



# Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### **Clinton: Flexibility is necessary**

President Clinton said during an Oval Office photo-op with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat on Thursday that Israel and the Palestinians will have to make compromises and that "no one can get everything" in a final peace deal.

Arafat said there will continue to be difficulties in the talks, but added that "there is also determination that we will have to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, not only on the Palestinian track, but also on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks as well."

### **Russian Jewish leader killed**

The leader of Moscow's community of Caucasian Mountain Jews was found murdered in his apartment, police said Thursday.

Police discovered the body of Rachamim Yuchananov, 68, saying the murder had probably taken place two days earlier.

They added that Yuchananov had suffered severe head injuries and knife wounds and that a knife with a broken handle was found nearby.

### **Greenberg likely to head council**

President Clinton plans to appoint Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg to serve as chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, according to a White House source.

The appointment is expected to be announced after a background check is completed, the source added.

A theologian who has written about the Holocaust's impact on religion, Greenberg would succeed Miles Lerman, who last week told Clinton he would step down as soon as a successor is appointed.

### **Sweden admits wartime guilt**

Sweden's prime minister admitted that his country acted wrongly during World War II.

"We will always have to bear the moral and political responsibility for what happened, or didn't happen, from the Swedish side during the war," Goran Persson told the nation's Parliament.

Persson broke 60 years of tradition by dropping the defense that Sweden, which hosts an international conference on the Holocaust next week, had acted as a neutral nation during the war.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### **Palestinians retake center stage even as they welcome Syrian talks**

*By Michael Shapiro*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — With the United States devoting much energy in recent weeks to Israeli-Syrian peace talks, the Palestinians are trying to make sure they are not left out in the cold.

Their effort was helped when this week's planned Israeli-Syrian negotiations were canceled, enabling the Palestinians to retake center stage.

After meeting with President Clinton on Thursday, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat publicly endorsed peace talks on the Syrian front. But his top negotiator a day earlier, while also welcoming the Syrian talks, maintained that the Palestinian track, not the Syrian track, is the key to Middle East peace.

"The termination of the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot and will not be attained without a solution to the Palestinian question from all of its aspects," Saeb Erekat said Wednesday at the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine.

The Palestinians have even hired Edward Abington, the former U.S. consul general in Jerusalem, as a lobbyist to help buttress their image here as final-status talks with the Israelis continue.

"We're not here to damage anyone's interests," Erekat said. "We're not here to accuse anyone of anything as far as our public relations efforts are concerned. What we're trying to do now is introduce ourselves the way we are."

The Syrians appear to have a different opinion on what is key to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

In his Dec. 15 speech at the White House marking the initial resumption of Israeli-Syrian talks, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa said a deal between Israel and Syria "is the only peace that shall open new horizons for totally new relations between people of the region."

Erekat rejected Sharaa's statement, saying that "denying facts doesn't mean that they don't exist" and warned any of the parties from trying to play the Syrian and Palestinian tracks off one another.

"We are parallel tracks and not competitive tracks," he said. "The moment any side decides to play a track against another it will be a major setback toward progress in the peace process."

During their meetings Thursday, both Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright sought to reassure the Palestinians.

"The resolution of the issues between Palestinians and Israelis is at the core of the comprehensive effort that we all want to make for peace throughout the Middle East, and we have to work through them," Clinton said with Arafat at his side at an Oval Office photo-op.

Israel and the Palestinians are working to reach a framework agreement by Feb. 13 and a final peace deal by Sept. 13. For the Israelis, the jockeying by the Palestinians and Syrians could serve to strengthen their hand in the negotiations with both.

Joel Singer, who was a key architect of the Oslo accords with the Palestinians and also negotiated with the Syrians during the earlier round of talks, compared the Palestinian-Syrian rivalry to that of competition between businesses.

"If commercial firms are competing, prices go down," said Singer, a Washington attorney. "It's good for the customer," meaning Israel.

One Israeli source said that it appears that the Palestinians "don't want to miss the

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Weizman faces criminal probe

Israel's attorney general ordered police to open a criminal investigation into allegations President Ezer Weizman illegally accepted large sums of money from a French millionaire friend.

Weizman has admitted receiving at least \$200,000 from Edouard Saroussi when he served as a Knesset member and Cabinet minister between 1988 and 1993, but says he was under no legal obligation to report the gifts.

### Knesset to discuss nuke program

Israel's Knesset plans to hold an open debate next week on Israel's nuclear arms program, Speaker Avraham Burg announced.

A left-wing legislator had sought the debate, which was originally denied for security reasons, but was later granted when he petitioned the High Court of Justice.

### Pope to visit Mount Sinai

Pope John Paul II plans to make a three-day trip to Egypt next month, the Vatican announced Thursday. He will stop in Cairo and then visit Mount Sinai during the Feb. 24-26 trip, the Vatican added.

### Syria to U.S.: 'Push Israel harder'

Syria's state-run newspapers urged the United States to push Israel harder to confirm its readiness to return the Golan Heights. Washington must become "a more active definer and interpreter of the broad terms that the Israelis have already accepted in previous rounds of talks," the English-language Syria Times said Thursday.

### Islamic Jihad threatens Israel

The Islamic Jihad movement issued a statement Thursday threatening to renew its attacks against Israel. "Every Zionist" is "a target," said the statement, which was faxed to Reuters in Jerusalem.



## Daily News Bulletin

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train" and both sides have agreed to conduct intensive negotiations when Arafat returns from Washington.

Erekat said during his speech that the negotiations could lead to an invitation from Clinton for a trilateral summit in Washington to hammer out a framework deal.

As the Israelis and Palestinians continue to grapple with the difficult final-status issues such as Jerusalem, 300 American rabbis have called for the city to be shared by both sides. The statement, which was spearheaded by Jerome Segal, the president of the Jewish Peace Lobby and a research scholar at the University of Maryland's Center of International and Security Studies, came after a year of reaching out to 1,200 Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative rabbis.

Segal said no Orthodox rabbis were asked to sign the statement. □

## Jewish cemetery in Prague at center of construction dispute

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — A heated debate over a 750-year-old Jewish cemetery has stalled a multimillion-dollar construction project in the Czech Republic.

The Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel may hold the key to unlocking the dispute, which has been joined by Jewish representatives across Europe and the United States.

The controversy centers around a Czech insurance company that gained permission two years ago to build a high-rise apartment block and underground garage in central Prague.

The problem is that the site on Vladislavova Street stands directly over part of a medieval Jewish burial site.

Before construction began, archaeologists brought in by Prague city authorities confirmed the existence of the cemetery, which was voluntarily relinquished by Prague's Jewish community in the 15th century. They estimated that the site owned by the Czech Insurance Company contained a total of 400 graves.

The building project has infuriated Jewish groups around the world who believe the cemetery has been desecrated.

The Czech Republic's chief rabbi, Karol Sidon, has come under fire for reaching a compromise deal with the insurance company last November.

Under the deal, the company agreed to move a 3,500 cubic-foot section of soil containing the remnants of up to 300 graves to a separate site, where a new consecrated space would be created.

According to the Jerusalem Post, the compromise came under attack from the chief rabbis of Britain, France and Holland and the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad.

The controversy was heightened by disinformation relayed over the Internet that Czech Jewish leaders had sold off part of the famous Old Jewish Cemetery, a separate burial ground that lies within the walls of the city's Jewish Quarter.

Sidon has maintained that the agreement struck with the insurance company was the best offer available, given that the firm owns the land on which the cemetery lies.

"Of course I would be happy if the cemetery would stay where it is now, but there are two parties in this case. Given the circumstances, I could not see a better option," he told the Prague Post.

But the agreement may have to be torn up.

This week, the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, Yisrael Meir Lau, sent an emissary to Prague to establish the facts surrounding the case.

The emissary visited the construction site with Sidon, who later described the meeting as "very friendly."

Sidon has indicated that he will wash his hands of the matter if Lau expresses disapproval of the agreement.

In an open letter, dated Jan. 13, Sidon stated that if the deal were not approved, "the Jewish Community in Prague and its Chief Rabbinate will feel obliged to leave the representation of the right of our ancestors to rest in peace to those who assume they stand the chance to reach a better solution." □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Irving admits to Nazi gassing

A controversial British historian who is suing a U.S. Holocaust scholar for calling him a Holocaust denier admitted in a London court that the Nazis systematically gassed 97,000 Jews to death in trucks during World War II.

David Irving, whose case against Deborah Lipstadt has drawn worldwide attention, has claimed that it was logistically impossible for the Nazis to have killed millions of Jews in gas chambers and that there is no evidence that Hitler personally approved the Holocaust.

### Haider frozen out of coalition

A new governing coalition was formed in Austria that freezes out the far-right Freedom Party of Jorg Haider.

The Social Democrats and People's Party took the move despite the second-place showing of Haider's party in last October's elections.

In a separate development, Haider sat with New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and about 80 others at a dinner Monday night given by the Congress of Racial Equality marking Martin Luther King Day.

Former New York Mayor Ed Koch later criticized Giuliani for not denouncing Haider.

"Why didn't he order Jorg Haider out of the hall?" asked Koch.

### JNF opens Moscow office

The Jewish National Fund opened its first office in Russia.

Officials with the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Israeli Embassy attended Thursday's opening in Moscow of the JNF office, which came two days before Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish New Year for trees.

### New 'civil rights' group planned

David Duke, the former Klu Klux Klan grand wizard who also served in the Louisiana Legislature, said he will announce the creation of a new group Friday at the National Press Club in Washington.

Duke said the group will be a "civil rights" organization for "European Americans."

### Restaurateurs reconsider decor

The owners of a Taiwanese restaurant that had decorated its walls with pictures of Nazi death camps removed the images Thursday.

They said they did not realize they might offend some customers.

The proprietors of The Jail restaurant, which wanted to give diners the feeling they are eating in a prison, took the action one day after reports surfaced that the eatery's Jewish and German patrons considered the decor offensive.

## Liberal streams of Judaism get slice of Israeli budget pie

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Reform and Conservative leaders in Israel are hailing an Education Ministry decision to allocate funds to their movements, saying it sets an important precedent in their campaign for recognition in Israel.

But Orthodox politicians said the ministry's decision is a waste of public funds because the liberal movements are not short of cash and they only want the money as a sign of recognition.

Earlier this week, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that the Education Ministry had allocated about \$500,000 to fund cultural and educational programs associated with the Reform and Conservative movements, and about \$630,000 to fund secular Jewish activities.

Although the money is not considered a substantial amount, it marks the first time the government has specifically allocated money to the non-Orthodox movements.

Liberal movements have received some funding from various ministries in recent years, but never as part of a state budget.

Orthodox and fervently Orthodox cultural programs were cut by 38 percent and 30 percent, respectively, in this year's budget, to \$9.5 million and \$14.6 million.

Many Orthodox politicians say the liberal streams do not deserve government funding because they make up less than 1 percent of Israel's population.

The Education Ministry on Wednesday confirmed that the allocations had been made to the liberal movements.

It added, however, that the decision was in fact made last October, but only received attention this week after being publicized in the media.

Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of the Masorti, or Conservative movement, said the real significance is not in the fact that non-Orthodox movements have received government funds.

"The new phenomena here is that for the first time we have been officially included in the budget of the Ministry of Education, and they are calling us by name," Bandel said.

Rabbi Avraham Ravitz, a legislator from the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc, said the allocations were inappropriate.

"They are taking away money which is needed for very important things in the Ministry of Education and giving it away for political reasons," he said.

"If they want recognition let them go to the Prime Minister's Office and get a flag," Ravitz added.

According to an Education Ministry spokesman, the decision was in line with the findings of a public committee which recommended in 1994 that the government provide alternatives for Jewish education in public schools.

It also reflected the personal commitment of Yossi Sarid, the education minister from the liberal Meretz Party, to open the door to the Conservative and Reform movements.

Indeed, Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center, said he was pleasantly surprised by the way the allocations were approved.

"In the past, any allocations we did get were like pulling teeth, since we were trying to fit our projects into criteria primarily created for Orthodox institutions," he said. "This is a signal of a new era."

The decision, he said, was a sign of greater sympathy for non-Orthodox movements under the government of Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

He also cited the sympathetic approach of Rabbi Michael Melchior, the minister of Israeli society and world Jewish communities, and Justice Minister Yossi Beilin.

The Reform and Conservative movements will now submit project proposals to the Education Ministry to secure funding under the new budget.

It is expected to take several months before the bureaucratic process is completed and funds are disbursed. □

## Jewish antennae raised after Clinton appears at Sharpton event

By Michael Shapiro

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In November it was Suha Arafat. This week it was the Rev. Charles Norris.

As first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton gets closer to officially announcing her candidacy for the Senate in New York, her efforts to navigate the intense ethnic politics of the state have gotten her into situations that might not endear her to Jewish voters.

On Monday, Clinton, a Democrat, spoke at a program marking Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday at the headquarters of the Rev. Al Sharpton, a controversial figure in New York politics who is seen by many in the Jewish community as being racially divisive and someone who has fomented anti-Semitism.

Shortly before Clinton entered the room, Norris, a minister from Queens and a board member of Sharpton's National Action Network, reportedly told a story about how he was fired from a company owned by Jews.

"Miller No. 1 was a Jew," Norris was reported as saying. "Miller No. 2 was a Jew. I was then employed by yet another Jew by the name of Jesus," he said, adding that he would "not be fired until" Jesus "thinks it's necessary."

Clinton's aides, who were quickly told of Norris' comments by Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), passed a note to Clinton, who then criticized anti-Semitism in her speech, *The New York Times* reported.

"We know that anti-Semitism still stalks our land as well," she said. Clinton later told reporters that before she arrived, "I heard that one of the speakers made some divisive comments, which I soundly reject."

Norris later said that he was sorry for offending people and that he has "no problem with Jews."

The quick condemnation of the remarks stood in contrast to what happened in Ramallah in November when Suha Arafat, the wife of the Palestinian Authority president, accused Israel of poisoning Palestinians. Clinton came under intense criticism for waiting a day to condemn the remarks.

Despite the immediate condemnation, Clinton was criticized for meeting with Sharpton's group.

Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, president of the Orthodox Union, which held a meeting with Clinton in December on a wide range of topics, questioned why Clinton would celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day by meeting with Sharpton, whom he described as "divisive."

"It sends a wrong message," said Ganchrow, who suggested that there are many other African American leaders in New York who Clinton could have met with.

Jewish Republicans were quick to react.

Despite Sharpton's effort in recent years to become more of a mainstream player within the Democratic Party, Matt Brooks, the executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said Sharpton has not backed away from his previous anti-Semitic remarks and "continues to surround himself" with people who hold such views.

Brooks, whose group launched an ad campaign attacking Clinton for not immediately denouncing Arafat's remarks, would not say if he would do the same concerning the speech to Sharp-

ton's group. Bruce Teitelbaum, director of the exploratory committee for Clinton's probable opponent, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, said, "People shouldn't be surprised at the kind of anti-Semitic rhetoric that was made" at the Sharpton event. "It's an anticipated consequence in participating in an event like that."

Teitelbaum said he did not believe Giuliani, a Republican, was invited to the event. He questioned whether Clinton would continue to seek the support of Sharpton, who has since denounced Norris' comments.

A spokeswoman for Clinton's exploratory campaign declined to comment on criticisms that she had met with Sharpton, referring instead to Clinton's own remarks.

But David Harris, deputy executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, defended Clinton's appearance, saying, "If Ed Koch felt comfortable on that stage, then Mrs. Clinton should, too."

"Those who are attacking Mrs. Clinton's outreach effort are really grasping at straws, and they are avoiding addressing the real issues of this campaign," Harris added.

Recent poll numbers show that Clinton, is having a tough time for a Democrat winning support from Jewish voters, who normally represent 12 percent of the state's general election vote and 25 percent of Democratic voters.

A December poll by the Quinnipiac College Polling Institute, which is closely tracking the still-unofficial race, gives Clinton 49 percent of the Jewish vote to 41 percent for Giuliani.

Experts have said those numbers could mean a loss for Clinton. "At this stage of the game, for a Democratic candidate she is weak in the Jewish community," said Maurice Carroll, the director of the institute. "She is going to have to crank it up a bit."

Carroll said the meeting with Sharpton's group could hurt Clinton "a little bit," but not as much as it could have in the past.

Sharpton "has rehabilitated himself to the point where he is a political factor now," Carroll said. "He is not just a street preacher."

Clinton's favorability rating among Jews has slipped recently, according to Quinnipiac polls.

In a Dec. 12 poll, the latest available, 37 percent of voters held a favorable view of Clinton while 29 percent held an unfavorable view, compared to 44 percent to 31 percent in a Nov. 10 poll.

In the more recent poll, only 1 percent of the Jews surveyed cited "Israel" or "Palestinian relations" as a reason for having negative feelings toward the first lady.

Giuliani's favorability among Jews also dropped to 38 percent, with 39 percent holding an unfavorable feeling, down from 45 percent favorable to 30 percent unfavorable in November.

Among the general electorate, Giuliani holds a slight lead in the race, with 46 percent of the vote to 42 percent for Clinton.

Meanwhile, Sharpton's name also surfaced Monday at a Democratic presidential candidates forum in Iowa, hosted by black and Hispanic groups. Democratic presidential candidate Bill Bradley defended a recent public meeting with Sharpton.

"I don't agree with Al Sharpton on everything," Bradley said. "But I think that he's got to be given respect, and people have to be allowed to grow. And so I look at this and I say it's a sad time when we don't look at somebody as they move through life, and we get them stuck in a particular position in life."

Gore, who privately met with Sharpton and other ministers last year, said he "was not hesitant" to meet with him. □