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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Barak to delay religious issues

Israel's new premier is committed to maintaining the religious status quo, which gives the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate control over religious affairs in the Jewish state.

Ehud Barak indicated during his visit to the United States that only after Israel solves its conflict with its Arab neighbors can Israeli society engage in the dialogue necessary to find a balance between the role of religion and the rights of individuals. [Page 3]

U.S. Jews asked to unite

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak called on American Jews to "find a way to unite yourselves to send a clear and unequivocal message" supporting Israel's peace policies to the U.S. government, according to participants who attended a closed-door briefing Sunday for the Israel Policy Forum.

Barak also called on American Jews to work to put "all of their retroactive difference aside" and work to restore bipartisan congressional support for the peace process.

In a subsequent meeting with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Barak called for support of the peace process regardless of party differences.

Premier offers his sympathies

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered his sympathies to the families of John F. Kennedy Jr. and his wife, who are missing after their plane disappeared off the coast of Massachusetts.

"I extend on behalf of myself and the people of Israel our thoughts and prayers to the Kennedy and Bessette families," Barak said during a CNN interview Sunday.

Meanwhile, in an interview taped for NBC's "Meet the Press," Barak said Palestinian refugees will not be able to return to Israel. A "better solution should be found" for the refugees "in the countries where they are living now," Barak said.

Israel to buy Lockheed jets

Israel decided to outfit its air force with F-16-I jet fighters manufactured by U.S.-based Lockheed Martin. The decision ends a tough competition between Lockheed Martin and Boeing, which sought to have Israel purchase its F-15 fighters.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Recent spate of anti-Semitic attacks does not indicate a trend, experts say

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The disturbing headlines of recent weeks have generated considerable trepidation among American Jews about a rising tide of anti-Semitism.

Even before the recent outbreak of hate activity, Jews had identified anti-Semitism as one of the greatest threats to Jewish life in the United States, according to a recent survey by the American Jewish Committee. In fact, since the group began polling Jewish attitudes nearly 20 years ago, fears about anti-Semitism have consistently ranked among the community's greatest concerns.

Although recent events would seem to confirm those deep-seated fears, experts who monitor hate activity say there are no signs of an alarming trend and caution against unwarranted anxiety.

"There's no evidence to suggest that there is an upsurge in the number of Americans who are buying into terrorism, racism, hate and violence," said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles.

Indeed, according to the Anti-Defamation League, which audits anti-Semitic activity each year, the number of anti-Semitic incidents reported in the United States involving harassment, threat or assault has declined during the past few years.

Although there was a slight increase in vandalism against Jewish institutions and property in 1998, the general decline in anti-Semitic activity has been consistent with the drop in overall crime rates across the country.

Kenneth Stern, a specialist on anti-Semitism and extremism with the AJCommittee, said, "If you look at it from the last 10 years, it's hard to say that one guy who decides to take a gun and shoot as many people as he can therefore defines a trend."

"The chances of running into a Benjamin Smith are rather small," Stern said, referring to the man involved in a series of shootings in Illinois and Indiana that left two dead and nine wounded.

"But to say that those dangers don't exist would be wrong," he added.

These assessments come in the wake of a series of hate-driven attacks directed at Jews and other minorities in recent weeks:

- Last month, three synagogues were set ablaze in Sacramento, Calif., in suspected arson attacks;
- On July 3, a shooting spree in Chicago injured six Jews walking home from Shabbat services;
- Last week, an alleged "hit list" that included the names of prominent Jews was discovered following the arrest of two brothers in connection with the murder of a gay couple in northern California.

The suspects in each of the incidents have been linked to the World Church of the Creator, an overtly racist and anti-Semitic group that advocates a racial holy war.

Smith, 21, who authorities said engaged in a two-state shooting rampage over the July 4 weekend before taking his own life, had been considered a model member of the World Church of the Creator.

A search conducted in connection with the arrest of brothers Benjamin and James Williams in Redding, Calif., meanwhile, yielded World Church of the Creator pamphlets and a cache of evidence linking them to the Sacramento synagogue arson attacks, including a notebook containing the names of 32 Jews, all but one of whom live

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak presents bottom line

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak presented President Clinton with four non-negotiable stances in peace negotiations, Foreign Minister David Levy told the Cabinet on Sunday. The "red lines" are: Jerusalem remains the eternal, united capital of Israel; Israel will not return to its 1967 borders; no foreign army will be deployed west of the Jordan River; and most Jewish settlements will be concentrated in blocs that will remain under Israeli sovereignty.

Arafat meets ADL delegation

The Palestinian leadership considers a one-year deadline to be a reasonable target for reaching a permanent peace settlement with Israel, Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat told a delegation from the Anti-Defamation League.

Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director, also said Arafat had made promising statements about clamping down on anti-Semitic incitement in the self-rule areas.

Court rules for detainee's release

Israel's High Court of Justice ruled Sunday that the longest-held Palestinian detainee should be released after being held nearly six years without trial.

Osama Barham was arrested in 1993 for membership in the militant Islamic Jihad organization. Under the terms for his release, Barham promised not to use violence against Israel.

Israeli Army mishandled remains

The Israel Defense Force admitted that the remains of a naval commando killed in Lebanon two years ago were buried in the grave of another soldier also killed in the operation.

The IDF issued an apology after forensic tests were conducted on the remains, which were returned to Israel last year as part of an exchange with Lebanon.

in the Sacramento area. Authorities say the Peoria, Ill.-based group, which was founded in 1973 but has experienced a resurgence in recent years under Matthew Hale, is one of the fastest growing white supremacist groups in the country.

The explosion of hate on the Internet has greatly aided the recruiting efforts of groups like Hale's, while giving rise to a growing number of other self-proclaimed hate groups.

Cooper said that since the Simon Wiesenthal Center began monitoring hate on the Web, the number of sites has risen from a single site at the time of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 to nearly 2,200 today.

In the three months since the school shootings in Littleton, Colo. — where two students apparently obsessed with hate and Nazi symbols massacred fellow students on Hitler's birthday — 700 hate sites have been added to the Web, Cooper said.

"For the first time these extremists are able to mass market their program and their ideology, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in an unfiltered, unassailable fashion," he said.

"If you do that often enough, you're probably eventually going to be able to find more of the loners that are out there and people that are going to act out on the program that's been put in place."

In Sacramento and the Chicago area, Jewish leaders have been attempting to quell anxieties that have arisen from the recent hate crimes. One Sacramento rabbi whose synagogue was targeted in the attacks has urged those on the hit list not to give in to fear.

"It's a mistake to be frightened," Rabbi Stuart Rosen, spiritual leader of Keneset Israel Torah Center, told the Jewish Bulletin of Northern California.

"This is something the enemies of the Jewish people want to hear," added Rosen, who declined to say whether he was on the list.

"We have a mission to bring peace to the world. That mission rests on three pillars: Torah, prayer, and lovingkindness. You fight hate with more acts of loving kindness."

Meanwhile, in West Rogers Park, the Chicago neighborhood where many Orthodox Jews live, the local Jewish community, law enforcement and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley gathered at the Jewish community center last week in what amounted to a display of the community's resiliency.

"Our community, shocked and outraged by what happened, has rejected the path of fear and intimidation," Michael Kotzin, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, told the July 14 gathering.

"We have stood tall, we have gone about our daily lives and we have reached out with sympathy to the others targeted during that awful weekend."

In the aftermath of the attacks, those involved in the fight against racism, anti-Semitism and bigotry are urging a more serious exploration of the root causes of hate and possible responses.

Devin Burghart, a project director for the Illinois-based Center for New Community, which monitors hate activity and engages in faith-based community organizing, cautioned against "jumping to rash conclusions" about recent events.

"We should never let fear be our single guiding principle," Burghart said.

Instead, he said, "communities need to stand together to speak out against hate, to actively work to construct moral barriers against hate in their local communities, so that we can decrease the number of Benjamin Smiths that we have."

Others have proposed legislation that would outlaw Web sites offering instructions on how to build bombs and carry out other terrorist activities. Jewish activists and civil rights leaders are also urging Congress to enact legislation to strengthen the federal hate-crimes statute.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act would allow the federal government to prosecute hate crimes sparked by sexual orientation, gender and disability. Current federal law applies only to crimes motivated by race, color, religion or national origin.

Ultimately, however, most experts acknowledge that there is only so much that can be done to curb hate activity.

Said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League: "The threat has always been there, the potential has always been there, and as long as you have anti-Semites who are ready to use violence, so it will always be. We're not going to eradicate it." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Clinton defends Hillary's stance

President Clinton defended first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's support for moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Speaking to reporters before his first meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak last week, Clinton said he would not permit the embassy to move because he could not "prejudge the final-status issue." But he said the first lady and any member of Congress "can express a personal opinion."

Insurance panel to unveil plan

A system for identifying those eligible for payments from insurance policies taken out by Holocaust victims is scheduled to be unveiled in the coming days.

Under the plan to be announced by the International Commission on Holocaust Era Claims, the panel can increase the amount of payments made by the insurance companies to Holocaust victims or their families if they are deemed insufficient. Earlier this year, the insurers on the commission agreed to have the insurers make inflation-adjusted payments on the policies.

Tycoon's roots may harm run

One of Russia's wealthiest and most powerful men said his Jewish roots would hinder his run for a seat in the Russian Parliament. "Of course, this problem exists for me in connection to the next election campaign," Boris Berezovsky said in a television interview Saturday with the ORT channel, which he reportedly controls.

Last week, the tycoon announced that he would run for a seat in the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, in elections scheduled for December. Berezovsky is believed to have converted to Orthodox Christianity a few years ago.

California passes slave labor bill

Both houses of the California legislature unanimously passed a bill enabling survivors of World War II-era slave and forced labor to seek restitution in California courts. The measure, passed July 15, allows the victims to sue companies currently doing business in California that exploited their labor under the Nazi regime.

Nazi gold fund stalled

Only \$26 million of the \$60 million that has been pledged to a gold fund to help needy Holocaust survivors has been handed over.

The figure was revealed last Friday, when a total of 18 donor and potential donor states met at the British Foreign Office to review progress of the fund, which was established by Britain at a December 1997 Nazi gold conference in London.

Religious-secular tensions flare in Israel during Barak's U.S. visit

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — While Prime Minister Ehud Barak was holding talks abroad about reviving the Israeli-Arab peace process, the religious-secular debate was heating up back home.

The issue flared up over the weekend, after Labor Ministry inspectors fined stores in a kibbutz shopping center for conducting business on the Sabbath.

Trade Minister Ran Cohen, of the secular Meretz Party, accused the Labor Ministry, run by the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, of violating the spirit of the coalition accords that created Prime Minister Ehud Barak's diverse government.

A spokesman for the Labor Ministry denied that the inspectors' actions had any political motivation.

The fighting between the two ministries occurred as Barak was making it clear that he is committed to maintaining the religious status quo, which gives the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate control over religious affairs in Israel.

Barak indicated during his visit this week to the United States that only after Israel solves its conflict with its Arab neighbors can Israeli society engage in the dialogue necessary to find a balance between the role of religion and the rights of individuals. He also hinted that he believes that the Israeli Supreme Court, where the Reform and Conservative movements have in some cases won their battles for recognition, should continue to address these concerns.

Over the weekend, Druse inspectors working for the Labor Ministry were dispatched to the shopping center at Kibbutz Gan Shmuel, where stores were fined for employing Jews on the Sabbath.

Store owners at the kibbutz said they were surprised by the inspectors' arrival Saturday, adding that there had been no such visits during the past six months.

Criticizing the fines, they pointed to a court ruling earlier this year that kibbutzim are not bound by Israel's Sabbath laws. The Labor Ministry spokesman said the inspectors had not gotten to the shopping center earlier because of a heavy work load.

Meanwhile, in an ongoing dispute, several hundred fervently Orthodox protesters demonstrated against allowing traffic through their Jerusalem neighborhood on the Sabbath. Nine demonstrators were arrested for assaulting police and throwing rocks.

Reacting to the various developments, legislator Yosef "Tommy" Lapid of the secular Shinui Party said little had changed on the religious-secular front despite pledges by the new government to respect the rights of people on each side of the religious-secular divide.

Meanwhile, tensions involving Judaism's religious streams were expected later in the week, when mixed prayer services for Tisha B'Av were expected to be held at the Western Wall.

Israel's Reform and Conservative movements have not officially planned such services, but the movements' leaders said individual worshipers could be expected to meet at the site, adding that they expect Israeli police to provide protection should fervently Orthodox Jews attempt to disrupt the services.

Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of the Masorti movement, as the Conservative stream is known in Israel, said his movement has never officially organized services at the Wall, but he expects between 150 to 200 Conservative Israelis to arrive on their own.

"We will not appeal to our members to come and pray, since we do not want it to be interpreted as a provocation and we do not think it is correct to use prayer as a protest," said Bandel. "However, I have no doubt that many members will come to pray, and I hope the police will protect them if, God forbid, they are attacked."

In recent years, groups of Reform and Conservative Israelis who held services at the Western Wall on Shavuot and Tisha B'Av were attacked by members of the fervently Orthodox, or haredi, community.

Last Shavuot, a crowd of haredim surrounded a Conservative service, and some hurled bottles at worshipers. Police provided adequate protection to enable the service to continue. □

(JTA correspondent Avi Machlis in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Newly released statements add to evidence against wartime pope***By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish groups are stepping up their criticism of Pope Pius XII's role during the Holocaust as the Vatican continues to consider the World War II-era pontiff for sainthood.

Documents newly released by Jewish groups show that Pius' representative warned President Franklin D. Roosevelt against the creation of a state for the "Hebrew Race" in Palestine and said he had no complaints about the Nazi occupation of Rome.

The documents raise new questions about a pope widely criticized by Jews for his failure to speak out against Nazi atrocities during World War II.

The discovery also comes as Jewish groups continue to pressure the Vatican to open its archives for a full examination of its actions during the war.

In one document found by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a leading Nazi-hunting group, a Vatican representative sought to make clear to the Roosevelt administration that the pope's help in rescuing 4,000 Slovakian Jews and transporting them to Palestine should not be taken as a sign that he favored setting up a Jewish homeland there.

"It is true that at one time Palestine was inhabited by the Hebrew Race, but there is no axiom in history to substantiate the necessity of a people returning to a country they left nineteen centuries before," the apostolic delegate to Washington Archbishop A.G. Cicognani wrote in a June 22, 1943, letter to the United States' special envoy to the Vatican, Ambassador Myron Taylor.

The letter continues: "If a Hebrew home is desired, it would not be too difficult to find a more fitting territory than Palestine. With an increase in the Jewish population there, grave, new international problems would arise. Catholics the world over would be aroused.

"The Holy See would be saddened and justly so, by such a move."

Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the center, said the pronouncement by the Vatican was particularly troubling because it came at the height of the Holocaust.

He contrasted the pope's "unequivocal and blunt" opposition to the creation of a Jewish state with his silence on the persecution of Jews.

"If only he had spoken with such clarity when it came to rescuing European Jewry," Hier said.

"What's critical for Jews to remember," he added, "is that when the chips were down and when the Jews were dying, the pope didn't hesitate to write to Roosevelt to tell them that we shouldn't recognize a Jewish majority in Palestine."

Hier said his organization found the letter in the course of researching Pius' wartime actions.

He added that the group released the document in hopes of urging Vatican officials "to rethink their strategy and at the very least postpone this discussion" of sainthood "for another two or three decades."

Bestowing sainthood on a controversial figure such as Pius,

the rabbi added, would do "tremendous harm to Jewish-Catholic relations."

Eugene Fischer, associate director for ecumenical and interreligious affairs for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the letter provided no new information and that it is consistent with the Vatican's long-standing policy "against the idea that the Jewish homeland exclusively be a homeland solely for the Jews."

He said Hier was trying to create a "myth" that Pius opposed Zionism outright when in fact he played an important role in saving the Jews of Rome and in giving tacit approval to Latin American Catholic countries who voted in support of the creation of the state of Israel.

"If one looks at the whole historic record, one might consider putting up a statue of Pius XII along with the founders of Israel," Fischer said.

Fischer added, "He was a very influential, quiet voice" behind the creation of the Jewish state.

Dismissing Fischer's remarks as "preposterous," Hier said, "When Pius finally recognized that the state of Israel would become a reality, he jumped on the bandwagon.

"In 1943, when there was no state of Israel and Jews were fighting for their physical existence," he added, "the pope was nowhere to be found."

Although Hier acknowledged the pope's role in saving some 8,000 Jews in Rome by allowing them to hide in monasteries toward the end of the war, he said, "By the time he lifted a hand for the Jews of Rome, the majority of the 6 million Jews were already murdered."

The World Jewish Congress, meanwhile, said it discovered a Nov. 1, 1943, memo written by Britain's ambassador to the Holy See following a one-hour meeting with the pope just prior to the Allied liberation of Rome.

Francis D'Arcy Osborne wrote that the pope said he had "no complaints" about the German occupation of Rome and that Germany had "behaved correctly" in respecting the neutrality of the Vatican.

Osborne said he told the pope that the Germans "were systematically stripping (Rome) of all its supplies, transport and labor, were arresting Italian officers" and children and were "applying their usual merciless methods of persecution of the Jews."

He also said a number of people shared the opinion that the pope had "underestimated his own moral authority and the high respect" in which it was held by German Catholics.

Upon examining the document, Fischer said it appeared the British ambassador was "trying to get the pope to say bad things about the Germans" for Britain's "propaganda" purposes.

But the pope had to have been aware that criticizing the Germans would have been "foolish" in light of the fact that thousands of Jews were hiding in Catholic monasteries, Fischer added.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJC, said, however, that the memo "speaks right to the question of the documented silence of Pius XII.

"He never did publicly speak out against the persecution of the Jews, and he's urged to speak out against Nazi atrocities by the British ambassador here. It does not reflect well on Pius XII," Steinberg said. □