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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Barak to confront opposition

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak returned to Israel from the negotiating table to confront growing opposition to a withdrawal from the Golan Heights as part of any peace deal with Syria.

Part of the opposition stemmed from the feeling among some Israelis that Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa remained cool toward Barak throughout a week of negotiations in West Virginia.

Not only were there no public handshakes, but the Israeli media repeatedly reported what were viewed as snubs by the Syrians of their Israeli counterparts. [Page 4]

Gore won't play up religion

Democratic presidential hopeful Al Gore said he does not plan to promote the fact that he is a born-again Christian during the election campaign, according to sources at an off-the-record meeting he had Monday night with 50 Jewish organizational leaders and activists in New York.

The vice president was accompanied by three Jewish Democratic members of Congress from New York: Reps. Gary Ackerman, Eliot Engel and Nita Lowey, all of whom backed his candidacy.

Holocaust trial opens in London

A libel trial began in Britain involving a historian who believes there is no evidence that 6 million Jews were killed by the Nazis and a professor who called him a "dangerous spokesman for Holocaust denial."

David Irving is suing U.S. scholar Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher, Penguin Books, for the alleged libel that appears in her 1994 book, "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory." [Page 1]

Day school enrollment doubles

Enrollment in non-Orthodox Jewish day schools in the United States doubled during the past decade, according to a new census by the New York-based Avi Chai Foundation. The census also reports that 80 percent of the current total of 185,000 day school students attend Orthodox institutions.

It also finds that more day school students are choosing to remain through eighth grade and that the New York metropolitan area accounts for two-thirds of the nation's day school enrollment.

Trial pitting Holocaust revisionist against Jewish scholar opens in London

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A British defense attorney gave a taste of the drama to come in the libel trial brought by a Holocaust revisionist against a Holocaust scholar when, during his opening statement this week, he addressed the plaintiff.

"To put it bluntly," Richard Rampton, who is defending Holocaust scholar Deborah Lipstadt against David Irving, told the judge Tuesday, "he is a liar."

This landmark trial, held in the August setting of London's Royal Courts of Justice, is expected to last for some three months and is likely to involve the most detailed judicial examination of the Holocaust since the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem almost 40 years ago.

If Irving wins, analysts say, it could give credibility to Holocaust revisionism at a time when those who witnessed the horrors themselves are dying out.

The case centers around claims made against the British historian by Lipstadt, a professor of Jewish and Holocaust studies at Emory University in Atlanta, in her 1993 book "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory," published by Penguin Books.

Lipstadt has a daunting task ahead of her. Under British law, the burden of proof is squarely on her and her publisher to show that Irving is indeed a deliberate distorter of events in World War II.

Irving, who is representing himself, suggested in his opening argument that beyond his claims against Lipstadt, there was an international Jewish conspiracy to destroy him.

Irving claims that Lipstadt defamed him by alleging that his writing "applauds the internment of Jews in Nazi concentration camps" and that he is "an Adolf Hitler partisan who wears blinkers and skews documents and misrepresents data in order to reach untenable conclusions."

In his opening statement, Rampton declared, "Lies may take various forms and may as often consist of suppression or omission as of falsehood and invention, but in the end all forms of lying converge into a single definition: willful, deliberate misstatement of the facts."

Irving, he contended, had employed "many different means to falsify history — invention, misquotation, suppression, distortion, manipulation and, not least, mistranslation."

Moreover, Rampton told the austere and somber courtroom, the lies that Irving had told concern the destruction of the Jews by the Nazis during World War II and Hitler's role in that catastrophe — "or, as Irving would have it, alleged catastrophe."

It was, Rampton said, "an area of history which requires any writer or researcher to be particularly careful of the truth."

Irving, he continued bluntly, is a Holocaust denier: "By this I mean he denies that the Nazis planned and carried out the systematic murder of millions of Jews — in particular, though by no means exclusively, by the use of homicidal gas chambers, and in particular, though by no means exclusively, at Auschwitz."

As Irving almost visibly seethed, Rampton recalled a speech Irving had given to an audience in Calgary, Alberta, in September 1991, a speech, he said, that "conveys a message about his true views and attitudes."

"I don't see any reason to be tasteful about Auschwitz," Rampton quoted Irving as saying. "It's baloney. It's a legend."

"Once we admit the fact that it was a brutal slave labor camp and a large number

MIDEAST FOCUS

Reform activists support talks

More than 200 Reform rabbis and activists met with Israeli diplomats across the United States on Monday to voice support for the Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations.

In an open letter to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, the activists said, "By our presence we wish to convey that we, not the opponents of the peace initiatives, represent the majority of North American Jewry. Future generations will bless you for your efforts."

Knesset debates referendum bill

Israel's Knesset is grappling with legislation involving a referendum on any peace deals with Syria and the Palestinian Authority. At issue is the type of majority that would be required to approve such deals.

Critics are charging some legislators with attempting to skew the rules so that a referendum could only be passed by a majority of Israel's Jewish voters.

Yeshiva sexual charges probed

Jerusalem police are investigating allegations of sexual misconduct by an instructor at a large Jerusalem yeshiva. The probe comes amid reports that senior rabbis at the seminary tried to cover up the affair and prevent students from filing complaints.

Israel Radio reported that former Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira may also be questioned about allegations that he tried to hush up the affair.

Druse threaten to sue

Druse residents on the Golan Heights are threatening to sue Israel if the Jewish state withdraws from land captured from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War.

The lawsuits would be filed both on behalf of Druse who would end up in Syria and those who would remain in Israel, according to a lawyer representing the prospective plaintiffs. They would ask for compensation for emotional damages and loss of employment and land.



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of people did die, as large numbers of people died elsewhere in the war, why believe the rest of the baloney?

"I say quite tastelessly, in fact, that more women died on the back seat of Edward Kennedy's car at Chappaquiddick than ever died in a gas chamber in Auschwitz."

Wearing a navy-blue pinstriped suit and gray tie, Irving claimed that the U.S. scholar's assault on his integrity had caused "very real damage to my professional existence."

In his long and rambling opening statement, which took up most of the first day's proceedings, Irving, author of 30 books on World War II, vehemently denied that he was a Holocaust denier or an anti-Semite.

Some of his best friends have been Jewish, he said, as he portrayed himself as the victim of an international Jewish conspiracy that has monitored him in an attempt to strip him of his credibility and reputation, and ultimately destroy him.

Lipstadt and Penguin were not alone "in their determination to destroy my career and to vandalize my legitimacy as a historian. They were part of an organized international endeavor at achieving precisely that.

"I have seen the papers. I have copies of the documents. I will show them to this court. I know how they did it and I now know why."

He alleged that in 1992 he had been expelled from Canada — he has also been banned from Germany, Austria, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa — on the basis of documents "blackening my name" which had been handed to Canadian authorities by "an unofficial body based in London," a reference to the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

He also attacked the Anti-Defamation League and said he would present a document to the court "which reveals quite unabashedly how they tried to pressure television producers to cancel invitations to me."

Abraham Foxman, the national director of the ADL, responded to these charges by saying it is not surprising that Irving is relying on conspiracy theories, adding that if "we have publicly called him a bigot, a pseudo-historian, Holocaust denier and anti-Semite, if that has led someone to doubt his credentials or decide one way or another how to deal with him, there's nothing for me to apologize for."

Irving said he would be presenting expert evidence from a professor of sociology at a leading American university on "the relationship between the world's Jewish communities and the rest of us."

"The Jewish community, their fame and fortunes, play a central role in these proceedings," he continued.

"I finally realized that I was the target of a hidden international attempt to exclude me, if that could be done, from publishing further works of history."

He continued: "It appears that these bodies, which are also embedded in our society in Britain and elsewhere, have seen their task, unbidden, as being to spy upon members of our society, maintain dossiers on us all, and to deploy those dossiers when necessary to smite those of us of whom they disapprove."

These "disturbing and sleazy" dossiers, he said, were explicitly designed "to hold such material on the subjects' personal lives, criminal records, credit delinquencies, marital difficulties, dietary habits and even sexual proclivities.

"It is not anti-Semitic to reveal this," he insisted. "The spying and smearing by these bodies goes on against Jew and non-Jew alike."

"I can think only of the wartime Gestapo and its offshoots in Nazi-occupied Europe as a body engaged in similar practices."

He was particularly incensed to be branded a Holocaust denier, which, he said, had the effect of creating "a pariah, an outcast from normal society. It is a verbal yellow star."

Lipstadt, at the epicenter of the storm, sat silent and impassive throughout the day's court proceedings, in a black pants suit, with a vivid orange scarf draped over her shoulders.

As the drama swirled about her, she glanced at her laptop computer on the desk before her or at the judge, sitting directly in front of her.

She was surrounded by some 20 members of her defense team, seated in four rows behind her. □

JEWISH WORLD

Report targets Ford collaboration

The German subsidiary of Ford Motor Co. collaborated more extensively with Nazi Germany than previously thought, according to *The Nation*.

Citing documents in the U.S. National Archives, the news magazine reported that Ford profited from making military trucks for Hitler's army and that its cooperation with the Third Reich continued eight months after the United States entered World War II. Ford executives responded in a statement that the company's Michigan headquarters "lost all contact with and control over the plant during the war years."

Group calls for marijuana study

A group representing women from more than 600 U.S. Reform temples is calling for a study of whether marijuana can provide relief for certain medical conditions.

In a resolution passed at its 42nd biennial assembly in Orlando, Fla., Women of Reform Judaism also urged elected officials to support legislation to reclassify marijuana as a "prescribed controlled substance" so that it can be used for research and given to critically ill patients.

Slave-labor bill prompts dispute

German legislation to ratify a \$5.2 billion fund to compensate Holocaust-era slave laborers will be unacceptable if it denies funds to victims who have already received other compensation, said representatives for the laborers.

A government spokeswoman responded that the issue would be discussed at the next set of talks about how to distribute the fund.

Evidence against Kalejs studied

A U.S. legislator urged Australia to prosecute alleged Nazis living in the country. Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), a Holocaust survivor, wrote to Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone after she said that Australia would not reopen an investigation of Konrad Kalejs.

Meanwhile, Australian police said they were examining possible new evidence against Kalejs, who is accused of participating in the killings of thousands of Jews in Latvia during World War II.

Rabbi helps inaugurate governor

A Lubavitch rabbi offered a benediction at the inauguration of Louisiana Gov. Mike Foster. Rabbi Yossie Nemes was given the honor in recognition of the Lubavitch movement's 25 years of service to the local community.

During his benediction, Nemes read out the seven Noachide Laws, which are deemed applicable to Jews and non-Jews alike.

British Jews protest visit by Iranian official

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — About 50 Jews gathered in central London this week to protest a visit by the first Iranian Cabinet minister to make an official trip to Britain since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Holding a banner reading "Free the Iranian Jews," the demonstrators held a vigil Monday opposite the entrance to Downing Street, where Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Tony Blair.

"This is a simple humanitarian plea for 13 people who have been picked up and held in Iranian jails for nearly a year," said Eldred Tabachnik, president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, who joined the demonstration. "We are saying, 'That is too long; let them go.'"

It is not known whether Kharrazi saw the demonstrators, but he is reported to have received a warm welcome from Blair and from his British counterpart, Robin Cook, who launched the rapprochement with Iran some 18 months ago.

On Tuesday, Britain and Iran signed a joint declaration to strengthen diplomatic ties, promote trade, and fight terrorism and drug trafficking.

The agreement, which put aside their differences about human rights, came at the end of Kharrazi's visit to London. Last May, Britain and Iran exchanged ambassadors after a 20-year break in relations.

The two countries agreed to restore diplomatic relations after Iran agreed to withdraw its support for efforts to execute a fatwa, or religious ruling, against British author Salman Rushdie. Rushdie still lives under close police guard following Khomeini's 1989 call on Muslims to assassinate the writer for alleged blasphemy in his novel "The Satanic Verses." □

Report: Israel checked Assad's urine, believes he's living on 'borrowed time'

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Syrian President Hafez Assad may well have been impressed to discover that a toilet had been erected for his exclusive use when he visited Jordan last February for the funeral of King Hussein.

He would not have known, according to a report in the London Sunday Times this week, that the toilet had been specially created by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad and its Jordanian counterpart.

What made the toilet special, the report added, was that the outlet did not lead to a drain but rather to a specimen jar. Minutes after the Syrian leader had used the toilet, the specimen jar containing a sample of his urine was being sped to a hospital in Israel, where a team of pathologists and biochemists was waiting to analyze it.

According to the report, the medical analysts concluded that Assad, who has had a heart attack and now suffers from diabetes and cancer, does not have long to live.

The sample would not only have confirmed the state of his diabetes and indicated the presence of cancer in his urinary tract, it also would have revealed traces of whatever drugs Assad was then taking for his litany of ailments.

"The latest Israeli assessment," the paper reported, is that "Assad is living on borrowed time and that a potential partner for peace may be lost."

The paper quoted an aide to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak as saying: "We should do everything possible to reach an agreement while Assad is alive. Nobody knows what will happen after Assad."

"There are some gloomy assessments about a possible bloodbath in Syria. Assad is a man you can trust to stand by his word."

A medical file prepared for Barak by the Mossad and by military intelligence analysts reportedly described Assad's condition as worsening and suggested he is now so incapacitated that he could work for no more than a few hours a day. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Barak faces internal opposition as talks with Syria take a break*By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The estimated 150,000 demonstrators who turned out this week in a cold rain in Tel Aviv's Rabin Square do not necessarily represent the majority of Israelis.

But Monday night's protest provided an impressive show of strength by those opposed to withdrawing from the Golan Heights as part of any peace deal with Syria.

Indeed, according to Tel Aviv University Professor Effy Ya'ar, if a planned referendum on a Golan withdrawal were held now, the anti-withdrawal forces would carry the day.

This was the sobering reality to which Prime Minister Ehud Barak returned Tuesday, after 10 days of less-than-productive talks with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa in the sleepy West Virginia town of Shepherdstown.

Barak sent Foreign Minister David Levy back to Israel on Sunday to assure the public, before the demonstration, that no agreement on a withdrawal had been reached.

"There was no real progress," Levy declared. "Nothing was settled, nothing conceded."

At the same time, though, as if to balance Levy's deliberately downbeat depiction of the state of the talks, U.S., Israeli and Syrian officials announced in Shepherdstown that they would be reconvening next week in the United States for more negotiations. Significantly, that round would coincide with a planned visit by Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to the White House.

For the past few weeks, Arafat has persistently urged President Clinton — and Barak — not to lose momentum in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations because of the resumption of the Syrian track. Barak and Arafat have committed to achieve a framework agreement on permanent peace by the middle of next month.

Some of the premier's aides are said to be telling him that this timetable, always considered ambitious, is now unrealistic given the time and effort he is investing in the Syrian talks.

This argument assumes that Barak, for domestic political reasons, will want to separate the two tracks, focusing first on the Syrian agreement and trying to get that through a referendum, and only later turning to the final peace accord with the Palestinians.

But there is another school of thought that suggests the premier would do better in securing Israeli public support by trying to reach agreement on both tracks simultaneously.

He could then hold a referendum on a comprehensive peace package that includes withdrawals from the Golan, from southern Lebanon and on the West Bank, with the complex issue of Jerusalem perhaps left open.

This approach could realize Barak's election promise "to end 100 years of conflict between Arabs and Israelis." Alternatively, a deal with Syria, while the Palestinian track remains static, would risk leaving the Palestinian track unresolved — and this could deter voters from supporting a deal with Damascus.

For the moment, though, the Syrian deal still looks uncertain not only because of domestic skepticism, but because the negotiations so far appear to have produced less than had been hoped for.

In Shepherdstown, the Syrians leaked to the Arabic newspaper al-Hayyat what purported to be the text of an American paper

setting out areas of agreement and of disagreement.

The paper reported that Israel had agreed to withdraw from the Golan to the international border set in 1923. But both Israeli and U.S. officials insisted that Barak had not agreed to this — let alone to the Syrian demand for a withdrawal to the border that existed on the eve of the 1967 Six-Day War, a move that would give Damascus control of the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Barak's aides say Israel and Syria have yet to agree on the crucial issue of security, and that the extent of the Golan withdrawal would be determined largely in light of that issue.

But the Israelis do not deny that a committee on borders had convened — and presumably discussed the Syrian border demands. Beyond the lack of substantive progress at the negotiations, Israel is concerned at the even slower pace of "atmospheric" warming.

Levy said Sharaa "opened up a little" as the conference wore on. But the fact remains that there was no photographed handshake between him and Barak, that Sharaa answered no questions from the Israeli media and that Syria has offered no confidence-building gestures, such as the return to Israel of the remains of Eli Cohen, hanged in Damascus as an Israeli spy more than 30 years ago.

Atmospherics are always important in a diplomatic process. But they are even more important in the current process, which will ultimately have its fate decided by millions of ordinary Israelis conditioned for decades to see Syria as an implacable foe opposed to the Jewish state's very existence.

The 150,000 demonstrators who turned out Monday night included a broad patchwork of Israelis — secular, religious and immigrants alike. Organizers had tried to keep the rally as broad-based as possible — to send the message that the Golan is important to all of Israeli society.

Political representation on the podium included not only members of the opposition, but also two members of Barak's own Cabinet — Interior Minister Natan Sharansky of Yisrael Ba'Aliyah and Housing Minister Yitzhak Levy of the National Religious Party. Both ministers — members of the previous Likud government — have vowed to bolt Barak's coalition if he agrees to a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan.

During the demonstration, loudspeakers played recordings of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stressing the strategic importance of the Golan.

Some observers noted the irony not only of the use of Rabin's words, but also of staging such a rally at the very site where Rabin was assassinated in 1995 at the end of a huge pro-peace rally.

One demonstrator said Monday's gathering was intended to send a signal to Syrian President Hafez Assad.

"Assad will see this and understand that Barak cannot provide him with the goods," Omri Ataria was quoted as saying.

Sources close to Barak said the rally did not shake the prime minister. Instead, they said, the rally had strengthened his position in the negotiations since it would prove how difficult it would be for him to make significant concessions. Cabinet Minister Haim Ramon expressed confidence that once a comprehensive accord is presented to the Israeli people, the public mood will change.

"Until now, the only thing people are talking about is the withdrawal," he said. "Nobody is aware of what we will get if we withdraw," including security and "comprehensive peace with the Arab world." □

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