy ruled.

A federal appeals court denied the men's appeals last year.

Duffy also presided over a subsequent trial in which two other men, including the bombing's mastermind, were also given life sentences.

Vandals worry Berlin's mayor

Berlin's mayor said Sunday he opposes plans for a national Holocaust memorial because it could be vandalized.

Eberhard Diepgen, a long-standing opponent of the proposed monument in central Berlin, said in a newspaper interview that it would cost millions of dollars each year to guard it.

Will arrival of Kwara Jews mark 'beginning of the end' of their plight?

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Seventy-six Jews from the Kwara region of northern Ethiopia touched down this week at Ben-Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv.

Their arrival Tuesday marked what many advocates hoped was "the beginning of the end" of the plight of an estimated 3,800 Ethiopian Jews who had been left behind when thousands of fellow Jews immigrated to Israel earlier this decade.

Many who have been involved in the cause of Ethiopian Jewry expect that the more controversial issue of the thousands of Falash Mura — who consider themselves to be Jewish but are not recognized as such by the state of Israel — seeking entry to Israel will move up on the Jewish communal agenda once the Jews of Kwara have been relocated.

The Kwara Jews who arrived Tuesday, dressed in their traditional white robes, seemed bewildered and anxious as they deplaned only to find themselves in the glaring lights of camera crews — their first view of their new home.

Despite the international media attention, this exodus from Africa was meant to be a low-key affair in an effort to maintain the cooperation of the Ethiopian government, several observers noted.

The new immigrants came on a regularly scheduled Ethiopian Airlines flight, the first of an expected 40 such flights bringing the remaining Kwara Jews to Israel.

The number of immigrants expected on Tuesday's flight was first put at 88 but, according to a Jewish Agency spokesman, two families were forced to remain behind because their children had contracted measles in Gondar. Officials say they expect the immigration of the Kwara Jews to be completed by the end of the year.

The estimated 3,800 Jews from the Lower Kwara region — up from previous estimates of 3,500 — were left off official rosters of Ethiopian Jews approved for aliyah, or immigration to Israel, in the mass airlifts of Operation Solomon in 1991.

Several other efforts were made to bring Jews out of Ethiopia since then, but by all accounts, this group of Jews was "forgotten." During the past year, hundreds of Kwara Jews — along with thousands of Falash Mura — had gathered at a compound near the Israeli consulate building in the northern regional capital of Gondar.

Conditions in the compound have consistently been described by humanitarian aid workers and Israeli officials as anywhere from "awful" to "inhuman."

Moved by the Jews' plight, advocates from the United States and Israel cried out for Israel to expedite their aliyah.

After months of unfulfilled promises, the outgoing Netanyahu government responded to their appeals this month by deciding to forgo the rigorous application process that typically has been applied in cases of Ethiopian Jews.

The Interior Ministry this week increased its staff in Gondar by four, bringing the number of personnel working together with local community members there to 12, including two senior Jewish Agency staff and a doctor.

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein — whose Chicago-based foundation, the Interfaith Fellowship of Christians and Jews, provided \$500,000 for the additional staff — was on hand for the 5:50 p.m. arrival Israel time, which brought the Kwara Jews into a waiting room already filled with immigrants from Brazil and Russia.

"A miracle," Eckstein said, referring to the room that brought "Jews together from the four corners of the earth."

He plans to make an additional donation of \$2 million directly to the Jewish Agency for Israel next week. His donation will come on top of an \$11 million allocation approved by the Jewish Agency this week for the immigration and absorption of immigrants from Russia, Yugoslavia and Ethiopia.

Michael Jankelowitz, a spokesman for the Jewish Agency, said he expected most of the money to go toward the Kwara Jews' transportation and resettlement in Israel.

From the airport, the new arrivals were to be settled at an absorption center in Mevasseret Zion, outside Jerusalem, and met by family members already living in Israel.

Saying that he hoped this flight marks the "beginning of the end of bringing the last Jews out of Ethiopia," Jankelowitz said, "this is a harbinger of good news, this flight 424." □

California leaders unite against hate after arsons at three shuls

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Under a giant banner reading "Sacramento United Against Hate," some 4,000 citizens of all faiths and colors have dedicated themselves to the fight against bigotry as their answer to arson attacks on three Sacramento-area synagogues.

More than 2,500 people crammed into the Community Center Theater on Monday night, while 1,500 more listened in an overflow auditorium during a two-and-a-half hour rally that participants described as "electric" and "the most emotional experience of my life."

The audience rose to its feet as California Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante declared, "Tonight all of us belong to the three synagogues," and as Sacramento Mayor Joe Serna said, "When I hear of synagogues burning, then I am a Jew."

There were more standing ovations as the representative of a black housing association presented the first \$10,000 check for a proposed municipal museum of tolerance, and when Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, observed that in future years, Sacramento would be held up as a model of how a community must respond to bigotry.

Not far from the emotional scene, more than 100 federal agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the FBI were painstakingly combing the three synagogue sites for evidence to link the hate crimes to their perpetrators.

Last Friday's predawn attacks targeted Congregation B'nai Israel and Congregation Beth Shalom, both Reform temples, and the Keneset Israel Torah Center, an Orthodox synagogue. Total damage was estimated at close to \$1 million.

At two of the sites, arsonists left leaflets that blamed the "International Jew World Order" and the "International Jewmedia" for the war in Kosovo.

At Beth Shalom, vandals broke in through a side window and started a fire on the bimah, or dais.

Keneset Israel was the target of a Molotov cocktail, which had been lobbed through a sliding glass door.

Politicians swiftly condemned the attacks.

The California State Assembly on Monday unanimously approved a resolution calling the fires among the worst acts of anti-Semitism in American history. Vice President Al Gore on Monday condemned the arsons as "cowardly."

During a smaller noon rally on Monday, in a park across from B'nai Israel, organizers handed out signs with the slogan, "Sacramento Together, United We Stand."

Vice Mayor Jimmie Yee, a Chinese American whose home was firebombed in 1993, urged Sacramentans to display the sign in their homes, businesses and cars, "to rekindle the light of reason and demonstrate your solidarity with persons of the Jewish faith."

The idea of a tolerance museum, first proposed by Rabbi Brad Bloom of B'nai Israel, drew quick support from Serna.

"The way to stop" hate crimes is "through education," the Sacramento mayor said. "If we can issue bonds to build ballparks, we should build a museum of tolerance in this city."

Serna and state Assemblyman Darrell Steinberg promised to enlist the help of corporations, labor unions, local government

units and community groups to pay for the museum.

The museum proposal was welcomed by the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, whose director, Liebe Geft, flew to Sacramento to meet with officials.

To help meet the immediate needs of the three synagogues, more than \$10,000 has been donated by organizations representing the Japanese and Chinese communities, Buddhist and Christian churches, political leaders and private citizens, the Sacramento Bee reported.

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development has offered low-interest loans to help the synagogues repair the damage, under the 1996 Church Arson Prevention Act. Andrew Cuomo, HUD's secretary, visited B'nai Israel with California Gov. Gray Davis and called it, "an attack against all Americans."

Other offers of help have arrived from all parts of the country. "We've been overwhelmed by offers of moral and financial support from as far away as New York and Florida," said a spokesman at the Sacramento Jewish Federation.

The ADL offered to help replace B'nai Israel's torched books and videos on the Holocaust.

The Jewish Community Library in Los Angeles is also planning to send books, said John Fishel, president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, who said he is open to requests for financial assistance.

In Los Angeles, Fishel said that he had met with the Board of Rabbis on Monday and "everyone was aware of the need to take special precautions."

No arrests have been made.

Investigators are paying close attention to anti-Semitic fliers found at two of the attacked synagogues.

The flier left behind at Keneset Israel denounced the "North Atlantic Terrorist Organization," adding that "The fake Albanian refugee crisis was manufactured by the International Jewmedia to justify the terrorizing, the bestial bombing of our Yugoslavia back into the dark ages."

The text was accompanied by a cartoon of bombs raining down on President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

ADL has been monitoring hate groups in the Sacramento area for the past few months and found them using similar propaganda themes, blaming Jews for the NATO bombings of "Serbian Christians."

However, the Sacramento Bee reported Tuesday that the FBI is warning not to jump to conclusions about the fliers.

"These fliers may eventually be proven to be connected to those responsible for the fires, but even if they are connected, they may contain misstatements about their actual motives and identities," FBI spokesman Nick Rossi told the Sacramento newspaper.

The three arson attacks occurred within a 35-minute span, starting at 3:24 a.m. last Friday.

Given the distance between the synagogues, investigators thought it unlikely, but not impossible, that the same person could have set all three fires.

The North American Boards of Rabbis is offering a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for the arsons. Private individuals have offered similar rewards, totaling \$35,000.

In addition, California Gov. Gray Davis offered a \$25,000 reward for similar information. □