



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 78, No. 12

Thursday, January 20, 2000

83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel to fund liberal streams

Israel's budget for this year includes funding for the Conservative and Reform movements, the Education Ministry announced Wednesday.

Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of the Masorti, or Conservative, movement in Israel, said the money involved was a modest \$615,000, but that it nonetheless represented an important turning point.

The move marks the first time that the two streams of Judaism have been officially recognized in the state budget, he said.

U.S. 'hopeful' on restarting talks

President Clinton said he is "quite hopeful" about Israeli-Syrian peace talks despite their postponement this week, adding that the gaps between the two sides were not large.

Also Wednesday, State Department spokesman James Rubin said that on separate days next week officials from the two sides would come to the United States to work on a U.S. draft document outlining the areas of agreement and disagreement.

Meanwhile, the White House refused to comment on an Israeli newspaper report that Israel had agreed in principle to negotiate a peace treaty with Syria based on the boundary line that existed before Israel captured the Golan Heights in 1967.

The Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, citing unidentified Syrian sources, said President Clinton conveyed Israeli Prime Minister Barak's position to Syrian President Hafez Assad in telephone conversations and in a letter sent Oct. 12, 1999. Barak's office also declined to comment on the report.

McCain opposed to freeing spy

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations he would "immediately" move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem if elected president.

The Republican presidential candidate also said Wednesday he opposes the release of Jonathan Pollard, a U.S. Navy intelligence analyst serving a life sentence in a U.S. jail for spying for Israel. After his speech, the first of a series of meetings the Presidents Conference is planning with the candidates, Jewish leaders praised his straightforwardness and strong command of foreign policy issues, although many said they disagree with him on Pollard. [Page 4]

Searching for God in Israel: Travelers tackle tough issues

By Howard Lovy

JERUSALEM (JTA) — On a recent Shabbat, Jerusalem's Olive Tree Hotel was filled with sounds reminiscent of the Tower of Babel.

If you stood in the middle of the street-level lobby, you heard a mishmash of young Reform and Conservative voices belting out their respective liturgical songs in different corners.

While those involved in the Orthodox service were undisturbed upstairs, a few dozen other Birthright Israel participants, who chose an alternative service, sat straining to hear one another as the sounds of the other Shabbat services filled the room.

For many of the young people in the hotel lobby, to be worshipping at all was a rare event, because this trip to Israel was created especially for the unaffiliated. But for those who chose the alternative service because they did not feel comfortable participating in any religious service, Shabbat turned into an opportunity to hold a discussion group.

What they touched upon was the very reason they caught a free ride to Israel in the first place: They are searching for a place within Judaism where they can reconcile their personal beliefs and experiences. For some Birthright Israel participants, themselves products of mixed marriages, it means not ruling out the possibility of marrying out of the faith. For others, it means searching for a way to be Jewish without believing in God.

Those who ran the 14 separate educational programs for Birthright Israel were prepared for young skeptics and tailored much of the Israel experience especially for them.

Most Birthright Israel participants interviewed said they hadn't really thought too much about the larger issues of Jewish continuity — whether they would marry Jews or raise Jewish children — and this is the first time they have taken the time out of their lives to think about it. The same is true of their examination of their belief, or lack of belief, in God.

Participants in the alternative group sat in a circle and discussed their concept of Judaism as a code of conduct, of moral behavior, that does not necessarily need a God.

In fact, said 18-year-old Anna Guercio, "I have a rabbi who doesn't believe in God." That statement from the Brown University student who attends a Secular Humanist congregation near Chicago caught the attention of Carey Simon, 24, of Austin, Texas, who approached Guercio after the service.

Simon's father is Jewish, his mother is not, and he was raised with no formal religion. He decided to explore his Jewish side through Birthright Israel because even though he does not believe people should base their lives on "dictates or commandments," he is attracted to the "tightness" of Jewish families and Judaism's emphasis on morality.

He said the Birthright Israel trip has changed his perceptions because he now sees that "Judaism is more than just a religion, it's a lifestyle."

Still, he said, there is that problem with the concept of God, something he said he'll continue to struggle with.

He delved deeper into conversation with Guercio, who is considering becoming a Secular Humanist rabbi. Maybe there is something to being an atheistic Jew, Simon said.

The reason many of them don't believe in God, Rabbi David Aaron told a group of students a day earlier, is that Hebrew school fed them a child's vision of God from

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinian upbeat about accord

The chief Palestinian negotiator said Wednesday that despite "big" differences between Israel and the Palestinians he believes it is possible to reach a framework agreement by mid-February.

Saeb Erekat, in Washington in preparation for Thursday's meeting between President Clinton and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, also warned Israel not to play the Palestinian and Syrian tracks off one another.

Erekat, speaking at the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, also said that during Arafat's visit Palestinian officials will push to have a U.S. law restricting contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization scrapped.

Evidence of massacre uncovered

An Israeli historian said he had uncovered evidence that Israeli troops massacred 200 Palestinians in a single village on the day Israel became a state.

Teddy Katz said he had spoken to witnesses, including soldiers who were present, to support his findings. "It started at night and was over in a few hours," Katz said of the attack on May 15, 1948.

Lebanon softens stance

Lebanon said it would be willing to establish security arrangements along the international border as part of a peace treaty with Israel. Lebanese Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss announced the policy shift in an interview with the Lebanese daily newspaper A-Nahar.

Tel Aviv rally honors rebbe

Some 10,000 members of the Chabad Lubavitch movement gathered Tuesday at a Tel Aviv stadium to mark the 50th anniversary of the late Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson's becoming the movement's leader. The anniversary also commemorates the death of Schneerson's predecessor, his father-in-law, Rebbe Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson.

which they ran away before they allowed it to evolve into a more sophisticated concept.

Aaron is founder and dean of Isralite, an Israel-based educational program that centers on Kabbalah and Jewish spirituality. It was one of the groups that provided the educational content for the first wave of Birthright Israel.

Along the way to Qumran and Masada, Aaron stopped his busload of students at a synagogue in Mitzpe Jericho and gave them a lecture about how they need to stop thinking of God as a "big blob in the sky."

Aaron, who told the group that he was "not suggesting you believe in God," introduced them to Jewish mystical concepts of God's existence within them, and their role as humans in tikkun olam, repairing the world, through mitzvot.

The rabbi believes the reason his Birthright Israel program filled up so quickly was because of how trendy study of Kabbalah has become. His program gave skeptical students both a popular and intellectual base from which they could start formulating their own relationship with Judaism.

Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, which brought over half of the first 6,000 Birthright Israel participants, took the concept of a personal relationship with Judaism a step further through a series of what it called "identity conversations," using sites in Israel as launching points for investigation.

"The profile of these students is that they're not enormously plugged in or enormously literate" in Judaism, Richard Joel, Hillel's president and international director, said, adding that one of the goals of this experience is "to get them to feel inside a deep sense of passion about owning their Jewishness."

For example, Joel said, before a visit to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the Hillel tours had a session on being Jewish called "Special or Normal, You Choose." In it, they contrasted the religious nature of Jerusalem with mostly secular Tel Aviv. They looked at a text from the Torah that describes the Jews as the chosen people, and a statement from Israel's founding father David Ben-Gurion about how Israel will have become a normal nation when Jewish prostitutes and Jewish thieves speak Hebrew.

Joel said that as a result of their experiences, some participants had decided to have long-delayed Bar and Bat Mitzvahs while they were there, and one cried when she chose a Hebrew name for herself.

"I don't think it's just come here to Jewish Disneyland," Joel said, adding that Israel, its land and its people can "provoke the Jewish renaissance that the world needs and we can provoke Jewish involvement by using our country as, 'ki mitzion, taytzay Torah' — 'From out of Zion will come forth Torah.'" □

Notorious terrorist network loses money, ability to attack after arrest

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Abu Nidal's terrorist network has suffered a crippling financial blow with the arrest of a senior member, according to a journalist familiar with the organization.

Patrick Seale, a biographer of Abu Nidal and a close confidant of Syrian President Hafez Assad, wrote this week in the London-based Arabic daily Al-Hayat that Palestinian Halima Nimr, who was said to have been using a fake Jordanian passport, had been arrested in Vienna when she attempted to withdraw some \$7.4 million from an Austrian bank. Seale quotes intelligence sources as saying the loss of the Vienna account will greatly curtail the freedom of Abu Nidal — the nom de guerre of Jaffa-born Sabri al-Banna.

Abu Nidal was the Palestine Liberation Organization's chief representative in Iraq when he broke with Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement in 1974 to protest the PLO's flirtation with diplomacy. His Fatah Revolutionary Council, which carried out a series of attacks in European capitals during the 1970s and 1980s, claimed hundreds of lives and was regarded as one of the most dangerous international terrorist organizations.

Among Abu Nidal's most high-profile attacks were the simultaneous gun-and-grenade attacks on the El Al passenger counters at Rome and Vienna airports in 1985 in which 17 people were killed. □



Daily News Bulletin

Shoshana S. Cardin, *President*

Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*

Lisa Hostein, *Editor*

Howard Lovy, *Managing Editor*

Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

JEWISH WORLD

Boycott launched of Dutch firm

The World Jewish Congress launched a boycott of the American arm of a Dutch insurance firm.

After Aegon refused to join an international panel dealing with Holocaust-era insurance policies, the WJC called Wednesday on its 200,000 members to cancel policies with Aegon's San Francisco-based unit, Transamerica.

Black leaders back off comments

A black leader in New York distanced himself from remarks made by a close associate that were seen as anti-Semitic.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, in an interview with The New York Times on Wednesday, said a story told by the Rev. Charles Norris that he was fired from a job by Jews was "insensitive."

For his part, Norris also told the paper that he was sorry for offending people and that he has "no problem with Jews."

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, who spoke after Norris at a Monday event honoring Martin Luther King, Jr., also denounced the remarks.

Poland may seek top Nazi

Poland may demand the extradition of Nazi war criminal Alois Brunner from Syria to face trial for causing genocide at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Brunner was a close aide to Adolf Eichmann and is thought to be responsible for transporting some 130,000 Jews to Auschwitz from France, Slovakia and Greece.

He is believed to be living in Damascus, which Syria officially denies.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center has demanded that Brunner's extradition be made a condition of any peace deal between Israel and Syria.

Hungary proposes Holocaust Day

Hungary's Jewish leaders welcomed a government proposal that the country's schools annually mark April 16, the date in 1944 when the Nazis began deporting the nation's Jews, as Holocaust Day.

The proposal by the nation's education minister is "symbolic and marks a new era," the Association of Hungarian Jewish Organizations and the Budapest Jewish Community said in a joint statement.

Eatery uses death camp decor

A restaurant in Taiwan's capital, Taipei, is decorated with photos and murals depicting Nazi death camp victims, and a sign over the entrance reads, "Gas Chamber."

The eatery's owners said they wanted to give diners the feeling they are eating in a prison, adding that they had not intended to offend anyone.

Census shows day schools becoming increasingly popular

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — After years of anecdotal reports about new schools and across-the-board enrollment increases, Jewish day schools have finally stood up to be counted.

The results from the most comprehensive census ever conducted of American day schools generally confirm the community's estimates of the past decade — 185,000 students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade attend 670 institutions, an increase of approximately 25,000 students from a decade ago.

The day school census, commissioned by the New York-based Avi Chai Foundation, is intended to assess the world of day schools and provide a benchmark so that future changes can be tracked.

"It's important that studies like this be conducted regularly," said Marvin Schick, an educational consultant and president of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph Schools in Staten Island, N.Y., who authored the study.

"If American Jewry is investing more in day schools than anything else, then you have to know what the story is."

Day schools, which offer secular and Judaic studies under one roof, have become an almost magical concept in Jewish communal life in recent years.

Federations, philanthropists and even national organizations that in the past rarely discussed day schools — including the Jewish Council on Public Affairs and the American Jewish Committee — are now cheerleading their success at stemming the tide of assimilation.

The love affair with day schools has even begun to chisel away at the longtime American Jewish support of public schools and opposition to school vouchers, as people search for ways to finance day school educations.

Among the findings of the new study:

- Enrollment in Conservative, Reform and nondenominational schools has grown by 25 percent in the past decade, with the sharpest increase — almost 50 percent — at the high school level.

Although liberal high schools are rapidly growing — with several schools in the planning stages and an association recently created to address these schools' needs — they currently enroll only 2,200 students nationwide.

- Eighty percent of all day school enrollment is in Orthodox schools, a number that is expected to remain steady — despite the growth in liberal day schools — because of the high birth rate in Orthodox families.

- Orthodox schools range in outlook from "Yeshiva-world" and Chasidic to modern Orthodox, with the more fervently Orthodox schools accounting for the largest enrollment.

- Enrollment is greatest in the lower grades and diminishes over time. Nonetheless, the curve is flattening, as more day school students choose to remain at least through eighth grade.

- Nearly two-thirds of all day school enrollment is in New York and New Jersey. The other states with sizeable numbers of children attending Jewish day schools are California, Florida, Illinois and Maryland.

- Occupancy rates range from 80 to 96 percent in day schools, indicating that — if enrollment continues to increase — there will be a need for new or expanded facilities.

Leora Isaacs, director of research and evaluation at the Jewish Education Service of North America, which issued a report last summer urging greater funding for day schools, said she was "really happy that the findings were not so surprising.

They're very consistent with the less precise and less systematic data we'd had before."

She praised the census for reaching previously undercounted schools, mainly fervently Orthodox institutions, and said the census would be useful for communities that are evaluating allocation and education needs. □

Jewish group admires candidate's straight talk on spy, but disagrees

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Republican presidential candidate Sen. John McCain believes Jonathan Pollard “betrayed our nation” and would oppose the convicted spy’s release.

McCain made the comment Wednesday in an appearance before the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the first of a series of candidate forums the umbrella organization is hosting in the coming months.

Pollard, a former U.S. Navy intelligence analyst currently serving a life sentence in prison for spying for Israel, quickly came up in the question-and-answer session following McCain’s brief speech.

“Throughout this campaign, I’ve told people things they wanted to hear and things they have not wanted to hear,” McCain said.

“I would not release Pollard. I believe he betrayed our nation and his obligations to our government. The evidence is abundantly clear.”

Jewish leaders said that while they disagreed, they were not surprised by McCain’s stance on Pollard. Some leaders gave him credit for being so straightforward.

“Of course” McCain’s position on Pollard is troubling, said Morton Klein, the president of the Zionist Organization of America.

But, he continued, “on the other issues he’s taken the best position on Israel of any other candidate.” Klein praised McCain for “understanding the dangers of the dictatorships surrounding Israel better than any candidate.”

Toby Willig, the president of the Orthodox women’s group Emunah, said she disagreed with McCain on Pollard, but still believes he is a “very presentable candidate,” and praised him for being more detailed on his views than Bush.

Speaking in a room at the UJA-Federation of New York building, McCain appeared relaxed, lacing his talk and the question-and-answer session with jokes about his experiences on the campaign trail, including his relatively low showing in the polls. His talk focused almost exclusively on foreign policy.

McCain also told the group that if he were elected president, he would “immediately” move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. He said he is cautiously optimistic about prospects for peace in the Middle East, although he is concerned about threats to Israel from Iraq and other rogue states.

“One of my greatest nightmares is Saddam Hussein has chemical weapons on a Scud missile pointed at Israel and then makes certain demands,” he said. “I’m convinced that as long as Saddam Hussein is in power, he will be a threat to Israel.”

McCain is trailing Bush in the polls, and it is unclear what support he — or other presidential candidates — have at this point from Jewish voters, who traditionally have favored Democrats.

“I think people were impressed by his knowledge of the issues,” said Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents. “He doesn’t pander and he answers straight.”

On other foreign policy issues, McCain:

- Urged better foreign intelligence operations to prevent

terrorism against the United States, but cautioned against violating the rights of American citizens;

- Would support a multibillion-dollar aid package to implement a peace deal between Syria and Israel;
- Identified as major threats to U.S. security the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the rise of radical Islamic fundamentalism, the emergence of China as a world power and the possibility of “information warfare,” in which terrorists disable major computer systems. □

German Jews angry over comment alleging ‘Jewish money’ in scandal

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — Jewish leaders here are in an uproar over a false report involving Holocaust survivors in a money-laundering scandal that has rocked the leadership of Germany’s leading conservative party.

In the scandal’s latest twist, a former Christian Democratic Party leader from the western state of Hesse said a secret account set up in the 1980s in Switzerland included millions of dollars bequeathed to the party by “grateful Holocaust survivors.”

Only hours after he had vigorously defended his story, former party Treasurer Casimir Wittgenstein admitted he had “lied to help the party.”

The story set off alarms among German Jewish leaders.

The statement is not only false, but it is “the biggest scandal in this scandal,” said Michel Friedman, a vice president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and a member of the Christian Democrats. Friedman, a Frankfurt attorney, called it “unbelievable and irresponsible” to add “such a story” to the “disastrous criminal act.”

“Telling the public that this is money” given “by Holocaust survivors” to the Christian Democrats is “the worst thing that has happened in this story.”

Friedman, who said an apology from Hesse Governor Roland Koch was in order, has called for action against the former head of the state of Hesse, Manfred Kanther, and the 83-year-old Wittgenstein, who in the 1980s allegedly transferred millions of money into foreign accounts and later withdrew it secretly.

Also lashing out at the party, Salomon Korn, president of the Jewish community of Frankfurt, told Radio Free Berlin on Monday that the words “Jewish money” had been used not simply by accident but because of “old prejudices.”

A day later, the head of the Christian Democrats, Wolfgang Schaeuble, apologized to Germany’s Jewish community on behalf of his party.

Friedman later said that he and Paul Spiegel, the newly elected leader of the nation’s Jewish community, felt Schaeuble’s apology was “better late than never.”

But he said this did not erase the shocking fact that such imagery could be used by a top party member as an excuse for money laundering.

The investigation also concerns tax adviser Horst Weyrauch, who allegedly played a role in private party accounts connected with former Chancellor Helmut Kohl. On Tuesday, Kohl resigned as honorary leader of the Christian Democrats. □