



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Court avoids church-state mines

The U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday let stand Maine's school voucher program, left intact a ruling striking down New York's attempt to create a special school district for a community of Chasidic Jews and refused to let Pennsylvania exempt religious publications and Bibles from sales taxes. [Page 3]

### Bradley addresses O.U.

In a speech Monday night in New York at a dinner hosted by the Orthodox Union, Democratic presidential candidate Bill Bradley praised Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) for supporting moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. [Page 4]

### Jewish school opens in Warsaw

Poland's prime minister joined local and world Jewish leaders in a dedication ceremony for a new Jewish school in Warsaw on Tuesday. Quoting a passage from the Talmud about the world being "sustained by children," Jerzy Buzek said the new Lauder-Morasha School is "magnificent proof" of Poland's Jewish revival "after the Shoah."

Earlier in the day, Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski presented Ronald Lauder, whose foundation built the school, with the Polish Republic's Medal of Merit at a ceremony in the presidential palace, in recognition of the philanthropist's contribution to the strengthening of Polish-Jewish relations.

### New status suggested for Cubans

An Israeli legislator proposed changing the status of Cuban emigres after they complained about the hardships they encountered since arriving in the Jewish state. Speaking Tuesday after details of the exodus of hundreds of Cuban Jews to Israel were made public this week, Meretz legislator Avshalom Vilan said the status change would make them eligible for support currently denied them.

### Abdullah meets with Clinton

Jordan's King Abdullah did not deliver a message to President Clinton from Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein indicating that he is ready to play a more constructive role in the peace process, according to U.S. officials.

Several Arabic newspapers reported last week that Abdullah would convey such a message.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### 'Operation Cigar': A not-so-secret Cuban aliyah gets world attention

*JTA Staff Report*

NEW YORK (JTA) — The immigration of hundreds of Cuban Jews to Israel made big headlines this week after the story broke in the British and Canadian press.

Code named "Operation Cigar," the departure was hardly news to Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, who apparently gave his blessing to the exodus years ago.

Since 1995, some 400 people have arrived from Cuba with the assistance of the Jewish Agency for Israel, a quasi-governmental agency responsible for aliyah, or immigration to Israel.

A trickle came earlier through the efforts of the Canadian government.

The mystery surrounding their exodus — confirmed by the Israeli government for the first time this week — seems to stem from Castro's reluctance to publicize special treatment arranged for the Cuban Jewish community, which now totals an estimated 1,300. But others see the move as part of Castro's desire to see crippling U.S. economic sanctions lifted.

Officially, Cubans are free to emigrate provided they have the appropriate paperwork and airfare. But most are too poor to leave.

Cuban Jewish leaders also confirmed that the operation had been occurring, but emphasized that it was not a secret.

"The fact that something is not known about does not mean it was secret," Raquel Marichal, a Jewish community leader, was quoted as saying.

Who first approached Castro regarding Cuban aliyah is unclear — with many taking credit. Indeed, Israel Radio on Monday reported that six years ago, Margarita Zapata, the Jewish granddaughter of Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, had used her friendship with Castro to raise the matter with the Cuban leader. But others involved with Cuban Jewry said they had never heard of her involvement.

But what has emerged since Israeli military censors opened the subject to the media Monday is that in the early 1990s the Jewish Agency entered into an agreement with Castro to keep their activities quiet in return for an obstacle-free operation. A spokesman for the Jewish Agency, Michael Jankelowitz, declined to comment on Cuban aliyah. This week, major newspapers in Europe and Canada revealed that the Canadian government had also been quietly helping the Jews of Cuba for the past 25 years by facilitating their exodus to Israel.

Cuba and Canada maintain political relations, while Cuba and Israel do not. Cuba dropped diplomatic relations with Israel after the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Officials in the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs have confirmed the existence of a special office in the Canadian Embassy in Havana through which Cuban Jews may apply to emigrate to Israel. Embassy workers in Havana forward emigration requests to the Israeli embassy in Ottawa, which in turn send them to Tel Aviv.

The emigrants leave Cuba using Cuban exit visas and passports, and use Canadian travel documents to enter Israel. The arrangement was kept secret for diplomatic reasons, said a spokesperson for Canadian foreign affairs.

"Given the relationship between the countries involved, keeping it quiet was the best idea."

The arrangement operated with "full transparency," the official said. "So the Israelis know, the Cubans know, obviously we know. And everyone is happy with it."

Most members of the Cuban Jewish community are descended from Polish and

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israel ponies up Birthright funds

Israeli Finance Minister Avraham Shochat authorized \$70 million in Israeli government funding over five years for the Birthright Israel program. The project, sponsored by Jewish philanthropists, plans to eventually bring all Jews between the ages of 15 and 26 to Israel on free tours.

The funding is expected to receive final approval by the Knesset's Finance Committee next week. Original plans for the \$300 million global initiative projected Israel's share at \$100 million, but a representative of Birthright Israel said the current pledge "fulfills Israel's role as a full partner in the project."

### Court rules against hijacker trial

Israel's Supreme Court ruled against a trial for the mastermind of the 1985 hijacking of the cruise ship Achille Lauro in which a wheelchair-bound American was killed.

Tuesday's ruling in the case of Abu Abbas cited an Israeli-Palestinian agreement that exempts from prosecution Palestinians accused of crimes committed prior to the 1993 Oslo accord who had entered the self-ruled areas after September 1995. The hijackers shot dead Leon Klinghoffer, 69, and threw his body overboard.

"In one stroke of a peace agreement, Israel has erased from its books dastardly crimes against the Jewish people," said the lawyer for those seeking a trial.

### Drug smuggling ring broken

Fervently Orthodox Jews served as couriers for an international drug ring that operated in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Israel and the United States, according to Israeli police.

A fervently Orthodox man recruited religious Jews to smuggle the drug ecstasy, the police added Tuesday. Some 49 suspects, of whom 24 were Israelis, were arrested for alleged connection with the ring.



## Daily News Bulletin

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Russian Jews who fled czarist pogroms at the turn of the century.

When Castro came to power in 1959, most of the then-15,000-strong community managed to flee, with the majority settling in the United States.

Hebrew University Cuba specialist Margalit Bejarano told the London Sunday Telegraph that there is far less anti-Semitism in Cuba than in the former Communist states of Eastern Europe.

"Castro never denied Jews kosher food or the right to organize cultural activities," Bejarano said, while noting that the practice of religion — Judaism or Christianity — is usually a bar to university and to some professions.

Cuba became officially atheist in 1962, and as a result, the Jewish community suffered from assimilation. In the early 1990s, a revised Cuban Constitution changed the country's status to secular and members of all religions were accepted into the Communist Party.

Moises Asis, a Miami resident who was the principal and founder of the Tikkun Olam Hebrew School in Havana, told JTA that in 1991, he visited the United States and Israel, where he approached Jewish organizations and Israeli political parties with the idea of Cuban aliyah.

In 1992, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee approached the Cuban government and received permission to provide physical care and Jewish education to the Jewish community, according to JDC officials. Both Asis and the JDC cite their efforts for stimulating interest in Israel among Cuban Jews.

Some reports have suggested that while Cuba and Israel may wish to reconcile, Israel is wary of Washington's reaction. The United States has maintained an economic embargo on Cuba since 1959.

Castro, 73, has been among the most virulent critics of Israel and most ardent supporters of the Palestinian cause, but official relations with the Jewish community of Cuba have become more noticeably warmer in recent months.

This was demonstrated by the Cuban leader's attendance at an Israel cultural evening at the Patronato synagogue in Havana, the largest of Cuba's four remaining synagogues, last Chanukah.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, which provided Cuba with some \$5 billion in aid each year, Castro was forced to modify his anti-Zionist stance and seek to establish new economic ties with the non-Communist world.

Unofficially, Cuba and Israel are said to be interested in resuming diplomatic ties, and Yisrael Meir Lau, Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, reportedly made a visit to Castro in 1994.

But Israel is understood to be holding back for fear of arousing Washington's ire.

An Israeli official in Washington said he was "not aware of any concerns" being expressed by the United States that Castro had approved the operation in order to curry favor with the United States.

He said Israel closely coordinates its policy vis a vis Cuba with the United States.

"Our Cuba policy is a function of the American policy," the official said.

State Department spokesman James Rubin on Wednesday welcomed the news of the Jewish immigration.

"The fact that members of the Jewish community have been allowed to emigrate to Israel is a step forward in Cuba's overall religious freedom policy," Rubin said.

"We welcome the fact that they are now in a position to emigrate more freely," he said, despite the fact that the recent news represented no apparent change in Cuba's policy.

Reports estimated that an additional 200 Cuban Jews are expected to be able to emigrate by next June.

Asis, who has not visited Cuba since he left in 1993, said he did not think the media coverage of the Cuban aliyah would negatively affect prospective olim.

Twenty are scheduled to arrive next week, according to an Israeli official, who said that if this group did not arrive it would show that the heightened attention had endangered the operation. □

*(JTA staff writer Julia Goldman and correspondents Naomi Segal in Jerusalem, Douglas Davis in London, Bill Gladstone in Toronto and Michael Shapiro in Washington contributed to this report.)*

## JEWISH WORLD

### Commerce watching Arab threats

The U.S. Commerce Department is taking recent boycott threats leveled against Burger King, Disney and other companies by American Arab and Muslim groups "very seriously."

In a letter responding to concerns expressed by the Anti-Defamation League that the threats violate U.S. anti-boycott laws, the Commerce Department said its Office of Anti-Boycott Compliance is "monitoring the situation closely" and "will initiate action if, after a full review of the relevant facts, action appears to be warranted."

### Zhirinovsky barred from election

Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky and his party were barred from participating in the nation's parliamentary elections in December.

The Central Election Committee barred the entire slate of the Liberal Democratic Party after two of its candidates were rejected for failing to disclose some of their assets.

### Austrian party officially second

A final count of absentee ballots confirmed that Austria's far-right Freedom Party came in second in last week's general elections.

Many Austrian commentators are saying it is premature to dismiss the possibility that the party, led by Jörg Haider, who once praised Hitler and members of the SS, will be part of the next government.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy has repeatedly stated that his country would reconsider its relationship with Austria if that happens.

### Vatican shelves Pius plans

The Vatican put aside plans to beatify Pope Pius XII next year, according to Rome's *La Repubblica* newspaper.

The planned beatification, which is the last step before conferring sainthood, had angered Jewish groups, who allege that the pope remained silent in the face of the Holocaust.

### Phoenix tops in Jewish growth

The Jewish community of Phoenix increased by 10,000 in 1998 for a total of 60,000 Jews, the greatest population increase of any U.S. Jewish community.

According to a report in the 99th edition of the *American Jewish Yearbook*, two other communities reported significant Jewish population gains: Tampa, Fla. (5,000), and Palm Springs, Calif. (4,150).

According to the yearbook, a publication of the American Jewish Committee, there was little change last year in the total U.S. Jewish population, which stands at 6 million, of whom some 46 percent live in the Northeast.

## Supreme Court refuses to tamper with church-state separation rulings

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. Supreme Court has decided to sidestep several mines on the church-state battlefield.

In a flurry of action Tuesday, the justices let stand Maine's school voucher program, left intact a ruling striking down New York's attempt to create a special school district for a community of Chasidic Jews and refused to let Pennsylvania exempt religious publications and Bibles from sales taxes.

While none of the moves set precedents, some legal analysts said that by declining to hear the cases the justices appear to be signaling a reluctance to make sweeping changes affecting the separation of church and state.

"I think it's clear they don't think they're going to be doing a wholesale revision of the Establishment Clause," said Marc Stern, a lawyer with the American Jewish Congress.

For its 1999-2000 term, the court so far has agreed to hear only one major church-state case, which involves the constitutionality of aid to parochial schools. The case stems from a 14-year-old Louisiana dispute over the question of whether computers and other material paid for with taxpayer money can be used by religious schools. The court is expected to clarify what has become a nebulous area of law.

On the voucher issue, the justices decided for a second year in a row not to enter into the fray. After leaving intact Wisconsin's voucher program in its last term, the court Tuesday upheld a Maine law that subsidizes children attending private, non-religious schools, but bars the state from paying tuition for students at religious schools.

Acting without comment or dissent, the justices rejected an appeal brought by parents of religious-school students who accused the state of violating their rights by withholding the same financial help that is available to students attending non-religious schools. Maine's voucher program, created in 1981, has consistently excluded religious schools. Unlike programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland, which give parents tuition vouchers to use at the school of their choice, Maine sends tuition payments directly to the schools.

In a separate action, the justices refused to let New York resurrect a special school district for Kiryas Joel — a village about 45 miles northwest of New York City whose residents are all Satmar Chasidim. The court, by a 6-3 vote, let stand a ruling by the New York Court of Appeals in May that struck down state legislators' attempts to carve out an autonomous school district for Kiryas Joel so that the community can control the special education of its students and the \$3 million in state aid it qualifies for each year.

That ruling marked the third time such an attempt was struck down by the courts.

The ruling by the Court of Appeals in May, upheld Tuesday by the Supreme Court, said the creation of a special district "has the primary effect of advancing one religion over others and constitutes an impermissible religious accommodation."

Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, said he was disappointed that the court "failed to take on the argument asserted by Kiryas Joel's opponents that a law can be unconstitutional simply because a community of religious believers benefits from it."

"This can't be what the Constitution stands for," he said. "We hope we will find an opportunity to correct and clarify this message very soon."

It remains to be seen whether the legislature will take a fourth stab at carving out a separate district.

On the issue of taxing the sale of religious items, meanwhile, the court left intact rulings that struck down Pennsylvania's practice of exempting religious publications, Bibles and religious articles sold by religious groups.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court and a state trial court ruled that the tax exemption was unconstitutional after two state residents sued, charging that the exemption violates the separation of church and state.

The action sets no precedent, but could prompt legal challenges in states with similar tax laws. □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****Bradley avoids direct stumping but gives hint on Jewish issues**

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Bill Bradley avoided direct political campaigning during his first address to a major Jewish organization since he declared his desire to become president.

But his speech Monday evening subtly indicated that the Democratic presidential candidate would be a friend to Jewish voters on key issues: Israel and religious freedom.

The evening, sponsored by the Orthodox Union's Washington-based Institute for Public Affairs, honored retiring Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) for his decades of service defending Israel and promoting Jewish causes.

But Bradley, who was invited to speak months before he declared his candidacy for the 2000 elections, opted to keep the spotlight on Moynihan rather than use the opportunity to make a pitch for Jewish votes. Bradley's speech came amid an unusually early start to a heated race for the Democratic nomination between Bradley and Vice President Al Gore.

Although he steered clear of a stump speech, Bradley, in recalling Moynihan's ideals and accomplishments, seemed to imply his own goodness by association with the veteran New York senator, who endorsed Bradley's campaign just weeks ago.

Bradley, in his testimonial to his friend and colleague, touched on Moynihan's history as a statesman and American ambassador to the United Nations, including his support for Soviet Jewry and his vehement defense of Israel against the 1975 U.N. resolution equating Zionism with racism.

He "unforgettably declared" Israel as "a metaphor for democracy" — a metaphor, Bradley said, "I have used since, without apology."

Alluding to Moynihan's sponsorship of the 1995 Israel Embassy Act, which requires the United States to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the former New Jersey senator praised Moynihan's support of Israel's right to choose "the capital of its choice" as the recognition of "a simple truth translated to the law of the land."

In a more oblique reference to Israel, Bradley said of Moynihan, "When he tells us democracies are entitled to make their own mistakes, he's warning us of the self-fulfilling folly of interfering in their domestic political affairs."

Reading through half-glasses, Bradley stressed in his remarks the need for more legislation to protect religious freedom.

"Americans should never have to choose between their career and their conscience," he said.

The remark seemed to be a nod to the Orthodox community, which has been taking the lead in lobbying Congress to pass legislation known as the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, which would give employers less latitude in deciding whether to accommodate a worker's religious needs.

"No American should feel trivialized because of their religious beliefs," Bradley said.

In remarks that included a rabbinical quotation, Bradley noted that as a senator from New Jersey, he represented the state with the country's largest yeshiva and its second largest Orthodox community. The dinner, which also honored the chairman of the IPA, Richard Stone, was apparently Bradley's second appearance before

a Jewish group since his campaign began.

On Sunday, he spoke to an audience at a Holocaust memorial center in suburban Detroit. The O.U. represents 1,000 congregations in the United States, and its members run the political gamut.

The audience of about 400 people generally found the presidential aspirant to be warm, well spoken and respectful of the Jewish community. How long Bradley's good first impression will hold up remains to be seen.

"I think he made a good start," said Nathan Diament, the O.U. institute's director.

His speech "was somewhat subtle, but touched on important issues such as religious freedom in the workplace," said Diament, whose organization promotes issues of importance to the Orthodox Jewish community on Capitol Hill.

Diament noted that Gore has strong support across the board in the New York region, including in the Orthodox community.

One attendee, Vivian Schneck-Last, a vice president at the Goldman Sachs investment bank, said she feared a growing complacency in Washington on Israel-related issues without strong advocates like Moynihan.

Would Bradley fit the bill? "I don't know," she said.

She gave Bradley credit for steering clear of politicking, saying: "I think more of him because of that."

While Israel is seen as a key to voter support among Jews, several people at the event noted that domestic issues were a close second.

A self-identified Republican among them said, "A strong America is what Israel needs."

Despite the electoral undertones, however, O.U. President Dr. Mandell Ganchrow stressed that the evening was meant to be apolitical.

The invitation was not meant as an endorsement, and Ganchrow said he had spoken to the White House and to Gore "many times over the past months." He also noted that Gore had been the keynote speaker at the group's events in the past.

In accepting the tribute from the group, Moynihan reiterated his support for Bradley, coming as close to electioneering as the evening would allow.

He said he was honored by the group's decision to invite Bradley.

"In a lifetime of politics, I have known no man with his combination of character and stamina," Moynihan said of the one-time professional basketball player. "He stays the course, he listens, he understands and he leads." □

**Israeli soldiers allegedly beaten**

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has lodged a complaint with the Palestinian Authority over the alleged recent beating of three Israeli soldiers by Palestinian police who detained them in the self-rule town of Bethlehem.

The soldiers, who were unarmed and dressed in civilian clothes while on leave, said they had gone to Bethlehem to buy electronics goods.

Palestinian security reportedly suspected the three were trying to break into a store and allegedly beat them during questioning. After being handed over to Israeli officials, two of the soldiers were lightly hurt and required hospital care. The three soldiers' commander said he plans to remove them from combat duty. □