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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Protesters back settlements

Several thousand settlers and their supporters demonstrated opposite the prime minister's residence in Jerusalem on Sunday night to protest the planned dismantling of settler outposts in the West Bank.

The protest, organized by a group of young activists called the Next Generation, indicates grass-roots opposition to the further dismantling of settlements as final-status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority are set to begin.

Meretz and Peace Now activists held a counter-demonstration.

Schindler's original list found

The original list of the names of Jews drawn up by Oskar Schindler to save them from the Nazis was recently discovered in Germany, according to a German newspaper.

The list of 1,200 workers is among a collection of Schindler's papers recently donated by a German couple to the Stuttgart Zeitung, which the newspaper is publishing beginning Sunday to mark the 25th anniversary of the businessman's death.

A second copy of the list, which appeared in the 1993 film on the German businessman by Steven Spielberg, is now at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

Route's opening delayed — again

Sunday's scheduled opening of a safe-passage route for Palestinians traveling between the Gaza Strip and West Bank was delayed for the second time in two weeks.

Israeli and Palestinian officials attributed the postponement to what they described as technical issues. Israeli Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami said Sunday he believed the remaining problems could be resolved quickly.

Hungarians want treasures back

Hungary's Jewish leaders say they will seek to have treasures stolen by the Nazis and later taken by U.S. troops returned to their rightful owners.

Their comments came last Friday, one day after a U.S. presidential commission on Holocaust-era assets said property looted from Hungarian Jews by the Nazis was seized by American forces and subsequently taken by members of the U.S. Army. [Page 1]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Admission that U.S. looted property may convince others to come clean

By Michael Shapiro

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A new account of how U.S. soldiers at the end of World War II looted a train filled with Hungarian Jews' property may prompt other countries to search dark chapters of their own histories in an attempt to make restitution.

That is the assessment of several members of the presidential commission that researched the fate of the "Hungarian Gold Train," which was filled with Jewish property stolen by the Nazis that later ended up in the hands of U.S. servicemen.

"I think we knew when this commission was set up there would be some dark spots on our own record," said U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, who also serves as the Clinton administration's point man on Holocaust restitution issues.

However, Eizenstat, who sits on the commission, stressed that the panel's openness in detailing those spots will "send a strong signal" to similar commissions in other countries.

"The worst thing we can do is suppress things because it's a U.S. issue," said Miles Lerman, the chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and a member of the commission.

"The more windows you open, the more air you let in, the healthier the process," he added.

The Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States said last week it uncovered documents detailing how U.S. infantry forces on May 16, 1945, seized a train in Werfen, Austria, that was filled with paintings, rugs, china, gold, watches and other valuables looted from Hungarian Jews by the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborators. This account of the American looting comes several years after the United States and Jewish groups began pressing Swiss banks and other European banks and companies to make restitution for the valuables and labor that was stolen from European Jewry.

The report, which is preliminary, buttresses those efforts because it "indicates that we are not afraid to look at our own government," said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, which has been pressing foreign countries to return Nazi-looted property to their rightful owners.

While international law and U.S. policy required the return of looted art and cultural items to the governments of the countries from which they were taken, U.S. officials decided that the origin and ownership of the valuables on the train were "not identifiable," according to the report released last week by the commission.

Hungarian Jewish leaders criticized the decision at the time, arguing that if they had access to the contents of the train they could help reconstitute the property.

Last Friday, one day after the report was issued, Hungary's Jewish leaders said they will seek to have the looted treasures returned to their rightful owners.

While much of the assets were auctioned in New York with proceeds going to refugee organizations, many other items such as rugs, china and crystal were simply taken by top American generals to display in their homes and offices, according to the report.

The whereabouts of those objects are unknown.

Other less valuable objects such as watches, jewelry and cameras were sold in U.S. Army Exchange stores. Other property was stolen from military warehouses.

Researchers for the commission also concluded that 1,181 paintings on the train

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israeli founding father dies at 90

One of the founders of Israel's national religious movement died last Friday at 90. At Sunday's funeral for Yosef Burg, President Ezer Weizman eulogized him as a friend and national leader.

Burg, a longtime leader of the National Religious Party who was known for his efforts to bridge the gap between religious and secular Jews, served in the Cabinets of successive Israeli governments for 38 years.

Reform leader to join council

The leader of the Reform movement in Israel was elected to sit on Jerusalem's religious council, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The election of Rabbi Uri Regev, head of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center in Israel, came as Orthodox politicians continue to seek to keep leaders of the more liberal movements off the councils.

Israel frees 151 prisoners

Israel freed 151 more Palestinian prisoners last Friday after Israeli and Palestinian officials resolved their differences over who should be released.

Israel has now released 350 prisoners since the signing last month of a land-for-security accord in Egypt. Israel plans to release more in early December to coincide with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Vandals strike Bnei Brak shuls

Residents of the fervently Orthodox community of Bnei Brak near Tel Aviv denounced a spate of attacks at three area synagogues in which vandals drew swastikas, removed mezuzot and smashed windows.

Intel pays record sum for firm

The American computer company Intel is purchasing an Israeli company for \$1.6 billion, the largest amount ever paid for an Israeli firm. DSP Communications, just outside Tel Aviv, supplies mobile phone companies with chip sets and software.



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were returned to Austria rather than to Hungary, their country of origin, in part because the United States was leery of Hungary's move toward Communist rule and because U.S. officials may have wanted Austria, which they considered Nazi-occupied territory, to have valuables to use in war claim negotiations.

The artworks' whereabouts are currently unknown.

Ernst Bacher, an Austrian cultural official, has told the commission that "a portion of this property had been restituted," but he did not provide researchers with any specifics, according to Jonathan Petropoulos, head of the commission's research team investigating art and cultural property.

Asked about possible restitution by the United States in light of the report's findings, Steinberg said the return of the paintings to Austria rather than to Hungary raises some questions.

There is "no indication that they have been restituted," Steinberg said of the artworks.

The commission, which was created last year, was charged with investigating the fate of Holocaust-era assets that came under the control of the United States and providing the president with recommendations for further action. It does not have the authority to make restitution itself.

"We do believe when we find the truth we have to do something about it," said Stu Loeser, the commission's spokesman.

He added that the commission may recommend to the president that the United States make restitution payments.

Loeser said the commission has opened a research office at the Center for Military History at Fort McNair in Washington and will try to locate former American servicemen who may know what happened to the property that was stolen from the train.

The commission also said it will "search for individual claims made by Hungarian victims and try to determine if survivors or their heirs have also made efforts to regain their property." □

Orthodox rabbis sign document excommunicating Rabin's assassin

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A group of 54 Orthodox rabbis in Israel has excommunicated the assassin of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The Oct. 14 ruling — which came prior to the fourth anniversary of the Nov. 4, 1995, assassination — bars Jews from visiting Yigal Amir in prison, talking with him or writing to him. Prison personnel and Amir's family are exempt from the edict.

A statement issued by the rabbis declared their "shock and disgust at [Amir's] impertinent attempt to present such a heinous murder as if it were done in the name of the Torah and in the service of the people and land of Israel."

At his trial, Amir refused to express regret for his actions, saying they were justified by Jewish law. Amir is serving a life sentence for the murder.

The rabbi who initiated the action, Rabbi Naftali Rothenberg of the Har Adar settlement, said he expects more rabbis to sign the document. He added that all ethnic groups and streams in religious Zionism are represented among the signatories.

The paper said rabbis from five Jewish settlements were among those who signed. Jewish settlers were some of the strongest opponents of Rabin's peace efforts with the Palestinians.

Rabbi Binyamin Lau, nephew of Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Yisrael Meir Lau, also signed the decree.

The ban will remain in effect until Amir, who is Orthodox, repents for the assassination.

Amir's mother derided the decree.

"My son is alone in a jail cell. With whom is he to conduct a minyan?" Geula Amir said.

"It's a joke. Nobody listens to" the rabbis, she added. □

JEWISH WORLD

Papon missing on eve of appeal

Maurice Papon, the pro-Nazi Vichy official convicted for his role in deporting French Jews during World War II, was missing after a court ruled that he must go to prison before his appeals hearing, *The New York Times* reported. Papon's lawyer told the paper he knows where the 89-year-old Papon is, but would not say if he would surrender.

Britain plans remembrance day

Britain is planning to make the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz an annual Holocaust remembrance day, according to a British newspaper.

The first such commemoration, which would mark the deaths of Jews, Gypsies and homosexuals, is expected to occur on Jan. 27, 2001.

Rome Jews mark deportations

Rome's Jewish community marked the 56th anniversary of Nazi deportations with a silent march through the center of the city. The march, which also protested any form of racism and discrimination, ended with a candle-lit rally in front of the main Rome synagogue.

The Nazis rounded up and deported to Auschwitz more than 1,000 Roman Jews on Oct. 16, 1943. Only 16 returned alive.

Groups blast German firms' offer

German companies are coming under pressure to increase their recent offer of \$3.3 billion to settle Holocaust-era slave-labor claims.

An ad appearing in last Friday's *New York Times*, taken out by B'nai B'rith, the American Jewish Congress and other groups, shows two pennies with the words: "German industry's shameful offer to slave laborers." The groups said German companies that used slave labor had combined revenues in 1998 of \$700 billion.

Massacre memorial unveiled

A memorial to the 11 Israeli victims of the PLO terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics was unveiled last Friday in the city that will host the 2000 Games. Diplomats from Israel and Germany, politicians and members of the Australian Jewish community attended the dedication in Sydney, Australia.

French shul vandalized

Vandals set fire to a synagogue in a Paris suburb after damaging the shul's Torah scrolls, Jewish communal leaders said last week.

The rabbi's office and that of his secretary were destroyed by the attack, they added. The incident took place in the suburb of Garges-les-Gonesses, which has a large population of North African Jews.

Congregations find themselves behind day schools on list of funding priorities

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — In recent years, supplemental, or congregational, schools — dismissed by many as failures — have been low on the list of philanthropic priorities for Jewish education.

"With the elevation of informal education to a high status, Israel trips and campus life are far more likely to garner communal funding than the schools that still educate the majority of Jewish children," wrote Jack Wertheimer, a provost at the Jewish Theological Seminary, in an article on Jewish education trends for the 1999 American Jewish Year Book.

His article also notes that most community federations allocate far more money to day schools than to programs for congregational schools.

Tellingly, one of the largest individual Jewish philanthropists, Michael Steinhardt, has launched major multimillion-dollar initiatives for day schools and Israel experiences, but has steered clear of supplemental schools.

"Afternoon Hebrew school has been an extraordinary flop," he said in a June interview with JTA, adding that despite efforts to improve, their "very structure of a few hours a week when most kids have more appealing alternatives" is flawed.

Despite the lack of mega-gifts, foundations and federations are investing modestly in Hebrew schools, providing seed money for projects at individual Hebrew schools, teacher-training programs and larger synagogue improvement projects that affect Hebrew school. One such program is the Reform movement's Experiment in Congregational Education, a program working with 14 synagogues around the country.

The program is funded by the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the Covenant Foundation, the Mandel Foundation and the Gimprich Family Foundation, philanthropies that devote some of their resources to Hebrew schools.

The Cleveland-based Mandel Foundation has invested money in training community leaders to provide teacher development programs, primarily for supplemental school teachers.

One community, the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, is trying to raise a \$10 million endowment for innovations in local Hebrew schools and is investing \$700,000 to equip them with computer technology.

But the common denominator among all the gifts is change. While day schools generally receive funds for capital costs and scholarships, most grants for congregational schools are earmarked for innovative projects.

"Where there's energy and vision, money will follow," said Chaim Botwinick, executive vice president of Baltimore's Jewish Education Center. "Foundations are not interested in funding the same-old, same-old."

According to Botwinick, who is currently seeking funding for a national network to study and promote innovations in congregational schools, a growing number of foundations are expressing interest in funding Hebrew school efforts, "but we still have a long way to go."

Most funds for supplemental schools are temporary, with the expectation that congregations will develop their own funding sources if the project succeeds.

Isa Aron, a professor at the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the coordinator of its Experiment in Congregational Education project, said money is essential for improving synagogues and congregational schools. But she agreed with Botwinick, saying that "when people have a good project they usually find donors."

"I don't think the beginning of the problem is money — the problem is when you don't have people involved enough or don't know exactly what your vision is," she said. "Once people are together with a vision and have planned programs, they may well need money and my guess is they'll find it. The Jewish community is affluent and there's money available." □

New document reveals Auschwitz was known in 1942

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A British student has discovered a 20-page document in the Foreign Office archive which proves conclusively that Britain and the United States knew about the gas chambers at Auschwitz as early as December 1942.

While it has been known that the Allies knew about the Final Solution — and even about gas chambers — then, this is the first time it has been demonstrated that the Allies knew in 1942 about the crematoria at Auschwitz, where approximately 1.5 million people, 90 percent of them Jews, were killed.

It was previously believed that the Nazis were able to conceal the purpose of Auschwitz better than they could at other camps, said Richard Breitman, a professor of history at American University and the author of a book on the topic, "Official Secrets."

The latest find could also reignite debates about why the Allies took no action, including bombing, to disrupt the operation of Auschwitz.

The information was contained in a memorandum, subsequently passed on to the British government, that was handed to U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt by Jewish leaders at a White House meeting on Dec. 8, 1942.

It starts by noting that 2 million Jews had already been killed and continued: "The five million Jews who may still be alive in Nazi-occupied territory are threatened with total extermination under the terms of an official order by Hitler calling for the complete annihilation of Jews in Europe by 31 December 1942."

It went on to inform Roosevelt that "centers have been established in various parts of Eastern Europe for the scientific and cold-blooded mass murder of Jews."

"Polish Christian workers, eyewitnesses, have confirmed reports that concrete buildings, on the former Russian frontiers, are used by the Germans as gas chambers in which thousands of Jews have been put to death."

The memorandum also specifically informed the American president: "The slaughter of trainloads of Jewish adults and children in great crematoriums at Ozwiencim [Auschwitz] near Cracow is confirmed by eyewitnesses in reports which recently reached Jerusalem."

The document was discovered by doctoral student Barbara Rogers at the British Public Record Office while researching the British government's response to the Holocaust.

"This is the only document to prove beyond question that the British government and President Roosevelt knew the true role that Auschwitz-Birkenau played in the Final Solution at the time," she said.

"The question is, why didn't they disclose it?"

Several explanations have been offered for Britain's apparent attempt to conceal early information about Nazi atrocities against Jews: the British were concerned that the release of information would compromise their successful code-breaking operation, which allowed them to intercept German communications; they feared a flood of emigration by European Jews to Palestine; and they were anxious to avoid a popular backlash if they were perceived to be fighting a "Jewish war." □

(JTA staff writer Peter Ephross contributed to this report.)

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Latvians troubled by 'genocide' conviction of former Soviet official

By Benjamin Smith

RIGA, Latvia (JTA) — The recent conviction of a Soviet official for "genocide" has many Jews questioning Latvia's commitment to an honest historical reckoning.

Late last month, a court in Riga sentenced Mikhails Farbtuhs, an 83-year-old former member of the Soviet secret police, to seven years in prison for deporting families from Latvia to Siberia in the late 1940s.

Latvian nationalists hailed the Sept. 27 ruling as a victory over memories of Soviet domination, which began with the USSR's annexation of Latvia in 1940.

In the ensuing five decades of Soviet rule, which ended when Latvia gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, thousands of Latvians were jailed, deported or killed by Soviet security forces.

For Jewish observers, the court's decision and the use of the word "genocide" raised concerns over what they view as the selective amnesia with which this small Baltic nation approaches its history.

During World War II, when the Nazis occupied Latvia, some 75,000 Latvian Jews perished in the Holocaust — 90 percent of the nation's prewar Jewish population. Experts say the scale of the tragedy might have been smaller if the local population had not helped with the killings.

The Latvian government has faced repeated criticisms for its failure to prosecute Nazi-era war criminals.

Farbtuhs has appealed the verdict and will remain free until a higher court's decision some time next year.

In the meantime, Latvians can be heard celebrating his conviction as a second set of Nuremberg Trials, this time dealing with the actions of Soviet officials. The parallel between Soviet and Nazi crimes troubles Jews in Latvia.

"There is no similarity between this case and Nuremberg," said Ronit Ben-Dor, press secretary of the Israeli Embassy to the Baltic states. "The deportations were not on such a large scale as the Holocaust," and they don't fit the guidelines for international law on genocide, she said.

Unlike the Nazis, she added, the Soviets targeted political dissidents, not an entire religious or ethnic group.

Latvia's new chief prosecutor with the Division of Totalitarian Crimes, Janis Osis, did little to silence such critics when he spoke with JTA about Farbtuhs' case.

"This is not different from what happened in Germany. This is even worse — what Stalin did to Latvians — and not only Latvians, but to all of Latvia's population."

Most Western historians question the application of the term "genocide" to Soviet crimes in Latvia.

"It was not Stalin's design to exterminate the Latvians from Europe," says David Kirby, who studies Baltic history at the University of London.

In fact, Kirby sees an attempt to avoid awkward questions of Latvian complicity in the Holocaust behind the focus on Soviet crimes.

"It's an easy ploy to say, 'But we were victims, too.'" □