



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 78, No. 31

Wednesday, February 16, 2000

83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Global claims effort launched

An international commission launched a global effort to resolve outstanding claims on Holocaust-era insurance policies.

The chairman of the commission, former U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, said his commission would spend some \$9 million on publicity and on processing the claims. [Page 4]

WZO: Don't bargain with Austria

The World Zionist Organization launched a campaign against Austria, calling on Jewish groups not to negotiate Holocaust-era restitution with the new government in Vienna.

Jorg Haider's "real nature is evident in his latest offer to buy us out with offers of money," said Sallai Meridor, the WZO's chairman. "It must be made clear that we will not negotiate with this government while at the same [time] we encourage every other country to disengage from it." [Page 4]

Bradley speaks at yeshiva

Democratic presidential candidate Bill Bradley reiterated his campaign themes of gun control and health care in a speech at a Brooklyn yeshiva.

Addressing about 150 fervently Orthodox leaders and hundreds of young students at the Beth Jacob girls yeshiva in Borough Park, he also said he has "fought anti-Semitism whenever it reared its ugly head" and has been a longtime supporter of Israel.

Asked afterward whether Jonathan Pollard should be released after serving 14 years for spying for Israel, he said he would not be able to take a position until he reviews high-level government reports regarding clemency.

Jewish films up for Oscars

A Welsh film about a romance between a Jewish boy and a Welsh girl received an Oscar nomination for best foreign film.

In "Solomon and Gaenor," a takeoff on "Romeo and Juliet" that includes dialogue in Welsh, English and Yiddish, Solomon conceals his Jewish identity until he is forced to reveal the truth.

"One Day in September," a film about the 1972 Olympic Games massacre of Israeli athletes, was nominated for best documentary. The Oscars will be presented March 26.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Barak faces internal dissension in wake of latest peace obstacles

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Eight months into what he himself has termed the crucial first year of his premiership, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is facing serious unrest in the ranks.

Several of Barak's Cabinet ministers are publicly airing their dissatisfaction with the escalating military situation in southern Lebanon and the latest deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian talks.

The politicians' murmurs come as Israeli soldiers, too, voice their own misgivings about the fighting in Lebanon, where Hezbollah gunmen have killed at least seven Israeli soldiers during the last three weeks.

Taken together, the developments are prompting renewed questions about whether Barak's ambitious plans for regional peace are realistic.

The unprecedented criticism voiced by active duty soldiers has hit particularly hard.

"We don't want to be the last IDF men to die in Lebanon," one group of Israel Defense Force soldiers told two Israeli reporters last week during the most intensive fighting in Lebanon in months.

Reserve soldiers have occasionally criticized government policy in the past. Indeed, it was a wave of such criticism in the reserve army which, in the view of many observers, prompted Israel's withdrawal in 1984-1985 from the heart of Lebanon to the nine-mile-wide security zone that Israel carved out at the time to protect its northern communities.

This week, Maj. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, the regional commander in charge of the Lebanon campaign, reportedly called the complaining soldiers a bunch of crybabies.

The frustration of the army brass undoubtedly reflects the political discomfort that Barak must feel reading the headlines about the dissident soldiers — to say nothing of the all-too-frequent stories and pictures telling the heartbreaking tales of the latest 19-year-old Israeli killed by a Hezbollah anti-tank missile.

But Barak's problem was compounded this week when it became publicly known that several of his own ministers are balking at his Lebanon policy.

Hard-liners like Interior Minister Natan Sharansky and doves like Agriculture Minister Chaim Oron are questioning the premier's assertion that he needs until April or May to determine whether there is a chance of withdrawing from Lebanon as part of a negotiated deal with Syria, or whether Israel should prepare to withdraw unilaterally.

Barak has been reiterating his commitment to have the army out of Lebanon, one way or the other, by July 7. But the dissenting ministers say this is too long to keep up the costly exchanges with Hezbollah.

In essence, these ministers tend to agree with Likud leader Ariel Sharon that the situation in Lebanon should be divorced from overall peace negotiations with Syria.

While most of Barak's dissenting ministers may not share Sharon's ultimate goal of heading off Israeli-Syrian talks altogether to avert an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, they agree with his opposition to Barak's linkage of a withdrawal from Lebanon and an accord with Syria.

During Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting, Barak got strong support for his strategy from his foreign minister, David Levy, and from Education Minister Yossi Sarid.

Even Justice Minister Yossi Beilin, a longtime advocate of a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, said he was "at one with" the prime minister's efforts to try

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak: No immediate withdrawal

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he will not order an immediate troop withdrawal from southern Lebanon. "We cannot just throw our hands up and run away, even if there's pressure," he said. His comments came before he defeated a no-confidence motion prompted by the attacks he ordered on Lebanon last week.

Israel to review West Bank maps

Israel is willing to review the maps outlining its next withdrawal from portions of the West Bank, according to an aide to Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Danny Yatom declined to say what Israel was willing to reconsider, but he did indicate Tuesday that the land to be transferred would exclude areas close to Jerusalem.

The Palestinian Authority rejected the previous set of maps because it sought control over those areas.

Syrian meets Hamas officials

Syria's foreign minister met with a group of Hamas leaders who were expelled from Jordan last year because of their anti-Israel activities.

Farouk al-Sharaa held talks that "dealt with developments of the peace process, which is stalled due to the obstinate policies of the Israeli government," according to a Syrian official. The Hamas officials included political leader Khaled Mashaal and Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook, who in 1997 was expelled from the United States.

Israel, Mexico reach trade accord

Israel and Mexico reached a deal for a free trade agreement, according to Mexican officials. Mexico will get tariff-free access to the Israeli market for such items as cars, trucks, buses, steel and coffee. Israel will be able to export duty-free to Mexico items including agricultural equipment, high-technology medical equipment and kosher instant coffee.

for a negotiated withdrawal during the weeks ahead — and to stay put for the moment in Lebanon in order to achieve this. These ministers backed the premier's grim assertion that the deaths of seven soldiers, however saddening, must not be allowed to dictate a nation's security policy. But the narrow backing he won for his approach on Lebanon must have been little comfort for Barak — given the distinct slippage in Cabinet solidarity over his entire peace strategy.

In tough one-on-one meetings with Barak over the weekend, a number of key ministers are reported to have expressed their deep anxiety over the current deadlock on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

Sunday was the date on which Israel and the Palestinian Authority were to have concluded a framework agreement accord for a final peace accord.

The two sides had also planned to reach the final accord by September — that is, before the U.S. presidential election, so that President Clinton could successfully conclude his work as Middle East peace broker.

Ironically it was Barak who pressed for this rigid and ambitious timetable, publicly proclaiming the February and September target dates. Barak has said repeatedly that what he does not achieve on the peace front during his first year in office — with Clinton still in the White House — will be much more difficult to achieve later.

The Palestinians, too, have often expressed their confidence in Clinton.

Yet the talks advanced haltingly, as the deadline loomed ominously nearer.

Far from making progress on the final peace accord, the two sides became bogged down over the past few weeks in disagreements regarding Israeli withdrawals from additional portions of the West Bank. Now that the Feb. 13 deadline has come and gone, the framework agreement is effectively dead — and the Palestinians are speaking of a rupture in Barak's relationship with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Barak, for his part, barely bothers to conceal his view that Israel's foremost interest is to make a peace deal with Syria. He has all but stated publicly that if the talks with Syria go forward, the Palestinians can wait.

For now, the Israeli-Syrian talks have been suspended. But Barak, basing his views on American and Egyptian assessments, is confident that the talks will resume soon and move swiftly toward an agreement. □

Vatican, PLO: Unilateral decision on Jerusalem would be unacceptable

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — The Vatican and the Palestine Liberation Organization, in a clear message to Israel, have signed a landmark agreement that says any unilateral decisions on Jerusalem would be "morally and legally unacceptable."

The agreement, which paves the way for full diplomatic ties, is perhaps the most significant development in PLO-Vatican relations since official ties were established in 1994. While Vatican and Palestinian delegations were signing the agreement Tuesday, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat met privately with Pope John Paul II, who is scheduled to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land next month.

They discussed Middle East issues and also agreed to add the West Bank town of Jericho to the papal itinerary. The pope, who has already planned a stop at the Palestinian-ruled town of Bethlehem, also plans to visit sites in Israel and Jordan next month. Most of the agreement signed Tuesday touches on day-to-day bilateral issues, including the status of church institutions in Palestinian-ruled areas.

Its preamble, however, focuses mainly on Jerusalem.

It says "an equitable solution for the issue of Jerusalem, based on international resolutions, is fundamental for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East."

It also says, "Unilateral decisions and actions altering the specific character and status of Jerusalem are morally and legally unacceptable."

And it calls for "a special statute for Jerusalem, internationally agreed" to safeguard "the proper identity and sacred character of the city and its universally significant religious and cultural heritage." The Vatican has long maintained that Jerusalem should come under an international mandate as a holy city. □



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

Supremacist faces new charges

A white supremacist charged with going on a shooting spree last summer at a Los Angeles-area Jewish center and later killing a postman was arraigned on a new federal indictment that added hate crime allegations.

U.S. prosecutors did not say at Monday's hearing whether they will seek the death penalty against Buford Furrow, who pleaded not guilty to all the charges at the hearing.

O.U. plans voter ads

The Orthodox Union plans to run "primary primer" advertisements in Jewish newspapers in the weeks before the March 7 Super Tuesday presidential primaries in 16 states.

The ads are meant to focus voters' and candidates' attention on which issues are of concern to the Orthodox community.

Some of the policy positions in the ads include expanding charitable choice, moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, banning physician-assisted suicide and expanding child care support.

Four vie for Iran's Jewish seat

Four people, including one woman, are seeking the legislative seat reserved for Iran's Jewish community in that nation's parliamentary elections.

One of those running in Friday's elections is the incumbent, Manouchehr Eliasi, who currently represents the community of about 35,000 people in the Iranian Parliament.

Hilda-Rab Zadeh, an English teacher who is believed to be the first woman to seek the post, reportedly published part of her campaign literature in Hebrew.

Envoy recalled over Haider praise

Argentina's ambassador to Austria was recalled to Buenos Aires after a local newspaper published a report he sent last October in which he described far-right leader Jorg Haider as a "democrat" and attributed the commotion created by his Freedom Party's ascent to power to "media exaggerations."

Juan Carlos Kreckler is expected to arrive in Buenos Aires this week to provide further details on his comments, President Fernando de la Rúa said.

Victims urge E.U. to press Poland

A delegation of Holocaust victims urged members of the European Parliament to press Poland to provide restitution for private property seized during the Holocaust.

The delegation from England, France and the United States called on the European Union to hold further discussions on the issue.

Sharansky on conversions abroad: No 'quickies' can become citizens

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's interior minister has weighed in with the Israeli Supreme Court on an issue that could set a precedent on Israel's policy toward conversions performed abroad.

Natan Sharansky said he would only approve converts for citizenship if he has proof that the person who converted abroad had some significant connection with the Diaspora community he or she converted through.

But when there is evidence that a person had been living in Israel on a temporary or tourist visa and popped overseas for a "quickie" conversion, he would not accept the application for citizenship, he said.

Sharansky's position, which he submitted Monday and which drew a harsh reaction from the Reform movement, referred to 15 cases of Jews who have converted overseas in Reform or Conservative communities.

The case is set to be discussed in April, when an expanded Supreme Court panel is due to rule on all outstanding conversion cases.

The cases, the bulk of which pertain to conversions performed in Israel, have been an ongoing source of tension between Israel and the non-Orthodox streams in Israel and America.

Since the specific cases of the 15 were submitted separately, the state had not yet provided its position.

Sharansky said his position on the matter is guided by two principles. First, Israel respects Diaspora communities of all streams and wants them to feel an integral part of the State of Israel.

However, he said, the Jewish people must be united by a common denominator — a reference to his support for only Orthodox conversions in Israel.

"This is why it is important that we keep recognizing all conversions by all streams in the Diaspora communities," Sharansky told JTA in a telephone interview Monday.

"But it is very important to create a process of building one people where there is a minimum common denominator that everybody agrees upon."

Sharansky said he feared that allowing "quickie" conversions overseas could open the door to a flood of foreign workers going abroad for conversion in order to gain citizenship.

Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center, called those fears "imaginary."

He said the position appeared to be an attempt to delegitimize bona-fide conversions done overseas by Reform and Conservative rabbis.

Based on previous court rulings, such conversions must now be legally accepted by the State of Israel.

"They cannot find fault and have not attempted to find fault with the preparation of these individuals for conversion," Regev said.

"If the study has been serious and the Beit Din is not a fly-by-night operation, but a reputable court with a long-standing rabbi, then these fears lie only in their imagination."

Sharansky's submission came one day after he told Israel's Foreign Ministry to stop instructing foreign consulates in Israel not to perform civil marriages.

That move could provide a new route to the canopy for couples with at least one foreign passport who the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate refuses to wed or who prefer not to be wed under Orthodox auspices.

Israel recognizes non-Orthodox weddings performed abroad.

Regev gave a cool welcome to Sharansky's decision to open the door for civil marriages in foreign consulates, saying it is a "brownie point" in terms of his willingness to steer the Interior Ministry in a different direction than Shas, the fervently Orthodox party that controlled the ministry before.

Sharansky said the consulate issue proved he was willing to seek creative solutions to issues of religious pluralism. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Austria set to talk restitution, but some Jews balk at the idea***By Michael Shapiro*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — After years of failing to address the issue of Holocaust restitution, Austria's new government says it wants to quickly enter negotiations with survivors and Jewish groups to settle outstanding claims.

However, some in the Jewish world see this sudden change of heart as an attempt to dampen the criticism of the country's governing coalition. The government is being criticized for including the far-right Freedom Party of Jorg Haider, who has made sympathetic comments regarding the Nazis.

The Austrian offer is forcing those who have worked on securing restitution for elderly survivors into a dilemma: Do they negotiate with Austria despite Haider's presence in the government or do they boycott talks to show their opposition to Haider, thus forcing survivors to wait even longer for a measure of justice.

While acknowledging the "unquestioned rights" of Holocaust victims, the World Zionist Organization on Tuesday called on Jews not to deal with the current Austrian government on restitution issues.

"Haider's real nature is evident in his latest offer to buy us out with offers of money," said Sallai Meridor, chairman of the WZO and Jewish Agency Executive. "It must be made clear that we will not negotiate with this government while at the same [time] we encourage every other country to disengage from it," Meridor said in announcing a new campaign to isolate Austria.

"Only standing together, working with the rest of the free world, we will stand a chance to succeed in this mission."

Until now restitution discussions with Austria have focused mainly on Austrian banks, with Jewish groups seeking reparations for bank accounts and other assets seized from Austrian Jews during the Holocaust.

Other Israeli and Jewish officials also have expressed skepticism about Austria's desire to deal with such outstanding issues as compensating slave laborers and settling unpaid insurance claims. Avraham Hirschson, a survivor who heads the Knesset committee that deals with Holocaust-era restitution, told a congressional committee here last week that "we will not cut any short deal with any country."

"The blood of my brother and my sister that were in the chambers are shouting at me and saying 'Don't go into any agreement with this government when Haider is in power,'" he added in his testimony to the House Banking Committee.

Israel Singer, secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress, told the House committee that Jews are concerned that the new Austrian government is acting out of "embarrassment" rather than in good faith.

"We should not have to crawl to those whom we do not choose to sit with," he said.

Despite their concerns, organizations that deal with reparations issues have not yet decided how to respond to the Austrian offer to negotiate quickly, an offer that was made by Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel. Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJC, said that his group; the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany; the Austrian Jewish community; and Austrian survivors

living outside of Austria are currently discussing how to respond to Austria's offer. He said, however, that "reparations are an obligation of Austria," no matter which government is in power.

Last year, Bank Austria, the nation's largest bank, reached a \$40 million settlement under which it agreed to make restitution for profiting from seizures of bank accounts.

Under the settlement's terms, the bank also agreed to issue an apology for its wartime actions. This was especially important to some Jewish leaders, who wanted the restitution efforts to have a moral as well as a financial dimension.

The Bank Austria settlement did not extend to other Austrian firms, including companies that profited from the use of Holocaust-era slave laborers.

Lawrence Eagleburger, chairman of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, said Tuesday that he has written to three Austrian insurance companies urging them to join the commission, which is seeking to settle outstanding insurance claims against European insurers.

Eagleburger, who outlined the process by which survivors and their heirs can file claims for unpaid insurance policies between 1920 and 1945, said he will continue to urge the companies to join the claims process, as the new Austrian government has urged them, despite possible concerns from Jewish groups.

"Jewish organizations may not want to deal with them but I intend to get them into the commission and I don't see anything wrong with it," he said. □

Committee on insurance policies launches effort to resolve claims*By Michael Shapiro*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — After nearly two years of work, the international commission seeking to settle unpaid Holocaust-era insurance claims launched a global effort Tuesday to reach out to Jews who may have claims against European insurance companies.

Lawrence Eagleburger, the former U.S. secretary of state who chairs the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, said people who believe their relatives bought life, education or dowry insurance policies with any company between 1920 and 1945 but never received the proceeds are eligible to file a claim with the commission.

The commission so far has been joined by only five insurance companies, but it is seeking to add more and will ask all companies to process claims. The companies are: Allianz of Germany; Assicurazioni Generali of Italy; Axa of France; and Zurich Financial Services and Winterthur Insurance, both of Switzerland. Claimants can file an application even if they do not know the name of the company under which the policy was held.

Eagleburger said the commission would spend nearly \$9 million worldwide on publicity and on processing the claims. He added that 10,000 Jewish organizations around the world have been enlisted to help those who want to file a claim.

Individuals can obtain a claims packet by: writing to the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims at P.O. Box 1163, Wall Street Station, N.Y., 10268 USA; visiting the Web site at www.icheic.org; or calling 1-800-957-3203. All claims must be filed by Feb. 1, 2002, and are promised to be resolved within two years of filing. □