



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Not-guilty plea entered for Furrow

A federal judge entered a not-guilty plea for the white supremacist accused of murdering a Filipino-American postal worker. The trial of Buford O'Neal Furrow Jr., who is also accused of shooting five people at a Los Angeles Jewish community center, is tentatively set for Oct. 12.

Israel Radio postpones airing ads

Israel Radio postponed broadcast of advertisements sponsored by the Reform and Conservative movements this week because they may be "ideologically controversial." [Page 3]

Western Wall funds approved

Israel's parliamentary finance committee rejected by a vote of 10-2 an initiative to prevent a government allocation for the Western Wall until an area is set aside for mixed-gender prayers.

Fervently Orthodox legislators argued that the allocation was designated for maintenance improvements, and therefore had nothing to do with the debate over setting aside an area for egalitarian prayer. During the debate, seven fervently Orthodox legislators stormed out of the meeting when Reform and Conservative leaders spoke.

U.S. still expects accord

The United States still expects an agreement on implementing the Wye agreement before U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright arrives in the Middle East on Wednesday.

State Department spokesman James Foley made the comments as Palestinian officials said talks on when and how to carry out last October's land-for-peace deal were in "crisis." Foley added Wednesday that Albright will focus on the long-range issues of peace in the region. [Page 4]

State Dept. to investigate torture

The U.S. State Department said it would investigate charges by three Arab Americans that they had been tortured in Israel.

The announcement came after the three men met with State Department officials last Friday. An Israeli spokesman said Israel had reason to be suspicious of the men, two of whom claim they were held for several weeks but not charged with any crime.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Birthright Israel prepares to launch as it labors over Jewish Agency role

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Increasing the number of Jewish youth spending time in Israel holds myriad benefits — for Jewish continuity, for Israeli-Diaspora relations and for tourism in Israel.

So it's no wonder that the Jewish Agency for Israel — for decades the premier organization running educational trips in Israel — wants to play a major role in a new initiative that aims to quadruple in the next five years the number of Jewish youth visiting the holy land.

Birthright Israel — brought to life last fall by two major Jewish philanthropists, Michael Steinhardt and Charles Bronfman — will offer free, first-time educational trips to every Jew in the Diaspora aged 15 to 26. But the people behind the initiative are wary of giving the veteran Jewish Agency too large a role in an endeavor they hope will break new ground in the field of Israel experiences.

The discussions come as the Jewish Agency, the quasi-governmental agency responsible primarily for aliyah and resettlement, is attempting to revamp itself as an agent for enhancing Jewish unity and strengthening Jewish identity.

At the same time, some American Jewish leaders have been publicly questioning the agency's relevance, assailing it as an outdated bureaucracy.

Several recent studies indicate that educational trips to Israel foster lifelong connections to Jewish peoplehood and the Jewish state. But in the past decade, the trips — organized mainly by the Jewish Agency, youth movements and local Jewish communities — have failed to fuel a burst in the number of young people visiting Israel both for summer stints and longer stays. Estimates vary, but according to research by Birthright Israel International's Jerusalem office, some 20,000 young Jews from all over the world have traveled to Israel each of the past two years.

To generate fresh excitement about visiting Israel, Birthright's creators "wanted to start something with a new image, with a new spirit, with a new vision," said Shimshon Shoshani, the head of the Jerusalem-based international operation.

They want to open it to the participation of different trip providers "without anyone holding a monopoly in his hand."

Birthright Israel wants to mobilize equal support from Jewish philanthropists, the government of Israel and Diaspora Jewish communities in a three-way partnership to provide \$300 million for the project over five years.

That funding would cover the cost of round-trip airfare plus 10 days of a first visit to Israel for Jewish high school, college and post-college youth.

This month, the initiative gained the enthusiastic support of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who agreed "in principle" to fulfill Israel's financial role in the partnership.

His predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu, had also endorsed the plan. Barak said he would announce in September, after hammering out budget issues with his administration, how much money Israel will offer.

Of the 20 philanthropists and private foundations sought to contribute \$1 million to the project each year for five years, eight have signed on so far, with three other potential funders lined up.

Jewish federations, envisioned as the third partner in the Birthright triumvirate, will be approached individually over the next year. Meanwhile, 20 communities have reportedly applied to be pilot cities for marketing Birthright Israel and recruiting

MIDEAST FOCUS

Jordan clamps down on Hamas

Jordan closed down Hamas offices in Amman and arrested several members of the group.

The move, long sought after by Israel, came just two days before U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is scheduled to arrive in the region.

Terrorist convicted in bombings

An Israeli military court convicted a Hamas terrorist of involvement in two suicide bomb attacks in Jerusalem in 1997.

The prosecutor in the case asked the court Monday to sentence Ahmer El-Zibben of Nablus to 21 consecutive life sentences, one for each of the victims killed in the Mahane Yehuda market and Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall attacks.

Hebron cemetery desecrated

Garbage and broken bottles were strewn at the entrance to the Ashkenazi cemetery in Hebron last week in what Jewish settlers claimed is the latest desecration of the site by Palestinians.

The cemetery is located in an area adjacent to the Palestinian-ruled part of the West Bank town and is the burial site of the granddaughter of the founder of the Chabad movement.

Jewish community leaders in Hebron said they have repeatedly requested round-the-clock Israeli presence at the cemetery to prevent vandalism.

Mossad appoints PR rep

Israel's Mossad recently appointed a public relations director for the first time.

The move comes as the Mossad continues a recent trend of pulling away the veil of secrecy that has shrouded the agency in the past. According to the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, Mossad chief Ephraim Halevy said a policy of authorized contact with the media would hopefully stem leaks that "could cause irreversible damage" to Israeli national security.



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participants. Even with incomplete financing, Birthright is launching its first trips this winter.

A dozen Jewish youth groups will provide trips to the 6,000 college kids from North America, Europe and South America expected to take up Birthright's invitation to visit Israel. Trips for high school students are slated to begin in 2001.

Negotiations now under way among the agency, Birthright Israel and the Israeli government will decide over the next few weeks what role the agency will play.

"The main thing for us" is that the Jewish Agency's education department "will contribute at the maximum from the educational and the context point of view," said Amos Hermon, a co-chairman of the education department of the Jewish Agency.

"This is our main idea and our appeal to the philanthropists" and the Israeli administration, he said by telephone from Jerusalem.

Initially the Jewish Agency was offered a role as a kind of standards "ministry" for Birthright Israel — determining the requirements and policies that all trip providers would have to meet in order to be accredited by the initiative.

But insiders at Birthright say that the Jewish Agency wants to not only create the standards, but also to continue to serve as the leading provider of Israel trips.

Birthright's organizers believe in an "open-market approach" — in which, if the Jewish Agency wants to run trips, it must compete with for-profit trip providers.

Competition is essential to the initiative's success, they say, because it will raise interest in Israel trips, increase consumer choice and bring down costs.

"Now the problem is that over 90 percent of those who come to Israel are actively affiliated Jews," said Birthright Israel International's chief operating officer, Gideon Mark. Birthright Israel is meant to appeal to Jews with little active Jewish connection, he said.

The Jewish Agency's discomfort with a crowded market approach was illustrated recently when Birthright Israel began arrangements to launch its first trips this winter.

The pilot trips, with slots for 5,000 college students from North America and another 1,000 from Europe and South America, are set to fly beginning Dec. 29 and run during winter breaks through February.

About one-half of the college trips were allotted to Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, with the rest being organized by groups representing a range of Jewish religious and ideological streams.

Hillel decided to create its own programming for the trips, while testing various trip providers for logistics and value.

The student organization opened bidding up to a range of providers, reportedly offering the Jewish Agency a quarter of the available trips.

Hermon said he had met with Richard Joel, Hillel's president and international director, about a collaboration, but disagreed with the educational content Hillel was planning. The agency does not want to be "just another provider," Hermon said, adding that he only wanted to work with Hillel if he got "the responsibility for the educational impact. This is my interest. And here we have got the reputation, and here we have the expertise."

On Aug. 28, Joel received a letter from the Jewish Agency saying it would not participate in Hillel's program.

Hermon said the Jewish Agency was still planning to work with other trip organizers this winter, including Young Judea, the Reform movement and the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America.

In a telephone interview, Joel said he was disappointed by the Jewish Agency's response and hopes "to build future relationships" with the agency.

Still he expressed no regret over Hillel's decision to open the field to competition.

A traditional trip to Israel is not appropriate for the students Hillel is targeting this time around — those, he said, whose main interest in going to Israel is "because it fits into winter break."

That is why, he said, Hillel wanted to experiment by creating its own program and training its own counselors. The program has to be both fun and recreational, he said, while at the same time it "has to be an encounter" for these students who he believes are open to "opening their historic story."

"We want to learn all we can from this pilot project," Joel said. "It's vitally important that we be able to make mistakes." □

JEWISH WORLD

Brief filed in church-state case

A Texas court violated the separation of church and state when it ruled that a mother could not take her child to a church that ministers to gay parishioners, according to a coalition of groups.

The American Jewish Congress joined five other religious organizations in filing a friend-of-the-court brief in the case, which involves a child whose Christian mother and Jewish father are divorced.

Both parents promised as part of the divorce settlement to give religious training to their daughter.

Torah given to Polish shul

A group of Americans presented a Torah to the last remaining synagogue in the town near the former site of the Auschwitz death camp.

The presentation of the Torah to the Lomdei Mishnaot Synagogue on Monday is part of the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation's efforts to rebuild the synagogue.

Camp commander trial delayed

A Croatian judge delayed the trial of a former concentration camp commander to give more time to reach a key defense witness.

Dinko Sakic's defense team said Ante Mestrovic, who lives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, did not attend the trial because of ill health.

Mestrovic reportedly was in the Jasenovac camp in 1943-1944, when Sakic was a commander there. The trial is scheduled to resume Sept. 21.

Remains of Hitler's aide buried

The remains of one of Hitler's aides were recently buried in the Baltic Sea to prevent his grave site from becoming a pilgrimage site, according to a German newspaper. Genetic tests on a skeleton dug up in 1972 proved that Martin Bormann did indeed commit suicide in 1945.

Chile to search for Nazis

Chile is considering forming a committee to search for Nazis in the South American country.

The report came after a Latin American representative of the Simon Wiesenthal Center recently met with Chile's chief of staff. A group of Nazis reportedly lives in a secret enclave in southern Chile.

PBS to air 'Delta Jews'

A documentary on the Jews of the Mississippi Delta will air next month on PBS.

"Delta Jews," an hourlong film narrated by Pulitzer-Prize winning playwright Alfred Uhry, traces the history, culture and challenges of the community of Jews living in the rural region known as "the most Southern place on Earth."

Reform, Conservative messages too 'controversial' for Israel radio

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — To Israel Radio's ear, the Reform and Conservative message, "There's more than one way to be Jewish," may be too "ideologically controversial."

The decision to delay the movements' ads prompted threats from the liberal Jewish movements that they will petition the Supreme Court against Israel's national public radio authority.

Last weekend, the Reform and Conservative movements launched their first joint advertising campaign.

Large-print advertisements appeared in prominent national and local newspapers, and on public buses. Radio advertisements were to be aired this week.

"This is an unprecedented outreach to the Israeli public to inform them about the merits of alternative choices in Judaism," said Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center.

He said the \$360,000 campaign marked the first time the two movements had launched a joint initiative to attract Israelis to liberal Judaism while emphasizing the differences between the streams.

Regev said the campaign was designed to publicize the liberal streams of Judaism "with a message that is not connected to crisis or controversy."

But the radio campaign sparked controversy from the start. The movements planned to air 30-second segments in which Conservative and Reform rabbis introduce themselves and invite non-Orthodox Israelis to visit egalitarian synagogues as High Holiday services near.

Israeli army radio refused to run the ads the after they heard that the Reform and Conservative movements were sponsoring them.

Israel Radio, which is under the auspices of the state-backed Israel Broadcasting Authority, signed an agreement with the movements' ad agency last month. The first ads were supposed to be aired this week.

But according to a letter sent by Amnon Nadav, manager of Israel Radio, to the radio's legal adviser, the Reform and Conservative ads "appear to represent an issue that is ideologically controversial. In such a case, they must not be approved for broadcast."

In the letter, Nadav asked his legal adviser to provide a defense for the radio's position if the case is brought to the Supreme Court.

Carmela Israeli, a spokeswoman for Israel Radio, insisted the station had not officially scrapped the ads, but was seeking a legal opinion as to whether they are indeed controversial.

"There has been no decision yet," she said. "According to our advertising regulations, we are not allowed to broadcast any advertisements that are ideologically or politically controversial."

Yossi Cohen, account executive at the Cohen Plus ad agency handling the account, rejected the claim that the ads were controversial.

"There is no provocative message here," he said. "This is just a warm message from two movements inviting people to learn about them."

Israel Radio has often debated whether certain proposed advertisements were controversial. However, other campaigns — some for clearly controversial issues — have been broadcast.

In 1992, Peace Now petitioned the Supreme Court against a public service television commercial on Israel's Channel One in which the Housing Ministry tried to attract people to buy homes in West Bank settlements.

Peace Now claimed the advertisement was "ideologically controversial" and therefore, according to broadcasting regulations, should not be aired. The Supreme Court rejected the argument and allowed the advertisement to air.

Media lawyers note that Israeli regulations on advertising in public- and private-sector media are far more stringent than those common in the West. □

Israeli, Palestinians struggle for accord before Albright visit

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have been hoping that U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would attend a signing ceremony for a deal on implementing a land-for-security agreement during her trip to the Middle East this week.

But days before the trip, no such document existed.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak said Monday he had spoken by telephone with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat on the remaining issues holding up the implementation of the Wye accord — and that nothing was resolved.

Barak said after a meeting of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that agreement depends on the Palestinian responses to Israeli proposals.

“As I said at the start seven weeks ago, we will honor every Palestinian decision,” Barak said in remarks broadcast on Israel Radio.

“We believe that together we reached a solution which is better than Wye as it was originally drafted. If the Palestinians choose this, we will be on the revised track. If the Palestinians do not, we will implement Wye as it is written.”

The “revised track” involves two key issues: a timetable for further Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank and the release of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails.

On the issue of prisoners, Barak is getting heat not only from the Palestinians, but from his domestic opponents as well.

Ariel Sharon, interim leader of the opposition Likud Party, accused Barak of making concessions to the Palestinians without demanding anything in return. The Knesset is scheduled to convene in special session Wednesday at Likud’s request to debate what it terms the government’s plan to release Palestinian prisoners “with blood on their hands.”

Barak’s office indicated Sunday that Israel might release Palestinians who had been involved in anti-Israel attacks but were members of groups supporting the peace process, the Associated Press reported.

Israeli and Palestinians were scheduled to hold another round of talks on Monday.

Barak said that if he were to implement the Wye accord “to the letter,” both sides would lose. □

Ex-slaves say German firms lack sensitivity to the victims

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — British Jews forced to work as slave laborers in Nazi Germany are bitter about the attitude adopted by German negotiators at last week’s compensation talks in Bonn.

“They don’t seem to feel they owe us anything,” said Rudy Kennedy of London, who attended the talks that ended with both sides still far apart.

German industrial interests are reported to have offered to create a fund of some \$1.8 billion, matched by a similar amount from the German government, to compensate former slave and

forced laborers. In return, the former laborers would agree to abandon all other legal actions relating to Nazi-era labor issues.

The former laborers, however, are believed to have rejected the offer and to be insisting on a total settlement amounting to some \$38 billion.

Kennedy, then 15, spent two years from March 1943 as a slave laborer with IG Farben at Auschwitz and later worked in the V2 rocket works at the Dora labor camp.

He was rescued from Bergen-Belsen by liberating British troops and now represents more than 200 members of a British group called Claims for Jewish Slave-Labor Compensation.

Kennedy, an unofficial delegate to last week’s talks, was shocked by the attitude of the German negotiators.

They “behaved to my mind in a most terrible way,” he said. “They feel they’re doing us a big favor by offering us anything at all.”

Lothar Evers, a German campaigner for the slave laborers, accused the companies of attempting to impose unacceptable conditions and said they demonstrated “an entire lack of sensitivity toward the victims” by seeking to limit payments to those who lived in guarded camps or closed ghettos.

More than 15 major Germany companies are jointly trying to negotiate an out-of-court settlement with their former forced laborers, of whom up to 2.3 million are thought to be still alive out of a total of 12 million.

The firms, which include BASF, Bayer, BMW, DaimlerChrysler, Ford, Krupp, Siemens and Volkswagen, as well as the Deutsche and Dresdner banks, are under pressure to reach a deal because the alternative — class action lawsuits started by ex-slave laborers in U.S. courts — could produce huge awards.

Many former slave laborers are angry that while the German government has compensated Jews who suffered under Nazism, German companies have refused to compensate the millions of people who were forced to work in their factories during the war.

The average age of the former slave laborers is nearly 80 and there is concern that if the German companies continue to procrastinate, many more will die before any settlement is reached.

The companies say they have a duty to shareholders and workers who built them up after the war to avoid major financial commitments for crimes committed more than 50 years ago.

Negotiations are expected to resume in Washington in early October. □

Schools compromise on religion

NEW YORK (JTA) — A Pennsylvania school district has reached what it hopes will be a compromise over the use of the Ten Commandments in its schools.

Under the compromise, high school students in Altoona, Pa., will be able to take a class in comparative religion and form an after-school Ten Commandments Club.

The proposal, which must still be approved by the local school board, came after a rabbi opposed a plan put forth by a local Baptist minister that would have posted the Ten Commandments in every school.

The Supreme Court barred schools from posting the Ten Commandments in 1980, but calls for their display have increased in recent months since the shooting at a Colorado high school earlier this year. □