



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Settlers disrupt razing

Some West Bank settlers Tuesday disrupted efforts to dismantle the first of 12 illegal outposts scheduled to be razed under a compromise reached last week between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and settler leaders.

Young activists waved signs and piled boulders to block the path of a truck brought to the site by a council of settler leaders to remove the outpost's lone structure.

Demonstrators said they do not intend to clash with Israeli soldiers if a forced eviction is ordered.

GOP weakens hate bill

President Clinton on Tuesday again called on Congress to pass tougher hate crimes legislation.

He criticized Republican lawmakers for dropping provisions that would make it easier for the federal government to investigate and prosecute hate crimes and would expand laws to include crimes motivated by a victim's sexual orientation, gender or disability. [Page 3]

Vatican archives to be examined

The Vatican and Jewish leaders agreed to set up a team of Jewish and Catholic scholars to review published Vatican archival material relating to World War II.

The move, announced Tuesday, stops short of complying with long-standing Jewish demands that the Vatican open its wartime archives to outside researchers in order, among other things, to clarify the actions of Pope Pius XII.

But Seymour Reich, chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, welcomed the agreement as "a useful first step." [Page 4]

Israelis lobby for aid

A number of Israeli Cabinet ministers descended on Capitol Hill to lobby for \$1.8 billion in aid the Clinton administration pledged to help Israel, the Palestinians and Jordan implement last year's Wye agreement.

Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh and Interior Minister Natan Sharansky met with key lawmakers Monday and Tuesday, with Sneh saying he expected the aid to be approved before Thanksgiving.

Ethiopians in Israel appeal for quick action on relatives

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Hundreds of Ethiopian Israelis gathered in Tel Aviv over the weekend to raise public awareness of the plight of thousands of their relatives they say remain stranded in Ethiopia.

Organizers of the meeting appealed to Prime Minister Ehud Barak to personally intervene to bring the group of immigrant hopefuls — often referred to as Falash Mura — to Israel.

"We called on the prime minister to personally intervene to bring the entire community here immediately," said Avraham Neguise, director of the Ethiopian advocacy group, South Wing to Zion, that organized the conference.

"The lists are ready, people have been checked," he said, referring to a census Neguise says his group has compiled of members of the Falash Mura community living in what are universally recognized to be squalid conditions.

The number of those waiting vary widely, with estimates ranging from 11,000 to 25,000.

"If it wants, the government can bring them over now in a short amount of time," Neguise said.

Israel's ability to mobilize immigration operations from Ethiopia has been proven numerous times: in mass airlifts in 1984 and 1991, in follow-up operations in the early 1990s and again this summer, when — largely due to pressure from American groups — about 1,400 more people were brought to Israel from the Kwara region of northern Ethiopia, most of them Jews who had been left behind in previous evacuations.

The Israeli government's position on the Falash Mura, however, is more complicated.

Officially, Israel says that the arrival in Israel of the remaining Kwara Jews during the next few months will mark the end of Ethiopian aliyah, or Jewish immigration to Israel.

Those still there, which Neguise and other advocates refer to as Beta Israel to stress their Jewishness, are descendants of Jews who converted to Christianity. Most say they want to return to Judaism and are practicing Jewish rituals.

Israel does not recognize the Falash Mura as Jews, even though several thousand were brought to Israel in the early 1990s as part of Operation Solomon in 1991.

Since then, the number of Falash Mura seeking to immigrate to Israel has increased dramatically. Thousands have streamed into the urban centers of Gondar and Addis Ababa in what they hoped would be the first step in moving to Israel.

Israel says that the only ones who would qualify to come would do so under the Law of Return, which holds that any person with one Jewish parent or grandparent is entitled to make aliyah.

Falash Mura living in Israel who convert to Judaism can initiate immigration applications for family members in Ethiopia.

Five Knesset members who attended Sunday's gathering pledged to campaign in the Parliament for government action on the issue.

"We have to make order of all this and just send over large teams to review applications and determine who can come," said Knesset member Avi Yehezkel of One Israel, who along with Eliezer Sandberg of Shinui, visited Addis Ababa and Gondar in August.

At the gathering of more than 700 people in Tel Aviv, members of the Ethiopian

MIDEAST FOCUS

Iran seeks evidence on 13 Jews

Iran has not yet gathered enough evidence to put 13 Jews suspected of spying for the United States and Israel on trial, former South African leader Nelson Mandela said.

Mandela was speaking Tuesday after talks with Foreign Minister David Levy. Mandela arrived in Israel after visiting Iran and Syria.

Islamic Jihad leader recaptured

Palestinian security officials arrested a military leader of Islamic Jihad who escaped from a Nablus jail with two other activists three weeks ago.

Over the weekend, Palestinian police arrested another of the escapees, while the third remained at large.

Security forces suspected they may attempt to carry out terrorist attacks to mark the anniversary of the assassination of Islamic Jihad leader Fathi Shkaki.

Jordanian journalists booted out

Jordan's press organization kicked out three of its members for defying a ban on traveling to Israel. The journalists visited the Jewish state at the invitation of the Haifa University Center for Arab-Jewish Studies to learn about the conditions faced by Israeli Arabs.

Israel may get erotic TV

Israel may soon have its own home-grown erotic television channel, the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported Sunday.

According to the paper, Playboy is in the midst of finalizing a franchising deal with an Israeli group that will include a satellite television station, an Israeli Internet site and videocassette rentals from automated machines.

The paper also reported that Playboy executives have delayed the idea of a Hebrew-language edition of its magazine, fearing strong opposition from Israeli religious groups.

community described conditions in those areas.

Neguise said the people waiting there lack adequate food and medical supplies. He charged the Israeli government of a discriminatory policy with regard to Ethiopian aliyah.

"We are not engineers, we are not doctors, we are not rich, we are poor," Neguise said in an interview.

He added that "color is playing a vital role" in the limited attention Israel is giving to processing immigration applications from Ethiopia.

Avi Granot, Israel's former ambassador to Ethiopia, denied that color had anything to do with the situation, saying that "we are not dealing with Jews" and, therefore, "racial discrimination is not a relevant argument from the start."

Tens of thousands of people "believe that just by claiming to be Falash Mura that would grant them the right of aliyah, which is not the case," Granot, who currently serves as the minister for public and interreligious affairs at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, said in an interview.

Having a Jewish parent or grandparent, even one who is a recent convert, he said, is the only way the Falash Mura now waiting in Addis Ababa and Gondar can be considered for immigration to Israel under the Law of Return.

Approving the relatives of the estimated 75,000 Israelis of Ethiopian origin, he said, is an "ongoing process."

According to advocates for the Falash Mura, applications of 150 families have recently been approved.

Barbara Ribakove Gordon, executive director of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, welcomed as a "positive change" the fact that the application process has started.

Still, Gordon and others who have been following the situation are concerned about the suffering of the Falash Mura who are waiting for the chance to go to Israel.

"Since we know they are doing some processing, shouldn't we keep" those waiting "in the best possible state so that when they come they're healthy, understand Judaism, understand Israeli society?"

Nancy Kaufman, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston, said in a telephone interview.

Her organization, together with the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, has actively worked to keep issues related to Ethiopian aliyah at the forefront of the Jewish communal agenda.

But Kaufman is dismayed by what she sees as Israel's recalcitrance on the Jewish status of the Falash Mura as well as a general lack of concern among North American Jewry.

She said she finds it "unacceptable" that Israel would continue to process applications on a case-by-case basis, yet deny responsibility for the well-being of the Ethiopians gathered in the compounds.

"Even if you say, OK, this is a much bigger problem than anyone originally anticipated, we didn't realize the complications of bringing that first group" of Ethiopian Jews to Israel, "still you have a humanitarian issue on your hands," Kaufman said Monday, a day after talking with Granot at a meeting of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs in New York.

As to the dire living conditions of the Falash Mura, Granot said, "The fact that there is great poverty in Ethiopia is true and the fact that many people desire to leave the country is true as well."

But he said there is no reason for Israel to distinguish between the Falash Mura and the "whole Ethiopian community."

In Israel, Neguise said Sunday's gathering marked the launching of a public campaign.

"We consider this conference a new step in our just, Jewish and Zionist campaign to bring all of our brethren here. We will not stop until the last Jew is brought to Israel," he said.

Neguise said in an interview that his group soon plans to hold a large public demonstration and possibly a hunger strike. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Israel contributed to this report.)



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JEWISH WORLD

Religious law on Senate docket

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) placed legislation aimed at providing greater protections for religious practice on a short list of bills to be considered this year by the Senate.

The Religious Liberty Protection Act, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this year, is being backed by a wide array of religious groups.

Schindler widow wants suitcase

Oskar Schindler's widow is claiming the contents of her late husband's suitcase that a German newspaper began publishing this week.

Emilie Schindler, who was estranged from her husband after 1958, told the German news weekly Stern that she would fly to Germany from her home in Buenos Aires in the next few days to claim the papers.

The editor of the Stuttgart Zeitung, which is publishing the papers, said his newspaper still plans to donate the papers to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

WJC threatens new boycott

The World Jewish Congress is threatening to call for a boycott of a leading German insurance company if it does not agree to publish a full list of unpaid Holocaust-era policies.

Allianz, the only one of five insurance companies taking part in an international commission on unpaid policies that has not published such a list, rejected the charges that it is not being forthcoming, saying it was one of the first insurance firms to begin the process of resolving unpaid claims.

The international commission handling Holocaust-era insurance claims is expected to discuss the issue Wednesday and Thursday at meetings in Washington.

Politician assailed on Holocaust

A popular Swiss politician is being accused of praising a book that denies the Holocaust occurred.

The charges against Christoph Blocher, who claims he never read "On the Decline of Swiss Freedom" but liked the title, came just a few days before Switzerland's parliamentary elections Sunday.

Russian fascists allowed to run

Russia's central election commission will allow a party headed by the leader of the country's most active neo-Nazi organization to run in December parliamentary elections.

The Salvage bloc is headed by Alexander Barkashov, the leader of the group known as Russian National Unity. The commission also approved a new bloc headed by ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy to run in the elections.

Congress drops hate crimes bill; Jewish groups vow to continue push

By Michael Shapiro

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Efforts to strengthen federal hate crimes legislation came to an abrupt halt this week, when Congress abandoned a bill that had strong backing from Jewish groups.

The proposed legislation sought to give federal prosecutors new authority to prosecute hate crimes against women, the disabled, and gay and lesbian Americans and to make it easier for the federal government to investigate and prosecute hate crimes by extending the Justice Department's jurisdiction. Current federal law applies only to crimes motivated by race, color, religion or national origin.

A spate of high-profile hate crimes, some targeted at Jews, had generated new momentum for the legislation, known as the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which Jewish groups had been urging Congress to enact since 1997. But it was not enough to overcome Republican opposition in Congress. The measure was passed in the Senate in July as part of its appropriations bill funding the Commerce, Justice and State departments. But it was not included in the House version of the bill.

On Monday, House and Senate negotiators, meeting to iron out differences in the two bills, approved a final spending bill without the hate crimes provisions.

President Clinton, who had urged passage of the legislation, criticized congressional Republicans for dropping it. The move dims the possibility that Congress will pass hate crimes legislation this year, prompting disappointment from Jewish activists.

Reva Price, Washington representative of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said Jewish activists who had pushed for the legislation are disappointed that Congress "didn't want to take this opportunity to put their money where their mouth is" and pass legislation that says "hate crimes are not acceptable in this country."

Jewish activists said they would look for other vehicles to pass the legislation — it is also included in a bill that targets violence against women.

"This is not going away," said Richard Foltin, the American Jewish Committee's legislative director and counsel. "It is an important initiative."

But they acknowledge that it will be difficult as Congress seeks to finish its work on the budget and then adjourn for the year. Activists said there is broad, bipartisan support for the tougher measures, but a coalition of those opposed to including the measure in the spending bill prevailed this week.

Republican lawmakers, who outnumber Democrats on the committee, dropped the measure for a number of reasons, including their belief that the legislation would create special classes of victims. Others said the provisions should not be considered in a spending bill but rather by Congress' Judiciary committees. Still others cited confusion with a competing measure, introduced by Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, that Jewish groups said didn't go far enough.

A similar bill was defeated in the Senate last year amid opposition from conservatives, who argued that it designated special classes of citizens, particularly gays and lesbians, who were already protected under existing state laws against violence.

Under current law, the Justice Department's authority is limited to crimes that occur in conjunction with a federally protected activity, such as voting or going to school. The proposed bill would eliminate that limitation, thereby making it easier for the federal government to prosecute cases like the murder of Yankel Rosenbaum, a Jewish student from Australia, during the 1991 Crown Heights riots in New York.

Last year 7,755 hate crimes were documented by all but four states across the country, according to FBI figures released yesterday.

The number — which includes race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity — represents a slight decrease from the 8,049 incidents reported in 1997.

The FBI's figures show that the number of reported religion-based crimes increased slightly in 1998 to 1,390, with nearly 80 percent — 1,081 — of those crimes directed at Jews or Jewish institutions, according to the Anti-Defamation League. Since the reporting of the crimes by law enforcement agencies is voluntary, it remains uncertain whether the numbers reflect an increase in hate activity or better reporting. □

Accord to review Vatican material seen by Jews as 'useful first step'

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — The Vatican and an international committee of Jewish leaders have agreed to set up a team of Jewish and Catholic scholars to review published Vatican archival material relating to World War II.

The move, announced Tuesday, stops short of complying with long-standing Jewish demands that the Vatican open its wartime archives to outside researchers in order, among other things, to clarify the actions of the wartime pope, Pius XII.

Controversy over the role of the church during World War II, and particularly of Pius XII, has been highlighted recently, in part because of possible plans by the Vatican to beatify Pius.

In addition, a new book about Pius by British historian John Cornwell, "Hitler's Pope," uses documentary evidence to show that Pius was an anti-Semite who facilitated Hitler's rise to power.

Seymour Reich, chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, known as IJCIC, welcomed the agreement as "a useful first step in resolving the matter of the Vatican's role during World War II."

He and others said the move is significant because the committee will have the imprimatur of the Vatican and could ultimately lead to access to secret wartime archives.

It would also, he said, aid in "resuming the Catholic-Jewish dialogue that has helped advance the evolving relationship between our two faiths in recent decades."

The agreement was announced after a more than three-hour meeting at the Vatican on Monday between Reich and Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Other IJCIC and Vatican representatives also took part. The accord stems from a suggestion made by Cassidy at a meeting between his commission and IJCIC representatives in Rome in March 1998.

A statement issued Tuesday said a team of three Jewish and three Catholic scholars will be named soon. Their duty will be to examine 11 volumes of Vatican archival material published between 1965 and 1981 that relate to the church's role during World War II. But they also will be empowered to seek clarification from other sources on questions left open by these documents.

"The team of scholars is expected to raise relevant questions and issues that, in its opinion, have not been adequately or satisfactorily resolved by the available documentation, and to issue and report on their findings," the Vatican and IJCIC said in the statement.

It quoted Cassidy and Reich as hoping that "any question and differences that now exist or may arise can be resolved through the joint review approach."

Reich, elected chairman of IJCIC last month, told JTA that material from the closed Vatican archives may be necessary to resolve issues. "What is important," he said, "is that the team will have the imprimatur of the Vatican. It will be difficult to ignore findings or questions posed by them."

He said IJCIC still ultimately wants the Vatican archives to be opened, but would not press on this matter while the review process is going on.

"At the moment we agree that this approach is best," he said.

"It's a useful first step toward arriving at what we want."

On the question of the beatification of Pius XII, Reich said that although nothing was stated explicitly, he got the sense that "there was no rush" on the Vatican's part to beatify Pius.

Cassidy expressed "satisfaction" at the agreement and said he was "convinced that what is needed in this connection is a joint study by competent Jewish and Catholic scholars of the available documents from the troubled period of the Second World War."

IJCIC is the main Jewish partner in formal dialogue with the Vatican. Its membership includes the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith International, the Israel Jewish Council on Interreligious Consultations, the World Jewish Congress and representative bodies of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewry. The body has all but ceased activities in recent years.

Reich said the meeting with Cassidy — believed to be the first substantive meeting by IJCIC leaders and Cassidy since the March 1998 session — got formal interfaith dialogue "back on track."

Last February Cassidy shook up the interfaith community by declaring the IJCIC essentially was "no longer in existence." He said "aggressive" anti-church attitudes by Jewish groups threatened Jewish-Catholic relations and an "uncertain atmosphere" was "beginning to cloud over our present relationship." □

Convicted Vichy French official goes missing before appeals case

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — A French Nazi collaborator appears to be unwilling to spend one night in jail — even if that jeopardizes his appeal before France's highest court.

More than a week after Maurice Papon disappeared from his home near here, speculation was rife over whether he would show up for his appeal against his 10-year prison sentence for crimes against humanity. According to French law, Papon, found guilty last year by a Bordeaux court of involvement in deporting Jews, is required to surrender to police and spend the night before his Supreme Court hearing in jail.

If he fails to surrender Wednesday night, his appeal would be automatically rejected — without a hearing — and the Bordeaux prosecutor could order police to hunt him down.

Papon was found guilty in April 1998 of helping deport some 1,500 Jews from the southwestern Bordeaux area to Nazi death camps when he was the secretary-general of the regional prefect's office and supervisor of its Office for Jewish Questions.

Gerard Boulanger, a lawyer for the civil plaintiffs, fears that Papon will not come, thus creating a pretext to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights.

He suspects that Papon is planning to file charges with the European court on the grounds that France's law stipulating the automatic rejection of an appeal in the defendant's absence violates his right to a fair trial under the European Human Rights Convention.

"One thing is sure. Papon will not turn up. If the European court finds France guilty of violating Article 6 [of the European Convention], it will not reverse Papon's conviction, but it will discredit his trial," Boulanger said. "I don't want Papon to die in his cell at the age of 95, happy that he has had France condemned by the European Court of Human Rights," he added. □