



# Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Barak urged on Lebanon pullback

Prime Minister Ehud Barak is coming under increasing pressure to withdraw Israeli troops from Lebanon as soon as possible. [Page 3]

### Consular civil marriages OK'd

Israel's interior minister said his ministry will recognize civil marriages performed in foreign consulates based in Israel.

Natan Sharansky's decision could provide a new method of tying the knot for couples with foreign passports whom the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate refuses to wed.

Until now, these couples had to travel abroad to nearby Cyprus or arrange a marriage-by-fax with countries such as Paraguay in order to have their marriages registered by Israeli authorities.

### Framework deadline passes

The deadline for reaching a framework for a final Israeli-Palestinian peace deal passed Sunday with both sides far from agreement. Negotiators have made little progress on the most difficult issues facing them, including Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements and the future status of Jerusalem.

### N.Y. Jewish museum head named

A scholar and longtime administrator at the Reform movement's seminary in Cincinnati was named president of New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

Alfred Gottschalk, who fled Nazi Germany as a child, has been dean, president and chancellor of the Hebrew Union College. He replaces David Altshuler, the museum's founding director, who recently began his job as head of a foundation affiliated with the United Jewish Communities.

### Rabbis urged to oppose pullbacks

Rabbis affiliated with the modern Orthodox National Council of Young Israel were challenged at their annual conference to mobilize the American rabbinic community to protest the surrender of the Golan Heights or sections of Jerusalem as part of any peace deals with Syria and the Palestinians.

Rabbi Sholom Gold of Jerusalem told the rabbis such a protest is a moral imperative and that their voices would be heard by the world and God.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### Rise of extremism in Austria could bolster Slovak community

By Ruth E. Gruber

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (JTA) — The dark cloud hanging over the rise of Jorg Haider's right-wing Freedom Party in Austria may end up having a silver lining for the Jews of neighboring Slovakia.

It may also boost the self-confidence of a community struggling to re-emerge and consolidate in the wake of the Holocaust and five decades of Communist rule.

"Of course the Jewish community can't be happy with the entry of a party like Haider's into the government in Austria," said Peter Salner, the president of the Bratislava Jewish community, which numbers about 500 adult members. Fewer than 4,000 Jews live in Slovakia. "But in an ironic way, the developments are positive for us," he said. "Jewish activities are being shifted here."

Bratislava lies on the Danube River only 40 miles from Vienna, making it the closest capital — and the closest Jewish community — to Austria, where a controversial new government including Haider's xenophobic Freedom Party, known as the FPO, took office Feb. 4. Entry of the FPO into government triggered demonstrations and international political sanctions. Israel withdrew its ambassador from Vienna even before the government was sworn in.

Last week Slovak President Rudolf Schuster, making the first-ever visit by a Slovak president to Israel, said he supported the Israeli decision and urged Israel to relocate its regional embassy to the Slovak capital. The Israeli ambassador to Austria also serves as ambassador to Slovakia and Slovenia.

The Freedom Party's inclusion in Austria's new government also prompted the Conference of European Rabbis to announce that it would move a major general meeting — a session slated for March that will include the chief rabbis of several European nations — from Vienna to Bratislava.

"The fact that we decided for a move from Vienna is an ethical issue," Aba Dunner, secretary-general of the conference, was quoted as saying in the Slovak press.

"An ordinary rabbi does not interfere in politics but this is not a political problem, but a moral and ethical one."

These developments reflect dramatic recent political changes in Slovakia as much as they do condemnation of the situation in Austria. They are changes that have polished Slovakia's international image and created a more positive atmosphere regarding Jews and Jewish issues.

"Austria was always our 'gateway to the West,'" said one Bratislava Jewish man in his 50s. "It makes an impression to see how attitudes have changed toward them and toward Slovakia."

After Czechoslovakia split into two independent states on Jan. 1, 1993, independent Slovakia was ruled by Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar, whose pro-Russia, authoritarian policies isolated Slovakia and delayed its integration into Europe. Meciar's ruling coalition included the far-right Slovak National Party, which advocated, among other things, the rehabilitation of the pro-Nazi wartime puppet regime in Slovakia and regarded the wartime leader, Catholic priest Josef Tiso, as a national hero.

Nostalgia for the wartime Independent Slovak State — the only time Slovakia had been independent — was a lodestone for many Slovaks during the communist era. For many, it represented the pinnacle of Slovak national identity, despite its fascist links and anti-Semitism, and despite the fact that Slovaks themselves rose up against Tiso in

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Syria opposes warning station

Damascus will not allow an Israeli early-warning station on the Golan Heights under a future peace deal, according to Syria's foreign minister.

Farouk al-Sharaa told a pro-Syrian Lebanese newspaper that Syria has "refused completely" to keep an Israeli ground station anywhere on the Golan.

### Police arrest Islamic cleric

Palestinian police reportedly arrested an Islamic cleric with ties to Hamas in connection with a deadly car explosion last week in the West Bank.

Israeli and Palestinian officials have been cooperating in investigating the Feb. 10 blast, which killed one Palestinian and severely injured another. The two were believed to be planning an attack on Israelis.

### Weizman questioned again

Police questioned Israeli President Ezer Weizman for a second time about his acceptance of large cash gifts from a French Jewish millionaire. Last week, Israeli police questioned Saroussi in Zurich.

### Pope to visit refugee camp

Pope John Paul II will visit a Palestinian refugee camp near Bethlehem during his pilgrimage to the region next month, the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Jerusalem said. Michel Sabbah added that the pope plans to support refugee demands to return to their homes within Israel.

### Poll: Palestinians back attacks

Support among Palestinians for attacks against Israel increased to 43 percent in January from 36 percent a month earlier, according to a poll released Sunday by the Center for Palestine Research and Studies. The poll, which had a 3 percent margin of error, also showed that Palestinian trust in the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak dropped to 16 percent from 18 percent during the same period.



## Daily News Bulletin

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1944. Tiso's regime paid the Nazis to "resettle" Slovak Jews; some 70,000 were deported to their deaths. Tiso himself was executed in 1947 as a Nazi collaborator, traitor and war criminal.

In a report published last year, Salner and his wife, Eva Salnerova, described the Tiso regime as a "flash point of conflict" in Slovakia.

Although Meciar distanced himself from the rehabilitation of Tiso and pledged to combat anti-Semitism, nationalist sentiments and the inclusion of the Slovak National Party in the government led to relations between Jews and the Meciar government that Slovak Chief Rabbi Baruch Myers described as a "cold peace."

When Meciar was voted out of office in September 1998, Mikulas Dzurinda became prime minister. Racing to make up for lost time, he implemented a program of political and economic reform aimed at forging closer ties to the West.

Last May, the pro-Western Schuster soundly defeated Meciar in the country's first direct presidential election. In December, the European Union invited Slovakia to begin talks that will lead to E.U. membership.

"The current government of Slovakia is considered kosher by the Jewish community," said Myers, a U.S.-born Chabad rabbi who was hired by the local Jewish community in 1993. "Prime Minister Dzurinda is becoming more positive toward Jews. The new government has won international approval from NATO, the E.U., the United Nations," he said. "Having the rabbis conference here will further that."

Like Dzurinda, President Schuster, too, has demonstrated a new attitude.

During his four-day visit to Israel, Schuster apologized for Slovakia's role in the extermination of Jews during the Holocaust and said Slovaks "must learn" about this dark chapter in their history.

"Watching movies about it is not enough," he said after visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem. "We must educate children in schools."

He also said he wanted Slovakia to mark a Holocaust Day on Sept. 10, the day on which the Tiso regime introduced its anti-Jewish legislation. Myers, who said he had asked Schuster to serve as patron of the rabbinical conference, stressed that these developments will benefit the Jewish community as well as the government's image.

"If the rabbis come and are received by the government, that will make a good impression," he said. "It will also raise the consciousness of the Jewish community."

As in other post-Communist states, there has been a flowering of Jewish life in Slovakia since the fall of communism 10 years ago.

There are regular Jewish classes, clubs, seminars, cultural events and other activities, including an annual two-week summer camp and a kindergarten in Bratislava co-sponsored by the New York-based Ronald S. Lauder Foundation.

Holidays are celebrated with communal events that can draw well over 100 people.

There are new Jewish museums in Bratislava and Presov and an Institute of Jewish Studies in Bratislava.

Last month saw the inaugural ceremony for a spacious new Jewish education center in Bratislava that will be run under Chabad auspices. There is even a local klezmer group, the Pressburger Klezmer Band. But communal development has largely taken place out of the international spotlight.

Moreover, said Myers, who has been a catalyst in the revival, though numbers are steadily growing, "Everything is a struggle."

In part, this is because Slovak Jews and their concerns were overshadowed by the very visible Jewish revival in Prague, a mecca to millions of tourists and home to a world-famous Jewish museum and medieval ghetto.

But the local political situation, with its lingering undertones of nationalism and nostalgia, was also an important part of the equation.

"Fear takes the longest to leave," said Myers' wife, Chanie, who runs the Jewish kindergarten, which this year has seven pupils. "With parents and grandparents, who remember communism and the Holocaust, that fear is understandable. What we say is, don't let the children inherit it.

"The more open and outward programs in Judaism are," she said, "the more that fear slowly dissipates." □

For more information on the Slovak Jewish community, visit [www.uzzno.sk](http://www.uzzno.sk). The Web site of the Slovak Union of Jewish Youth is [www.suzm.sk](http://www.suzm.sk).

## JEWISH WORLD

### NEWS ANALYSIS

## Lebanon withdrawal seems definite: The only question facing Barak is when

By Mitchell Danow

### Supremacist launches appeal

A white supremacist is appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court to review an Illinois state decision to deny him a law license. The leader of the World Church of the Creator, Matthew Hale was denied a license in part because of his views on race, according to the petition before the court.

### Orthodox man loses condom case

A jury in Florida ruled against an Orthodox Jew who sued a drug store chain that fired him after he refused to sell condoms to customers on religious grounds.

The jury ruled last Friday that the Eckerd Corp. could not reasonably accommodate Hillel Hellinger without hurting customer service.

### Insurance claims process to start

A program to begin payments to the heirs of Holocaust-era insurance policies will begin next week, according to the head of an international commission on unpaid insurance claims.

As two days of congressional hearings on restitution issues concluded in Washington, Lawrence Eagleburger reported the commission will publicize Tuesday a toll-free phone number and other details for families to claim payments never made after the policyholders were killed in the Holocaust.

### Expert estimates Nazi looting

The Nazis looted 600,000 artworks during Hitler's 12 years in power, according to a U.S. government expert.

Jonathan Petropoulos, research director on art for the Presidential Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States, estimated that 100,000 objects came from Western Europe and 300,000 from Eastern Europe and parts of the Soviet Union. Some 200,000 works came from Germany itself, Petropoulos added during testimony Feb. 10 before the House Banking Committee.

### Review of Danish actions sought

Denmark's prime minister said his government should review the country's actions during World War II in light of recent research indicating that Denmark voluntarily handed over at least 132 Jews to Germany between 1940 and 1944. New reports say that Danish officials later tried to alter documents to make it look as if they had acted under German orders.

### Rescuer dies at 91

Maria Paasche, who helped Jews escape from Nazi Germany, died at 90. In the 1930s, Paasche transported Jews on her motorcycle to Prague before that city came under Nazi occupation.

NEW YORK (JTA) — Prime Minister Ehud Barak has to make a difficult calculation.

Months ago, he vowed to withdraw Israeli troops from southern Lebanon by July — with or without an accompanying peace deal with Syria. That vow was widely credited with bringing Damascus back to the negotiating table in December.

But now the Israeli-Syrian talks have been suspended, and Barak has to weigh whether he should wait longer and see if the negotiations will be revived — or pull the troops out even earlier than July.

From the Israeli standpoint, a withdrawal from Lebanon after reaching an agreement with Syria — one that would be accompanied by guarantees of security along Israel's northern border — would be preferable to a unilateral withdrawal.

But waiting can prove costly, especially now that Hezbollah has become emboldened by Barak's pledge and wants to inflict heavy damages on Israeli troops. The more losses it inflicts, the more it will appear that the unilateral withdrawal is a unilateral Israeli defeat.

During the past three weeks, seven Israeli soldiers have died in Hezbollah attacks, prompting growing calls from the Israeli public to pull the troops out before July.

At least half of Barak's Cabinet favors an early withdrawal, according to the Israeli daily Ma'ariv. Joining the calls is none other than opposition leader Ariel Sharon, the architect of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon. "The posts in Lebanon today have become anachronistic, and we must get out," he said Sunday. "Situations change."

The same day, the father of the latest Israeli casualty sounded a heartfelt call for early withdrawal.

Arye Itach, a reserve colonel who founded the infantry unit in which his son Tzachi was killed last Friday in a Hezbollah rocket attack, said Israeli soldiers in Lebanon are "cannon fodder" because the government does not allow them to operate freely.

"We must move up the timetable," Itach told Israel Radio hours before his son's funeral Sunday. "This killing is terrible."

Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers stationed in the southern Lebanon security zone have been publicly questioning the wisdom of remaining there.

Last week, Israel Radio aired remarks by troops reflecting their low morale and desire to pull out of southern Lebanon as soon as possible.

"We have no business here," said one. Another added: "If we're going to leave anyway, why stay and give them a few more dead?"

Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department criticized Syria for not influencing Hezbollah to stop its attacks on Israeli troops. The "evidence is clear" that they need to exercise their influence more effectively, spokesman James Rubin said.

Last Friday, U.S. officials convened a five-nation monitoring committee in an attempt to stem the growing violence in southern Lebanon. But Israel walked out of the meeting on Barak's orders after Hezbollah killed another Israeli soldier hours earlier.

The next day, Hezbollah mounted a fresh attack against Israeli troops, and a Hezbollah official vowed more "humiliating" assaults.

Last week, in the worst escalation of the fighting in Lebanon in months, Israeli jets launched airstrikes on Hezbollah targets and on three power stations in Lebanon, one of them near Beirut. Israeli officials also declared a two-day state of emergency, during which citizens in northern Israel remained in bomb shelters on the chance Hezbollah would launch cross-border Katyusha rocket attacks.

Foreign Minister David Levy vowed a scorched-earth policy in Lebanon if Hezbollah decided to retaliate with Katyushas, but those attacks did not materialize.

Meanwhile, the question does not appear whether Israel will withdraw its troops, but when. Danny Yatom, a top Barak aide, made this clear during a television interview Sunday.

"We are leaving," he said. "We will go out of Lebanon not later than July 2000 — period." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Ancient legend of the Golem still evokes curiosity, controversy***By Bram D. Eisenthal*

PRAGUE (JTA) — The stately Charles Bridge transports travelers into old Jewish Town here. It's a kind of a time portal, built in 1357 by King Charles IV and lined with 30 magnificent baroque statues.

The controversy over whether a legendary creature once lived on the other side of this Gothic bridge makes the journey even more mysterious.

In the late 1500s, Prague's Rabbi Judah Loew (1520-1609), one of the most respected and beloved sages in Eastern Europe, is said to have built a man of clay, which he called the Golem.

The Jews of ancient Prague had a foothold in this city for 600 years by then, arriving as merchants in the 10th century. By the 1300s, though, the burgeoning community was confined to the walled Jewish Town.

Although Prague's Jews were treated better by the local aristocracy than were most Jews in Europe, attacks were still commonplace. In the infamous Easter massacre of 1389, 3,000 Jewish men, women and children were cornered in an alleyway and slaughtered.

Fearing for the safety of his community, Loew, also known as the Maharal, practiced Kabbalah — the Jewish mystical tradition — to breathe life into his clay creature. This protector would be summoned when needed, while otherwise laboring in the Alt Neu — Old New — Synagogue during off-hours.

Unfortunately, after performing some heroic feats of rescue, the Golem became infused with ego, disobeying its creator. Loew managed to trick the Golem and cause its life force to disperse.

The legend goes on to say that the Golem's body has been kept in the attic of the synagogue ever since.

But did the Golem actually exist?

"Many do come to Prague attracted by the legends, especially many Chasidic Jews," said Leo Pavlat, the director of Prague's Jewish Museum. "Twice I was woken in the middle of the night when some people called, asking that I take them to the roof of the Alt Neu shul to see the Golem. I managed to convince them that he didn't exist."

Pavlat scoffed when told that many consider the Golem to have been a living, breathing thing. He also said that Loew was not a kabbalist. "There is no actual link" between the "rabbi and kabbalah," he said.

These denials provoked a pointed response from a leading Canadian Chasidic leader, Rabbi Moishe New, director of the Montreal Torah Centre.

The rabbi is a noted authority on Kabbalah, giving lectures and teaching classes on the subject to beginners and veterans alike.

"The Talmud recalls instances where sages fashioned Golems for the protection of Jewish lives, much as the Maharal did," New said.

"The body of the Golem was infused with a soul, becoming a type of angel enclosed in a manmade body. Angels are considered to be like creatures or animals in daily Jewish prayer. They have no free choice and are not capable of making moral decisions — they are spiritual robots, subservient to their makers."

The Maharal, New also stressed, certainly did practice Kabbalah.

"He was an outstanding kabbalist, philosopher and talmudist and wrote an entire series of books, 20 in all, based on Kabbalah. They were called 'Gevurot Hashem' or the 'Might of God.' Rabbi Loew's genius was that he expressed kabbalistic teachings in a rational manner, thus making it accessible to the masses.

"As a matter of fact, the Chasidic movement owes its inception, to a significant degree, to his teachings."

But what of the existence of the Golem of legend? The tale was certainly inspirational enough to cause German Czech journalist Franz Klutschak, in 1838, to write a story titled "The Golem and Rabbi Loew," for a popular periodical, *Panorama des Universums*.

In 1847, the *Galerie der Sippurim*, published by Prague bookseller Wolf Pascheles, mentions Loew's Golem among its many tales about famous Jews.

A 1915 bestseller by Vienna-born Gustav Meyrink featured the Golem as well.

Even Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer got into the act, publishing his English version of "The Golem" in 1982. He had written the Yiddish original for the *Jewish Daily Forward* in 1969, with his Prague protagonist a kabbalist named Rabbi Leib.

The motion picture world also got into the act with two German silent movies, a 1914 version co-directed by the film's star and co-producer, Paul Wegener, followed by another in 1920, also featuring Wegener.

Visiting Prague, it's easy to get caught up in the legend, with two sites of interest to Golem-seekers.

The unforgettably bleak, yet thrilling landscape of the Old Jewish Cemetery in Jewish Town is a Kafkaesque arrangement of over 12,000 stones dating back to the 15th century. Bodies are buried vertically in rows of 12, as Jews were not allowed to inter their dead anywhere else. Many stones are tilted, pointing like jagged shards of glass.

While many of the city's renowned leaders are buried here. The prize is the grave of the Maharal himself. It is probably the most visited Jewish site in Prague, and like Jerusalem's Western Wall, is filled with notes of prayer and hope thrust into every nook and cranny.

Then there is the nearby Alt Neu Synagogue itself. Dating to 1280, it is the oldest Jewish house of worship in Europe and one of Prague's oldest Gothic buildings.

Services have been held continuously for over 700 years, with the exception of the World War II years.

Worshippers can gaze at the vaulted ceiling, wondering whether the Golem is in the attic, as purported.

"Certainly, the Golem's existence was witnessed by the people of that time and forms part of the oral history of the Jewish people," said New.

As to where its body lies, the rabbi sticks to the legend.

"It is in the attic of the Alt Neu Synagogue, under piles of weathered old holy books. The body may be crumbled by now, but that is the tradition."

As to why community leaders like Pavlat continue to deny the Golem's existence, New can only offer an educated guess.

"The Maharal would not have wished it to be venerated, and it has therefore been kept a guarded secret over the centuries. That is probably the motive for not showing the body." □