



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Jews, Baptist leader may meet

The president of the Southern Baptist Convention is trying to arrange a meeting with Jewish leaders. Paige Patterson issued the invitation to eight Jewish leaders after complaints about his repeated calls for Baptists to seek the conversions of Jews and other religious groups.

Gedale Horowitz, president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, who is one of those who received Patterson's invitation, suggested that he and Patterson have a one-on-one meeting.

House passes budget

The U.S. House of Representatives approved Thursday a \$390 billion budget bill, including nearly \$3 billion in annual aid to Israel and nearly \$2 billion for Israel and the Palestinians to help implement last year's Wye agreement.

The deal, which must now be approved by the Senate, did not include tougher hate crimes legislation that Jewish groups support.

German negotiators stand firm

There is no chance that Germany will increase its latest offer for a proposed fund to compensate Nazi-era slave laborers, according to the spokesman for a group of about 50 German firms.

Wolfgang Gibowski told JTA that the firms, along with the German government, are offering \$4.3 billion — "and that is the end of the story."

The figure is \$1 billion less than the amount reported by sources close to the negotiations, whose latest round ended Wednesday in Bonn. "We asked all other parties to declare on the 8th of December whether they agree or not" to the offer, he added.

Bradley: Israel's record 'perfect'

Democratic presidential candidate Bill Bradley mostly avoided Jewish issues during a meeting Wednesday in Atlanta with more than 200 Jews from around the country.

Speaking at a session held independently from the site of the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly, he said his record on Israel is "perfect," but did not elaborate.

Instead, he focused on what he sees as America's "untapped potential" to "unlock in every American the capacity for goodness."

APPROACHING THE MILLENNIUM

Tourists expected to flood Jerusalem despite recent expulsions of Christians

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Melodic harmonies echo through Dominus Flevit, a small-but-quiet church on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, as a group of 30 Christian Bible scholars and pastors sing "Hallelujah to the Lord," first in English, then Hebrew.

Built in 1955 on the ruins of an ancient church, the teardrop-shaped structure commands a breathtaking view of the eastern walls of Jerusalem's Old City.

According to Christian tradition, Jesus, knowing his prophetic message would be rejected, wept here as he viewed the illusion of a tranquil city that in fact was bitterly divided, its Jewish population suffering under a brutal Roman occupation.

Outside the church, tourists lower their heads in quiet prayer for peace in Jerusalem.

The scene contrasts sharply with images in the Israeli and international media that have regularly reported millennium celebrations with sensational stories about deranged Christian tourists or fringe groups who may carry out violent acts to hasten Jesus' "second coming."

Yet this group of Christians, who have come to Israel on a combined pilgrimage and study tour organized by the California-based Centre for the Study of Biblical Research, were surprisingly undeterred by Israel's recent crackdown and deportation of some fringe Christian groups. Some even defended the government's actions, but warned that Israel must be careful not to stereotype all 2.5 million Christian pilgrims expected next year as dangerous.

"This is a Jewish state, and we are guests in the Jewish state," said Bill Bean, an ordained minister and director of the center. "Christians are invited to this land if they don't break the law. If Christians are going to come here and break the law, then they shouldn't be here."

For many, the main concern about the way Israel is handling millennialist threats is that Israelis do not really understand the differences between Christian denominations.

"As you have Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jewry, we have many, many denominations," Bean said.

"It would be nice if someone in the government or the Ministry of Religious Affairs would take time to talk to people who really are legitimate in this field to learn from them about the different groups."

Although millennium observers and experts acknowledge that Israel must take threats of fanaticism seriously, some are concerned about the way Israel has handled the situation so far.

Earlier this month, Israel deported a group of 20 fundamentalist Christians led by Brother David, a colorful character who lived in Jerusalem for many years and whose followers were anticipating what they believed would be Jesus' imminent second coming.

Brother David was in Israel illegally, having destroyed his passport several years ago. But despite his offbeat religious beliefs, he spent most of his time doing charitable work — and his peaceful followers showed no signs of violence.

Rabbi David Rosen, director of the Israel office of the Anti-Defamation League and an interfaith activist, said accusations by Israeli police that Brother David's followers had planned a mass suicide demonstrated an "abysmal ignorance" of the differences

MIDEAST FOCUS

Clinton, Barak meet in Istanbul

President Clinton's national security adviser said the United States has made no progress in its attempt to restart negotiations between Israel and Syria. Sandy Berger spoke to reporters Wednesday in Turkey, where President Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak met to discuss the peace process at a European summit on security.

He also said Clinton told Barak that Israel and the Palestinians must work quickly to resolve a dispute over a scheduled Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, which will be postponed until at least next week, negotiators say.

Palestinians want compensation

Palestinian officials are demanding that Israel pay compensation for its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The demand came Thursday during the latest round of final-status talks.

Students order in strippers

Israeli high school students ended a recent pilgrimage to former Nazi death camps in Poland by bringing strippers to their hotel rooms for a late-night show, the school's principal said.

"There was a male stripper and a female stripper," Rachela Yoktan, principal of Ofek High School, told Israel Radio on Thursday. Yoktan said the incident took place earlier this month, behind the back of a teacher chaperoning the group of 70 students. "They found cards in the hotel listing all kinds of services that guests could order," Yoktan added.

Israelis watch meteor show

Israel got a clear view of Wednesday night's Leonid meteor shower, hailed by astronomers as the heaviest storm of shooting stars in more than three decades. At its height, the storm reached a rate of an estimated 1,700 shooting stars per hour.



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between mainstream Christian believers, fringe nonviolent groups and radical cults.

"There may be a failure to distinguish violent from peaceful Christian millennial groups," Rosen said. "Such confusion will prove to be a serious boomerang for Israel. Aside from the damage to Israel's international image, such actions may have wider-range deleterious effects on potential pilgrimage to Israel, depriving the Jewish state not only of the benefits of tourism, but also of the enormous amount of goodwill that is offered by the pilgrimage of millions for the new millennium."

Rosen says that since the expulsions, he has seen encouraging signs that the police may try harder not to generalize about Christian tourists. Indeed, Shlomo Ben-Ami, Israel's public security minister, told JTA through a spokesman that Israel "wants to carry out a policy of keeping its gates open and encouraging tourists to come to Israel."

Israel's Ministry of Tourism insists the recent expulsions will not hurt tourism. Nitsan Ilan, a spokeswoman for the ministry, said it recognizes that policemen dealing with millennial threats need a better understanding of Christianity.

"The Tourism Ministry is working with the police to give seminars to policemen," she said. "This month 700 Jerusalem-based policemen will be participating in lectures given by experts on Christianity."

For his part, Steven Notley, a Christian scholar and licensed tour guide who has been in Israel for 14 years, is not worried about the crackdown.

"I do not think it will affect tourism one way or another," he said. "But I would like the government to make sure that whoever they get rid of is clearly breaking the law. It should not be some sort of hysteria that you are getting rid of anybody who dares to suggest that they believe in the second coming."

As Notley led the California group through the Old City, hordes of tourists in dozens of groups at the most famous Christian sites appeared to signal that little damage has been done so far.

One group carries a large wooden cross, walking in the footsteps of Jesus as they chant hymns in unison.

Jeanne Miterko, director of the New England branch of the center, said she has been to Israel four times and has never seen so many tourists.

"I don't blame the Israelis for being concerned," she said. "The big question is how they act on that. The best prophylactic measure is to know where these people are coming from before they board the plane."

To do so, Israeli security services are cooperating with foreign secret services such as the FBI. However, the problem is how to finger potential threats without undermining the "open gates" policy and frightening away tourists.

"In America you just cannot tell people they cannot come in because they are associated with this or that group," Miterko said. "That could really create a problem of public perception of Israel."

Some say the media fuss over potential millennium madness is counterproductive. "If they talk about it in the news media it becomes a magnet for meshugenahs," says Larry Hirsch, a "messianic Jew" from California. "The fact that some Americans were kicked out doesn't bother me, but keep it low key."

Hirsch — and veteran Christian tour guides — say the real threat to millennial tourism will be the fear that Israel will simply be too crowded. "People will be deterred from coming because there is no room at the inn," Hirsch said. □

Resilient head lice strain Israelis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli researchers are scratching their heads over ways to combat a particularly resilient local strain of head lice.

According to Hebrew University's lice expert, Dr. Kosta Mumcuoglu, the mighty mites are more widespread, resilient and treatment-resistant than their counterparts in Europe and North America.

According to Mumcuoglu, 70 percent of Israeli children between the ages of 3 and 12 have suffered from head lice at some point in their lives. More than 560,000 children were afflicted by lice in the past year.

With the help of the Israeli Health Ministry and Hadassah University Hospital in Ein Kerem, Mumcuoglu is to soon begin clinical testing of anti-lice treatments. □

JEWISH WORLD

Chechens release Jewish boy

Chechen kidnappers released a 15-year-old Jewish boy whom they have held captive since May. Maj. Vyacheslav Izmailov, who has been working to free people held by Chechens, is believed to have played a leading role in Monday's freeing of Vladimir Fayil along with three Russian soldiers.

More than 1,000 people are currently held by Chechen gangsters looking for ransom. Jews, especially Israeli citizens, are the most desirable prey because it's widely believed that Israel, or the international Jewish community, will pay high ransoms for them.

Poll: Shoah 3rd biggest event

The Holocaust is the third biggest news event of the 20th century, according to a new Gallup poll published Wednesday in USA Today.

Events relating to World War II swept the top three slots in the poll, with the war itself coming in first and the dropping of the atomic bomb second.

Training center opens in Moscow

A school to train teachers about the Holocaust opened in Moscow earlier this month, reflecting a growing trend in Holocaust education in Russia in recent years.

The Holocaust Center is running the school in conjunction with the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem and Israel's Open University, which has already been teaching correspondence courses on the Holocaust to thousands of students throughout the former Soviet Union.

Toronto to erect menorah

The mayor of Toronto promised to erect a menorah on the site in a local park where a 15-year-old Russian Jewish student was murdered by a gang of youths Sunday evening.

Dmitri Baranovski was sitting with some friends when a gang of about 10 or 12 older youths approached them, demanding cigarettes. When Baranovski asked why they were being hassled, they beat him severely, and he died the next morning in a hospital.

No suspects have yet been apprehended. The menorah is expected to be in place before Chanukah begins at sundown on Dec. 3.

Chile bans neo-Nazi meet

Chile banned an international gathering of neo-Nazis.

Jewish leaders in Latin America and abroad had sought a ban on the international congress, which was scheduled for April 20, the 111th anniversary of Hitler's birth.

Gore praises U.S. Jews' pursuit of social justice

By Julia Goldman

ATLANTA (JTA) — Vice President Al Gore may not know how to pronounce Hebrew words, but he knows how to tailor a speech to a Jewish audience.

Speaking in Atlanta at the opening plenum of the General Assembly of the United Jewish Communities, Gore acknowledged the American Jewish community's pursuit of social justice.

"I want to thank you for your daily battles for justice," he said Wednesday to the roughly 5,200 delegates at the G.A., as the annual meeting of Israelis and representatives from federations across North America is known. Gore told the group that the Jewish principles of "freedom, faith and justice are very much alive throughout the world," because of the UJC's work providing for social services, rescue and relief.

The UJC was celebrating its first day as a legal entity, following the merger of the United Jewish Appeal, the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Israel Appeal. While much of his 20-minute address focused on issues that have become central to his presidential campaign against Democratic rival Bill Bradley, Gore peppered his remarks with references to Jewish values, prophetic wisdom and Yiddish humor.

His pronunciation of the word "chesed," Hebrew for kindness, with a hard "ch," as in "church," rather than the throaty "h" Hebrew calls for — brought laughter from the filled Atlanta Civic Center.

"Did I pronounce it wrong?" Gore asked. He was corrected from the floor.

Gore, who initially declined the UJC's invitation to speak, apparently decided to take advantage of the opportunity to promote his political agenda.

He decided to attend just days before his appearance, throwing G.A. organizers into a frantic push to accommodate the vice president's security requirements.

Bradley arranged separately to meet Wednesday evening with Jewish leaders in Atlanta during a previously scheduled visit.

While the vice president has often addressed Jewish groups, including past G.A.'s, this time he appeared to deliberately distance himself from the Clinton administration, focusing not on his record as vice president, but on his vision for America's future.

In keeping with what has become part of his retooled campaign image, he presented himself as a casual speaker, even taking the microphone from its stand and moving to the front of the stage.

Despite the fact that Gore was speaking to a group that sends nearly \$200 million to Israel each year, he made few references to the Jewish state.

Nor did he mention Jerusalem, a subject that is a central sticking point in the Israeli-Palestinian final-status talks, which most politicians emphasize in talking to Jewish crowds as Israel's "eternal, undivided capital."

Gore made only vague mention of the Middle East peace process and did not identify himself with the Clinton administration's role in pushing Israel and its neighbors back to the negotiating table. He said he wanted "to make very clear," at this "hopeful, but fragile moment in the peace process, when we all dream of peace with security," that "the United States of America will always stand with Israel whenever she takes risks for peace and will always be a strong supporter of Israel."

When speaking specifically about foreign policy, Gore centered his remarks around his support for the passage of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty on nuclear weapons, which the United States drafted for the international community, but the Senate rejected.

On the domestic front, Gore called for hate crimes legislation and for protecting "a woman's right to choose," which received thunderous applause.

But he devoted most of his speech to issues of social justice that he said were central to Jewish tradition: education, the environment and health care for children and the elderly.

"Jews have understood the fragility of our social order" and the need for "laws and commandments," Gore said.

"I am here today because I share those values," he said, noting that his values came from his family and "a tradition interwoven with yours." □

Prayers of atonement arise from blood libel crime scene

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — Members of a Protestant church here are asking God's forgiveness for a crime committed against Jews nearly five centuries ago.

Before some 300 worshipers and guests at Berlin's Marien Church on Wednesday, the Rev. Ulf Lunow atoned for the events of 1510, when 35 Jews were burned to death.

He also reminded his parishioners not to remain silent when faced with intolerance today.

In the summer of 1510, the Jews were executed at the church on charges of having desecrated a Communion wafer and using the blood of a Christian child to celebrate Passover — the infamous blood libel myth invoked as grounds for countless pogroms against Jews.

The names of the murdered Jews — all men and boys — were read aloud, echoing through the church's vaulted chambers.

"The world is certainly not yet a perfect place," said Berlin Rabbi Walter Rothschild, who during the ceremony chanted prayers of mourning in Hebrew. "But with the reading of these 35 names, it is a little better."

The program — which included Jewish and Christian prayers, as well as songs in Hebrew and Yiddish — was inspired by Salomea Genin, a Jewish Berliner who returned to the city of her childhood after World War II.

Genin had noticed a "very heavy atmosphere" in the church while attending a cultural program three years ago.

Others reported experiencing the same heaviness, said Genin, who then remembered what had happened there in 1510.

"I said, 'My God, these souls are still cleaving to this church. What they needed was for someone to say they were sorry.'"

The events of nearly half a millennium ago began after a ritual object was stolen from another church. The man who was accused of having stolen it said he had sold a Communion wafer to a Jew.

As a result, 38 Jews were given the death penalty. Three converted to Christianity in hopes of saving their lives. Two of those were put to death by the sword on July 20, 1510, the day after the others were burned.

One Jew was pardoned. He spent the rest of his days in a monastery, where he worked as an eye doctor, Genin said.

Genin said Lunow supported the idea of having a service of atonement, but his superiors balked at the idea two years ago.

"They said it happened before the Protestant Reformation, when this was a Catholic church. So we should go to the Catholics," Genin said. "Rev. Lunow tried again this year and convinced them."

Lunow, meanwhile, said his parishioners sometimes complain about being reminded of a far more recent crime — the Holocaust.

Some ask, for example, why they should have to pay reparations nearly 55 years after the end of the war, he said.

It seemed therefore appropriate that the service of atonement coincided with the latest round of slave-labor compensation talks in Bonn.

Lunow said it was shameful that so few German firms were taking part in the fund.

"I find it good that the Americans, and the Jews in America,

continue to put their finger in this wound," he added.

"I feel that there is relief," said Genin after the service. "And I have the strong suspicion that the atmosphere will be much lighter when I come back here." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Resignation of rabbi in Warsaw shows community's growing pains

By Ruth E. Gruber

WARSAW (JTA) — Citing irreconcilable differences with the lay leaders who hired him, Rabbi Baruch Rabinowicz has tendered his resignation as rabbi of Warsaw only six months into his two-year contract.

His decision focuses light on tensions within the emerging Jewish community in Poland and demonstrates the growing pains of the Jewish revival in post-Communist Europe.

"He resigned and we accepted the terms of the resignation, so the crisis has been overcome in a dignified way," said Stanislaw Krajewski, a Polish Jewish leader. "We gained experience rather than suffered a blow." He called Rabinowicz's resignation "a reason for relief and hope that no further damage will be done. At this stage we can do better without him than with him."

Still, said one community insider, "I feel that we have wasted time, energy and emotion."

An Orthodox rabbi in his mid-20s, Rabinowicz was the first rabbi hired by the community in at least four decades. The move was hailed an important landmark in Jewish revival, both by community leaders and by outside observers.

Insiders say a variety of tensions emerged between lay leaders and Rabinowicz — regarding both style and substance — from the beginning, which eventually led to personal animosities.

"It was a shiduch that didn't work," said one community insider, using the Yiddish word for a match, after Rabinowicz handed in a letter of resignation Wednesday. "Love comes from giving, not taking. Neither the rabbi nor the community was 'prepared to give enough. Both sides had unreasonable and unrealistic expectations, and both sides are guilty.'"

Community leaders had hoped Rabinowicz would be a strong leader and effective public face for the community, a forceful figure who could solve internal disputes and attract Jews around him. Most younger members of the Warsaw community, including its leadership, are Jews with a secular or liberal orientation, and they were put off by Rabinowicz's Orthodoxy, as well as by his apparent timidity.

The fact that the rabbi gathered a small group of Orthodox followers around him caused further friction. Rabinowicz said he is considering staying in Warsaw despite his resignation to work with this group outside community auspices.

He complained that the community was fragmented and factionalized and also that there were no organized provisions to support a rabbi and other synagogue workers in the traditional fashion. "I had to be rabbi, shamash and gabbai all in one," he said, referring to three synagogue positions.

He said community leaders failed to provide decent housing and ensure the physical and material well-being of himself and his family. He also was the target of taunts by local children near his home and once or twice had tomatoes thrown at him. □