



# Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Lawmaker: 'Iran 13' will be freed

All of the 13 Iranian Jews arrested last year and accused of spying for Israel and the United States will be freed soon, according to the sole Jewish representative in the Iranian Parliament.

Manouchehr Eliasi told Reuters that Iranian officials "have promised me the case will be resolved in the near future. In 10 to 15 days the result will be known." A spokesman for the Iranian judiciary, denied that there are any plans to free the 13. [Page 3]

### Holocaust museum bars Haider

Jorg Haider was refused entry to Montreal's Holocaust museum, according to Dorothy Zalcman-Howard, an official with the Canadian Jewish Congress. The Austrian far-right leader's visit to Montreal came a week after the leader of the Tash Chasidim, some of whom are anti-Zionist, sent Haider a letter congratulating him on his party's inclusion in the Austrian government.

### U.S. legislators slam Syrian paper

Thirty-seven members of the U.S. Congress denounced a Syrian newspaper for publishing an article in which the editor minimized the Holocaust and said Zionism is worse than racism. In a letter to President Clinton, the bipartisan group asked that Syrian leaders be urged to publicly distance themselves from the Jan. 31 article.

### Candidates: Recognize Jerusalem

The top two Republican presidential candidates said the United States should recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Answering a question by CNN's Larry King during a televised debate in South Carolina, Texas Gov. George W. Bush said, "I think we ought to recognize it, yes."

Arizona Sen. John McCain said the United States should recognize it "immediately," adding that it would make the "peace process much simpler" because "as soon as the Palestinians and others know exactly where that capital is, then it'll be off the table."

Because of the Presidents Day holiday in the U.S., the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Feb. 21.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### Wait for compensation may be over for aging Hungarian Shoah survivors

By Michael J. Jordan

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Now that a global outreach project to settle unpaid Holocaust-era insurance claims has been launched, it appears that Margit, an 85-year-old great-grandmother, is headed straight for the head of the line.

As she played rummy with three friends in the Budapest Jewish community center Wednesday, Margit described how she survived the city's ghetto with her parents and two sisters.

Before the war, her father had run a successful printing press. Among his clients was the local office of Italian insurer Assicurazioni Generali, one of the five insurance giants now cooperating with the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims. Margit had been her father's bookkeeper, so she knew he held a life insurance policy with Generali. The beneficiary was to be her mother.

But by the time her father and her mother died, in 1948 and 1950, respectively, it was too late: The Iron Curtain had been drawn, and relations with the West severed.

Only in October 1998 did the topic resurface, when local papers reported the formation of the international commission.

Margit couldn't find the insurance policy, but she wrote to Generali, which responded that the policy had not been paid out.

Margit says she doesn't know how much money may be coming to her. But with her monthly pension of just \$154 — equivalent, at Budapest prices, to four pairs of Levi's — any disbursement would make her remaining years a bit more comfortable.

"I need all the money I can get," Margit said between hands of rummy. "But I'm also thinking about my son, two grandchildren and my great-grandson."

It's unclear how many claimants like Margit there are in the world.

In Hungary, though, commission officials will have their hands full.

Hungary has one of the largest survivor populations in the world, with close to 20,000; another 30,000 are considered heirs to those who perished.

As many as 5,000 may come forward to make claims on life insurance policies, says Gabor Sebes, executive director of the Hungarian Jewish Heritage Public Endowment.

Not surprisingly most are afraid to talk openly about whether they will file claims.

Hungary is still a poor enough country that anyone suddenly flush with cash typically keeps it hush-hush.

Survivors don't want their names in the media because they fear crime, or at least, the resentment of neighbors. Margit, for example, refused to give her family name.

"They haven't received a penny yet," said Sebes, "but every other day there's an article in a paper about how much compensation Holocaust survivors will be receiving."

Yet Jews are not the only ones who are now eligible for the unpaid insurance policies. Any victim of the Holocaust who was a policyholder, beneficiary or heir to either qualifies.

The commission liberally defines a victim as someone who, anytime from 1933 to 1945: "was deprived of their life; suffered damage to their mental or physical health; was deprived of their economic livelihood; suffered loss or deprivation of financial or other assets; or suffered any other loss or damage of their property as a result of racial, religious, political or ideological persecution" by organs of the Third Reich, in territories occupied by the Third Reich or its allies. This would include groups such as

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Vatican-PLO pact angers Israel

Israel misinterpreted a deal between the Vatican and the PLO that has angered the Jewish state, a papal envoy said.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry summoned Monsignor Petro Sambi on Wednesday to protest references to Jerusalem in the agreement, signed a day before in Rome.

Israel accused the Vatican of interfering in peace talks with the Palestinians by cautioning Israel against undertaking unilateral decisions affecting Jerusalem.

But the envoy said, "There is no reference to the political situation of Jerusalem."

### U.S. denies defense pact

The United States is not pursuing a mutual defense treaty with Israel, as some Israeli press reports have suggested, according to State Department spokesman James Rubin.

Rubin said the United States is focusing on "expanding the existing type of cooperation and the existing relationship, and not on any mutual defense treaty."

### Knesset to help locate assets

Israel's Knesset created a committee to help Holocaust survivors find assets deposited during the war in banks in prestate Palestine.

Legislator Colette Avital, a former consul general in New York, will head the committee.

### Knesset addressed in German

Germany's president asked for forgiveness for the Holocaust during a speech in Israel's Knesset.

Johannes Rau spoke in German, a first for a Knesset speech.

Several legislators stayed away in protest.

Among them were Danny Naveh from the opposition Likud Party, whose parents survived the Holocaust.



## Daily News Bulletin

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Communists, Gypsies, homosexuals and Poles, among others.

"Our process is open to anyone, if they were a Holocaust victim and persecuted," commission Vice Chairman Geoffrey Fitchew said at a news conference Wednesday in Budapest. "All claims will be treated in exactly the same way."

Media reports have estimated European insurance companies may pay out anywhere from \$1 billion to \$4 billion.

But Fitchew suggested the final figure may ultimately be higher.

He said negotiations are continuing to "persuade" more insurers to join the commission.

He agreed that bad press may nudge other firms to pitch in.

"Negative publicity is an important consideration for any commercial operation," Fitchew said. "Every business needs to retain the good faith of its clients. I don't think you should underestimate that."

For now, however, the dollar figures thrown around sound merely fanciful to those who have been waiting more than half a century for a settlement.

Many in the survivor community, after initial enthusiasm for other Holocaust-era compensation programs, are disappointed that they have not yet received any payments.

They had to produce and fill out reams of documents for those programs — so some may feel it's a waste to go through the same rigmarole all over again.

"We'll have to convince them that it's worth it to go down memory lane again," said Esther Radvanyi, who will handle the commission's outreach program with Jewish organizations in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

"It took 50 years to get here" before it was acknowledged that "some of these people have legitimate claims." □

## Ukrainian Jews file lawsuit for publishing anti-Jewish slurs

By Lev Gorodetsky

KHARKOV, Ukraine (JTA) — Ukrainian Jews have filed a lawsuit against a state-financed publication for children for its recent publication of anti-Semitic slurs.

The articles have shocked Jews here because this city in eastern Ukraine has been stable and relatively free of anti-Semitism in recent years.

One article printed in the newspaper, which is run by a cultural group calling itself Enlightenment, said Jews have greatly exaggerated the number of Holocaust victims. The author also asks, "Is it possible to compare the nearly instant death in gas chambers to death from starvation?" a reference to the millions of Ukrainians who died in Soviet-induced famines in the 1930s.

In a series of articles in the same newspaper, Jews are also accused of "working to destroy the morality and the economy of the Ukrainian people," of a 300-year-long craving for "taking vengeance on the Ukrainians," of starving millions of Ukrainian peasants to death during the Stalinist era and of conspiring to control contemporary political life in Ukraine.

"We consider this case to be not only Jewishly important, but internationally important as well because all citizens have to fight against ethnic hatred," said Alexander Feldman, a local Jewish leader who serves as president of the Jewish Foundation of Ukraine.

Since Enlightenment is financed by the state, Ukrainian taxpayers, including Jews, paid for the publication of the articles. As a result, the Jewish community, which generally keeps a low profile, is reacting vocally.

The lawsuit by the Jewish Foundation asks a Kharkov district court to close Enlightenment and fine them \$200,000 to be given to the Jewish community.

Leaders of Ukraine's Jewish community, which numbers nearly 500,000, have also sent a letter protesting the articles to Ukraine's president, Leonid Kuchma. Kuchma's office responded that it would take unspecified measures against the group, according to Feldman.

The court is expected to consider the case at the beginning of March. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Rabbi appointed museum chief

President Clinton officially appointed Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg chairman of the council that oversees the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

Greenberg is an Orthodox rabbi known for his writings on the Holocaust and for his leadership at two organizations that promote Jewish pluralism and learning: the Jewish Life Network and CLAL — National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

He succeeds Miles Lerman, who resigned last month and had strongly supported Greenberg as his successor.

### Group helps Chechen refugees

A Russian Jewish umbrella group is launching a program to help families who are fleeing the war in Chechnya.

The Russian Jewish Congress hopes to provide the refugees with lodging and financial help.

Other Jewish organizations, including the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Jewish Community Development Fund in Russia, have announced they will participate in the project.

### Britain returns Holocaust assets

Britain said it has paid out some \$2.5 million in claims by Holocaust survivors and their heirs whose prewar assets were seized as enemy property.

Most of the assets consisted of cash that was transferred to British banks for safekeeping by residents of European countries that fell under the Nazi occupation. A panel is still considering some of the 948 claims that were filed by a September 1999 deadline.

### Nazi hunters convene in Latvia

Latvian officials opened an international meeting of Nazi hunters by pledging to do all they can to punish war criminals. Investigators from the United States, Israel, Canada, Australia, Great Britain and Germany gathered in the Latvian capital for a two-day meeting to present the evidence they have against suspected war criminal Konrad Kalejs. The Latvian-born Kalejs, 86 and now living in Australia, is accused of involvement in the murder of thousands of Jews, Gypsies and Communists during World War II.

### N.Y. Jewish landmark may close

A New York Jewish landmark restaurant plans to reduce the size of its dining room and may close for good in a few years.

Ratner's, a dairy restaurant on the Lower East Side famed for its onion rolls and mushroom barley soup, will close in May for remodeling. Ratner's owner told The New York Times that his business has halved in the past five years.

## Four candidates vie for the only Jewish seat in Iran's Parliament

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — There is a hotly contested "Jewish seat" in this week's Iranian parliamentary elections.

Four people, including one woman, are seeking the vacant spot in Friday's vote. One of them is the incumbent, Manouchehr Eliasi, who currently represents the community of about 35,000 people in the Majlis, the Iranian parliament.

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

Under Iranian law, the nation's Jewish, Zoroastrian and Chaldean communities are each entitled to one seat in the Majlis.

The Armenian community gets two.

Two of the Jewish candidates are running from the southern city of Shiraz, where a hard-line revolutionary court is soon expected to hear the case of 13 Iranian Jews who were arrested last year amid accusations of spying for Israel and the United States.

Two days before the election, Eliasi predicted that all of the 13 Jews will be freed soon.

Eliasi told Reuters that Iranian officials "have promised me the case will be resolved in the near future. In 10 to 15 days, the result will be known."

A spokesman for the Iranian judiciary, however, denied that there are any plans to free the 13.

The case, which has sparked an international outcry, involved a "mix-up," according to one of the 13, Omid Teflin, who was recently released on bail.

"That's all it was with me," the 25-year-old said in a recent interview with Agence France Presse.

"And that's what I think it was for the others as well."

The president of the Jewish Association of Shiraz, Eshagh Nik-Nava, told the French news agency that he agreed with Teflin's view, saying the "whole affair is a big misunderstanding."

"Jews have been here for 2,700 years," Nik-Nava said. "They do not commit illegal acts. This would be the first time."

The 13 Jews — religious and community leaders, including one teen-ager — have been held in a jail in Shiraz since last spring, but have not been formally charged.

Both Israel and the United States have vehemently denied the accusations against the accused, who could face the death penalty if convicted.

Many observers believe that the arrests and accusations are part of a power struggle between conservative hard-liners and President Mohammad Khatami, a relative moderate who has made overtures to the West.

Friday's elections are being seen as a contest between the two forces.

Among the approximately 5,000 hopefuls seeking election to the 290-seat Majlis are the reformers calling for more social openness and freedom of speech.

They are opposed by the hard-liners, who warn that the principles of the 1979 Islamic Revolution are being forgotten.

These traditionalists, who dominate the outgoing parliament, paint a picture of moral decay among young people, Khatami's most active supporters.

The hard-line Guardian Council, which determines the fitness of candidates, has reportedly disqualified more than 600 candidates, most of them reformers. □

## Israel's credit rating upped

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Standard & Poor's rating service has increased Israel's credit rating to positive from stable.

The service said it made the change because of improvements in the structure of the Israeli economy and in the country's balance of payments.

A higher credit rating is significant because it will reduce the Jewish state's borrowing costs. □

## Storytelling popular both as art form and teaching tool

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — As a child, whenever Peninnah Schram lost her temper with her brother, her mother admonished her with the same story.

The tale, which her mother claimed was true, was of a husband who was drafted into the czar's army for years and had to leave his wife and small son. When he finally returned home, in army uniform, he stopped outside the doorway and heard his wife speaking intimately with a deep-voiced man.

Consumed with jealous rage, he walks in, pulls out his pistol and prepares to shoot the man he is convinced has cuckolded him. But just in time, he hears the other man say "Mama" and gasps with relief that he did not kill his own son.

Schram went years without thinking of the story until one day, as an adult, she was overcome with anger at her misbehaving young daughter. Then, the tale suddenly returned, and it "was like my mother standing over my shoulder."

Schram, the author and editor of eight collections of Jewish stories and the founder of the Jewish Storytelling Center at New York's 92nd Street Y, has been described as the "grande dame" of Jewish storytelling.

She and her colleagues say the craft is a powerful teaching tool, with messages from stories often lingering much longer in the mind than lectures or other teaching methods.

"It engages kids and helps them integrate what they're learning," said Lynn Hazan, a storyteller, performer and Hebrew school teacher in suburban Chicago. "It's as participatory as you can get. And the kids remember the stories."

Gerald Fierst, a full-time storyteller in New Jersey, said, "Schools now think of storytelling as something they want to bring in for educational purposes. The use of oral language in early grades has been shown to improve reading and writing ability."

Storytelling is an art form that shares qualities with both performing and literary arts. But as tellers often stop to ask the audience questions, it is more interactive. It also is more fluid than a play or piece of writing, with tellers adding or dropping new details at each telling.

"Storytelling is very much akin to stand-up comedy," said Fierst. "There has to be a connection back and forth between the audience and teller, there has to be spontaneity. We know the story but don't know how to tell it until the moment it comes out, which is what makes it an exciting art form."

According to Corinne Stavish of Southfield, Mich., storytelling differs from theater because "you're performing not for the audience, but with the audience."

"There's an immediacy between the teller and audience and a form of communication between both," she added.

What is considered to be a "Jewish story" varies. For example, at this year's Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education conference in the summer, storytellers shared traditional Jewish tales, Jewish adaptations of other folktales, personal memoirs and original works of fiction.

Schram, for the most part, sticks to traditional fare: stories told by her parents, found in Midrash or Talmud or uncovered through research at the Israel Folktale Archives in Haifa.

For her part, Hazan has delivered a story about participating in a breast cancer walk-a-thon as well as one about being reunited with her childhood Hebrew school teacher.

Fierst recently wrote and performed a story about a Jewish boy in the Civil War South who, during Passover, helps two slaves escape.

Tellers generally agree that to be considered Jewish, a story should have a moral or message consistent with Jewish teachings. In addition, Jewish stories generally revolve either around Jewish characters, Jewish places or the Jewish calendar.

But, tellers note, because Jews lived amidst other cultures, many traditional tales considered "authentically Jewish" — ones found even in the Talmud — often are variations on tales from other cultures.

Long a fixture of Jewish culture, storytelling became less common in America as immigrant families assimilated.

Schram, a professor of speech and drama, recalls in 1970 asking her students at Stern College, the women's school of Yeshiva University, if they knew the traditional tales about the Polish town of Chelm.

"When they said they didn't, I thought, 'Something's wrong if yeshiva kids don't know these stories,'" she said, noting that this spurred her to help establish a storytelling festival.

The festival grew into the Jewish Storytelling Center, which hosts monthly workshops and performances.

Today, in large part because of Schram's work, Jewish storytelling is experiencing something of a revival, with a proliferation of anthologies, festivals and networking among the tellers.

With approximately 150 members, the storytellers network in CAJE is one of the largest and most visible networks of educators in the group, with the bards swapping tales and performing every night of CAJE's annual conferences.

The Jewish storytelling revival mirrors a larger revival in storytelling, with tellers and fans from around the world now meeting annually for several days in October at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tenn.

Many storytellers attribute the recent popularity to a culture fatigued with the electronic mass media of computers, movies and television.

"There is no substitute for the human voice," said Schram. "People feel the need to go back to the human. It's comforting, healing and teaching. Yes, you can read stories, but there's something more in the human contact."

"I like that this is void of technology except for the microphone," said Stavish, who co-chairs CAJE's storytelling network. "It keeps me grounded in the essentials of humanity." □

## Israel to pay for forced confession

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Four Israelis wrongfully imprisoned 20 years ago are to receive some \$750,000 from the state as compensation for their suffering, a Tel Aviv court has ruled.

The men were recently acquitted during a retrial on charges of arson and robbery following the admission of one police interrogator that they had been forced into confessing their purported offenses.

The judge said Monday the case was "unparalleled in the annals of Israeli justice."

The four plan to file a civil suit for damages. □