



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel may improve U.N. status

France opened the way for Israel to fully participate at the United Nations by withdrawing its objection to Israel's joining the Western Europe and Others Group.

Now only a few European states remain opposed to Israeli membership in the regional group, a prerequisite for joining some U.N. committees and the Security Council. Israel's outgoing U.N. ambassador, Dore Gold, said the issue could be resolved in a matter of weeks, which would end Israel's isolation as the only country to be denied membership in such a group.

Clinton, Barak, Arafat to meet

President Clinton is slated to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in Oslo on Nov. 2 to discuss the framework for a final peace agreement, National Security Adviser Sandy Berger said Wednesday.

The leaders are scheduled to take part in a ceremony to honor Yitzhak Rabin, who launched secret negotiations with the Palestinians in Oslo in 1993.

Voucher amendment expected

Republican congressional leaders are expected to propose an amendment to an education bill that would provide elementary students in low-performing schools up to \$3,500 in tuition vouchers for private and parochial schools. Meanwhile, the Ohio state attorney general has asked the Supreme Court to overturn a judge's order that temporarily bars new students from participating in the state's voucher program.

Mandela visits Gaza Strip

South African President Nelson Mandela told enthusiastic Palestinian legislators in the Gaza Strip that he feels "long-standing fraternal bonds between our two liberation movements." [Page 3]

Nazi collaborator flees into exile

A former Vichy official who was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for helping deport Jews to Nazi death camps fled into exile. Maurice Papon, 89, said in a statement issued by his lawyers Wednesday he would return to his country only after injustices against him had been righted. Authorities ordered an international arrest warrant to track down Papon, who was supposed to attend an appeal hearing Thursday.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Despite grievances, Cuban olim feel lucky to be in the Jewish state

By Avi Machlis

ASHKELON, Israel (JTA) — As the dramatic story of the immigration of 400 Cubans to Israel was broadcast across the world last week, the new Israelis put the spotlight to good use and publicly aired their grievances after many months of silence.

But even the three drab, seven-story buildings where they live in the Jewish Agency for Israel absorption center in Ashkelon could not keep the immigrants from bursting with excitement. And when a government delegation led by Absorption Minister Yuli Tamir paid a visit to this southern coastal town last week, Grisel Hernandez insisted on making a statement.

"I am very satisfied in Israel," said the 30-year-old former English teacher in impressive Hebrew. "Every day when I wake up in bed I say, Thank you."

The combination of grumbling and joy accurately reflects the complex situation these immigrants feel here today. Many are angry at how they have been treated in the months since their arrival, yet most of the immigrants interviewed by JTA say they are happy to be in the country, and none said they wanted to leave.

Although they embraced the media spotlight, they are still unsure how the recent publicity surrounding the story will affect the chances of their relatives, among some 1,300 Jews left in Cuba, to emigrate. An official close to the situation, however, said the latest group of about 15 people, down from original estimates of 20, had already departed Cuba and was expected in Israel on Wednesday, indicating that the publicity has had no negative effect on the exodus.

Typically, between 15 and 20 Cubans arrive in Israel each month, the official said.

Only last week did Israeli military censors open the subject to the media. As details emerged, it became clear that the Jewish Agency had assisted in the emigration of some 400 Cubans since 1995. The Jewish Agency had entered an agreement with Fidel Castro to keep the operation quiet in return for an obstacle-free operation.

Although the Cuban emigration was not widely known, one thing is certain, says Hernandez: Castro "knew about the entire thing," she says, wondering why the mission was shrouded in secrecy. "Nothing happens in Cuba that Fidel does not know. And in Cuba, professionals, doctors and teachers cannot leave without permission from Fidel Castro or his buddies."

Immigrants here say it is much more difficult for professionals to secure an exit visa from the country, and Israeli officials say the majority of the immigrants who have arrived are blue-collar workers. In addition, among the Jewish immigrants are many non-Jews who are eligible for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return, which grants even grandchildren of a Jew the right to aliyah. In a tiny Jewish community like Cuba, say immigrants, intermarriage is inevitable.

"I am not Jewish, but I feel like a Jew," says Alfredo Sotolongo, 41, wearing a red cap, gold earring and bracelets, a fat cigar wedged between his fingers. "During the last eight years, we were very active in the synagogue."

Sotolongo came to Israel with Violeta Perez Nieto, his second wife, and four stepchildren. His stepson Ewduin Perez, 24, is also not technically Jewish. But when Jews began reviving community life in the early 1990s after Castro became more tolerant of open religious practice, the family started going to synagogue.

Perez's grandfather was Jacobo Perez Meshulam, who immigrated from Turkey to Cuba and was a founder of the local synagogue. "We lived with him, and during my

MIDEAST FOCUS

Police search Netanyahu's home

Israeli police searched former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's home Wednesday looking for evidence linking him to a suspected fraud case, Israel Radio said.

The police were probing allegations that Netanyahu billed the government for private work carried out by a contractor while he was in office.

Price tag put on pullback

The Israeli army estimates it will cost \$234 million to withdraw its troops from Lebanon and redeploy them along the Israeli border, according to the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot.

Most of the money would be used for building shelters and other protective facilities in Israeli towns and villages along the border, the paper added Tuesday.

Israel arrests Syrian deserter

Israel arrested a Syrian army deserter who snuck across the border into the Jewish state. The soldier, who is being held pending deportation, told Israeli officials he deserted after his commanders threatened to place him in a military jail.

Bribery scheme at Gaza border

Three employees at a checkpoint between Israel and the Gaza Strip were arrested on suspicion of accepting bribes and favors in exchange for granting Palestinian residents entry permits into Israel. Israeli investigators said the three are among six people being held in connection with the scheme.

New Year fete called Zionist plot

An Islamic newspaper in Egypt labeled as a Zionist plot the country's plans for a celebration of the millennium. The Al-Shaab weekly claimed that a New Year's show would support what it called a claim that Jews had built the pyramids.

childhood I always remembered seeing the Jews swaying at prayer," says Perez, recalling the small group of Jews who remained devout even when the regime was less tolerant. A few years ago, a group of youngsters began organizing activities.

"I began going to Friday night services, Shabbat morning services, and every Sunday I participated in Hebrew classes," says Perez.

Perez mentions the name of Jose Miller, a community leader who apparently was close with Castro, as having been one factor in Castro's decision to let the Jews go. But he, and most other immigrants interviewed, say they found out they could leave via rumors that spread through the community like wildfire.

As the word spread, Perez, who was working in a cigar factory, made his decision, and headed for the Canadian Embassy to submit his paperwork.

Canada, which maintains relations with Cuba, helped facilitate the emigration since there are no diplomatic ties between Israel and Cuba.

Perez does not hide his motives and does not profess any Zionist ideology, yet he says he is willing to work hard, serve in the army and start again in Israel if given the chance.

"I came because life was hard in Cuba," he says. "We felt like dogs in Cuba, but here I feel like the same dog with a different collar."

Eitan Behar, who was known in his hometown of Santiago de Cuba as Jorge, is one of the immigrants whose desire to come to Israel stemmed from a reawakening of his Jewish identity. Behar, a 27-year-old engineer, was the youth leader of Hatikva, which he describes as "a small, but very active" group in the Jewish community in Santiago, which began to hold regular Sabbath gatherings in 1993.

The renewal of Jewish life was "very powerful for us, very intense," he says in a telephone interview from Beersheva where he lives with his wife, Nili. "We realized we didn't know how to do services, Kabbalat Shabbat, to sing the tunes."

For help, his community turned to the Jewish community in Havana, to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and to other groups from the United States, Latin America and Canada. Learning about Judaism, Behar says, naturally led him and Nili to learn about Israel, where they decided to make a new life.

Behar said things are working out according to his plans, but he admits, "As immigrants we have several obstacles to overcome: language, getting a job, learning a new country."

For most of the immigrants, the biggest problem is that they have been granted rights similar to those received by immigrants from Western countries.

But unlike their Western counterparts, Cuban immigrants were not allowed to bring any money or property out of Cuba. Their snappy dress in designer clothing is misleading; two suitcases of clothing were all they were allowed to take out. The rest of their property was nationalized.

The immigrants argue they should therefore be eligible for the same absorption package granted to immigrants from impoverished countries like Ethiopia. Most importantly, they want to receive the same amount of assistance for buying an apartment. Israel's Absorption Ministry says the average Cuban family will receive up to \$30,000 for a mortgage, while the average Ethiopian family is granted as much as \$75,000.

The Jewish Agency has allowed the Cubans to stay at their absorption centers longer than the usual six-month period, knowing that their status must first be ironed out.

"I am still optimistic," says Perez, echoing the sentiments of many immigrants at the absorption center, some of whom were upset at the Israeli media for making it sound like many were on the verge of leaving the country.

"Israel is our country, and we love this country," says Alexe Colon, 23, a fiery redheaded young man who left his law studies in Havana to come to Israel.

"We do not want to go back to Cuba, but we do want to be given mortgage rights similar to those of the Ethiopians."

Isis Segal, 29, agrees. "We have no work yet, and it is very difficult, but it was very hard to keep quiet for so long," she says. "We only hope the publicity will not hurt the chances of our relatives coming to Israel." □

(JTA staff writer Julia Goldman in New York contributed to this report.)



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JEWISH WORLD

Athlete to play near hometown

An Orthodox high school basketball star agreed to play for a university near his hometown of Baltimore next year.

According to his longtime adviser and former coach, Tamir Goodman will play for Towson State University as long as the school is able to reschedule its games to accommodate Goodman's observance of the Sabbath.

Goodman backed out of a previous commitment to play for the University of Maryland, in part because the school would not reschedule its games.

He is playing this year for a Seventh-Day Adventist school in suburban Washington. Seventh-Day Adventists also observe the Sabbath.

Airline allegedly blocked prayer

A Montreal Jewish businessman is suing Air France for allegedly attempting to prevent him from praying on a flight into Paris.

Michael Chernack claims that a flight attendant tried to stop him from saying morning prayers on the April 25 flight and then told him that Air France prohibits praying on its planes.

An Air France spokesman said there is no such policy.

Shul marks 250th anniversary

A congregation that is a bastion of Southern Jewry will celebrate its 250th anniversary later this month.

Temple Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim of Charleston, S.C., is one of the oldest synagogues in continuous use in the United States.

Neo-Nazi found in Britain

A neo-Nazi who fled Germany in 1995 after being sentenced to jail for inciting racial hatred has been found in Britain.

Gerhard Rudolf, who had been sentenced to 14 months in prison, faces two more Holocaust-denial charges in Germany.

The chairman of the London-based Holocaust Educational Trust, Lord Janner, urged Germany to seek his extradition immediately.

Rudolf has been living in southern England under his former wife's maiden name.

Spielberg film opens in Italy

Director Steven Spielberg's Oscar-winning Holocaust documentary "The Final Days" opened in Italy this week.

The nation's Education Ministry is promoting the film as a tool for Holocaust education.

Cinemas added an extra morning showing to enable school classes to see it.

Mandela bears message of peace in his first visit to the Jewish state

By Suzanne Belling

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — Former South African President Nelson Mandela wants to play a mediating role between Israel and its neighbors.

That became clear during Mandela's trip this week to the Middle East, which included his first visit to the Jewish state Monday and Tuesday, after stops in Syria, Iran and Jordan.

While in Tehran, he said, he spoke to Iranian President Mohammad Khatami regarding the plight of 13 Jews accused of spying for Israel and the United States.

Mandela conveyed Khatami's assurances to Israeli President Ezer Weizman that the 13 would be given a fair trial with "full legal representation."

Mandela also said that Israel is correct in asking for recognition from Arab nations.

"I cannot conceive of Israel withdrawing if Arab states do not recognize Israel within secure borders," Mandela said after meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy. Mandela later traveled to the Gaza Strip, where he met with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

A longtime supporter of the PLO, Mandela told reporters that "Israel should withdraw from all the areas which it won from the Arabs in 1967, and in particular Israel should withdraw completely from the Golan Heights, from south Lebanon and from the West Bank."

While in Gaza, he told an enthusiastic Palestinian legislative assembly that he feels "long-standing fraternal bonds between our two liberation movements."

While declaring himself to be sympathetic toward the Palestinians, Mandela also urged Arabs to grant Israel "firm and unequivocal" recognition of its right to exist within secure borders. He also said he believes Syrian President Hafez Assad is committed to making peace with Israel.

"Syria is your neighbor. Take it from me, they are seeking a peaceful solution," Mandela said in Israel in the presence of a South African delegation, which included Israel's ambassador to South Africa, Uri Oren; Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris; Marlene Bethlehem, national president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies; and Russell Gaddin, the board's national chairman.

Mandela expressed his "fascination" with development in Israel, saying the state could be an "economic powerhouse" in the Middle East.

The South African delegation welcomed Mandela to Jerusalem, where a red carpet was laid outside the King David Hotel. The former president hugged Harris, a close personal friend, saying: "Now I feel at home — my rabbi is here."

At the conclusion of the lunch, Mandela said: "One of the reasons I am so pleased to be in Israel is as a tribute to the enormous contribution of the Jewish community of South Africa. I am so proud of them."

Mandela also visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial center, saying he was "deeply pained and enriched" by the experience. He emphasized how important it is that the world not forget the Holocaust.

After meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak on Monday, Mandela described him as "a man of courage and vision."

"The people of the world and Israel should support Barak. He has aroused our hopes," he said.

Former South African Rabbi Dov Sidelsky and his wife, Naomi, who live in Jerusalem, attended the meeting at Barak's invitation.

The rabbi is the son of Johannesburg lawyer Lazar Sidelsky, 88, who employed Mandela as a law clerk in the 1940s, when it was unheard of to give black people professional opportunities.

"Mandela knew Barry as a little boy and, when he came to my home, used to ruffle his hair in an affectionate manner," Lazar Sidelsky said. "Mandela always promised me, if he went to Israel, he would definitely make contact with my son."

"Isn't it incredible that, among all the bigger issues Mandela had to contend with, he kept this promise?" □

Young activists vow to fight razing of West Bank outposts

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli prime minister's compromise with Jewish settler leaders to voluntarily dismantle illegal West Bank outposts is moving ahead — but not without difficulty.

The Yesha Council, which represents Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, dismantled a West Bank outpost Wednesday, moving ahead with a deal reached with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to take down 12 illegal enclaves.

The outpost was dismantled a day after young settler activists blocked a truck from razing the lone structure erected on a hilltop near the settlement of Shvut Rachel.

In that incident, the demonstrators congregated at the site near Ramallah and blocked the path of the truck carrying the equipment. Settler leaders subsequently dismantled a water tower from another nearby hill outpost.

At the first outpost Tuesday, demonstrators piled stones preventing access to the hilltop. The demonstrators danced and waved placards reading, "Today This Enclave, Tomorrow Jerusalem," and, "Let the Sun Shine on All the Enclaves."

The protest reflects strains within the settlement movement itself on how to deal with the settlement policies of Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Some members of the settlement community, particularly younger activists, have accused the Yesha Council of succumbing to pressure from Barak.

Though Yesha leaders and some right-wing politicians had praised the plan for having reduced by three the number of outposts Barak initially intended to dismantle, mixed feelings were evident Tuesday. The driver of the truck brought in to dismantle the outpost said he did not intend to force his way through.

"I know some of these guys," he told Israel's Channel 2 television. "I was in their position a couple years ago."

The enclave, dubbed "Shvut Rachel II," was considered one of the simpler operations undertaken by Yesha because it is uninhabited and consists solely of a lone storage container with some agricultural equipment inside. Some of the enclaves of the 12 planned to be taken down are inhabited.

Since the Wye River agreement was signed a year ago, some 42 outposts had sprouted on hilltops in the West Bank, as settlers sought to create "facts on the ground" before final-status negotiations, which will determine the future of the settlements.

Barak has insisted he is acting out of legal, and not political, considerations in determining which outposts can remain. His effort at compromising with the settler leaders was seen as an attempt to avoid some of the unsettling scenes witnessed during the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, when Israeli troops forcibly removed Jewish settlers who had sought to stake claim on West Bank hilltops.

Demonstrators at Shvut Rachel II on Tuesday said they did not intend to clash with troops if it came to a forced eviction.

"If the soldiers come, we will come down from the hill, when they leave we will go back up," one of the demonstrators, Avishai, told Israel Radio.

"We do not intend to confront IDF troops. IDF troops are us, our brothers, our friends. We will not clash with them. But from our point of view, this hill is ours, this one and all the others." □

Anniversary of Rabin murder used to heal chasms in Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Four years after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Israelis are still grappling with the social chasm the murder revealed.

In an effort to heal some of those rifts, secular and religious youths attempted, if only for a day, to seek out what unites them.

As commemorations began Wednesday, hundreds of high school students met in a "dialogue tent" set up in the Tel Aviv square where Rabin was slain.

The images of ponytailed secular teens exchanging words with their religious counterparts provides some signs of encouragement that the gaps separating Israelis might one day diminish.

"We still may not agree, but perhaps we understand that the dismantling of settlements may be incredibly painful for one side, while making another side happy," one participant said.

Israel's national day of mourning for Rabin, observed on the Hebrew calendar date of the assassination, got under way Wednesday with a candlelighting ceremony at the presidential residence.

Other events included a state memorial ceremony at his grave at Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem and a special Knesset session.

The anniversary was marked as settler leaders began dismantling several settlements in the West Bank, sometimes facing opposition from younger, more militant settlers.

Four years ago, in the weeks preceding the slaying, settlers launched large-scale protests across Israel against turning over any West Bank territory to the Palestinians.

Yigal Amir, who was very involved in those protests, shot Rabin on Nov. 4, 1995 — and later said his actions were justified by Jewish law.

This week, echoing the acrimony that preceded the slaying, Orthodox rabbis prohibited the dismantling of settlements.

Israel's attorney general this week stressed that while freedom of expression must be upheld, law enforcement officials must ensure it does not slide into political violence.

The renewed momentum in Israeli-Palestinian peace moves, and the concessions it is expected to bring, have sharpened the political debate. At the same time, religious-secular tensions have also intensified. Organizers of the dialogue tent hoped the encounters would help the different groups bridge their differences.

Such dialogue "helps create a public atmosphere that could prevent the next political murder," Danny Tropper, chairman of the Gesher — Hebrew for "bridge" — Foundation, told the Israeli daily Ma'ariv.

In the United States, Israeli consulates throughout the country, working in many cases with local Jewish community federations and Jewish community relations councils, are planning memorial events surrounding the anniversary.

Eitan Haber, the senior aide who officially announced Rabin's death and later eulogized the slain leader at his funeral, will speak at consular events in New York, Boston and Chicago.

In Los Angeles, an interfaith service is planned for Oct. 24; in Houston, singer David Broza will perform a special memorial concert on Nov. 6. □

(JTA staff writer Julia Goldman in New York contributed to this report.)