



Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel welcomes Iranian results

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak welcomed the strong showing by reformers in Iran's parliamentary elections, but said it was too early to tell if the vote would mean a new direction in Tehran's anti-Israeli foreign policy.

"This is an internal and historic struggle within Iran," Barak was quoted as saying Sunday.

At the same time, he said, Iran continues a policy of "encouraging terrorism" and "seeking nuclear capability."

Meanwhile, the man who served one four-year term in the Iranian Parliament seat designated for a Jewish representative lost in the elections.

Maurice Motamed defeated Manouchehr Eliasi, who had said that he had been promised that 13 Iranian Jews accused of espionage would be freed, a claim denied by the Iran judiciary.

Iranian Jewish leaders in the United States differed over whether Eliasi was voted out of office because of dissatisfaction with his advocacy for the imprisoned Jews.

U.S. seeks death for L.A. shooter

U.S. prosecutors will seek the death penalty against an avowed white supremacist accused of killing a Filipino American mailman after he wounded five people at a Jewish community center in Los Angeles last August. The motion was filed last Friday following authorization by U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno to seek the death penalty against Buford Furrow Jr.

Barak tries to break deadlock

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he will try to formulate a package that could break weeks of deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Barak's comments came during a speech to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations on its annual mission to Israel. [Page 3]

Aliyah down from U.S.

The number of people emigrating from Western nations to Israel declined last year, according to the Jerusalem Post. In 1999, 1,323 Americans made aliyah, a 15 percent decline from the year before. Aliyah from the United States is at its lowest point since 1968, the paper quoted an official with the Jewish Agency for Israel as saying.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Baptists to blitz Chicago in conversion convention

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Southern Baptist Convention is backing away from its promise to bring 100,000 Christians to Chicago next summer to evangelize in the streets.

Now Convention officials estimate that 5,000 to 10,000 Southern Baptist volunteer missionaries will come from other locations, and that there will be some 70,000 to 80,000 local people working on the Windy City blitz.

At least one Jewish official says that even those numbers overestimate how many people can be rallied locally. "The community isn't that big," said Rabbi Ira Youdovin, executive vice president of the Chicago Board of Rabbis.

The area, with a population of about 6.5 million people, includes roughly 260,000 Jews.

A public fight between Southern Baptist and Jewish leaders over the entire missionary campaign, first announced by the Southern Baptist Convention last November, has prompted an unexpected development — the beginnings of a working interfaith relationship between Chicago rabbis and the chief Southern Baptist official there, who is now talking about joining the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Strategic Cities Initiative is targeting Chicago and Phoenix this year, Boston and Las Vegas in 2001, and Philadelphia and Seattle in 2002.

But on July 8, which falls on a Saturday, it will be a missionary full-court press throughout Chicagoland.

On that day, pairs and threesomes of Christians will "prayerwalk," strolling down every street praying for the residents of the neighborhood, said the Rev. Phil Miglioratti, the Southern Baptist Convention's strategic focus cities coordinator for Chicago.

Others will distribute "free cold water in hot parks, offer free car washes in the name of the Lord and go into businesses offering to clean windows and restrooms," Miglioratti said.

Southern Baptist Convention officials promised in interviews that Jews would not be targeted for the missionizing.

"We're not targeting Jewish neighborhoods. We're targeting the whole city of Chicago," said Phil Roberts, a Southern Baptist Convention vice president. "If we go to a door and someone says, 'We're Jewish and don't want to hear anything,' then we're moving on," said Roberts.

"In all honesty, we have not discussed sending people with Jewish backgrounds to Jewish areas," Miglioratti said, of the Hebrew-Christians from area "Messianic" congregations they expect to work with. "We really don't have a Jewish strategy."

At least one local Jewish official is glad that few Jews are likely to be home that day.

"There could hardly be a better day to pick to have less success encountering Jews," said Jay Teath, director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago. "Hopefully many will be in synagogues, others on vacation and the youth will be in summer camp."

But another local Jewish leader warned them to stay away from a predominantly Jewish area on July 8.

"It would be reckless for the Baptists to come into West Rogers Park with big

MIDEAST FOCUS

Mubarak supports Hezbollah

Egypt's president visited Lebanon, where he voiced support for Hezbollah gunmen trying to oust Israeli soldiers from the country.

President Hosni Mubarak became the first Egyptian leader to visit the Lebanese capital since Lebanon won independence in 1943. Foreign Minister David Levy later told Israel Radio that Mubarak's remarks Saturday were "worrisome."

Syria makes Druse overture

Syria suggested to Israel that they set up a site on the Golan Heights where Druse from opposite sides of the border can meet and talk. Until now, the villagers have had to shout across the cease-fire line from a distance of hundreds of yards.

Israel sees the overture from Damascus, made through the International Red Cross, as reflecting Syria's intention to resume stalled peace talks.

Police want Netanyahu indicted

Israeli police questioned former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for six hours on suspicion he accepted bribes, misused state funds and illegally kept gifts worth thousands of dollars.

Israel Television said police would recommend indicting Netanyahu on all three counts and that Netanyahu's wife, Sara, would be charged with fraud and illegally keeping state gifts given to the couple.

Restrictions on scientists lifted

Israeli scientists will face fewer security restrictions when they visit U.S. national laboratories, according to U.S. Energy Department officials.

The provision lifting the restrictions is expected to be part of an agreement to be signed later this week by Israel and the United States.

Israeli scientists have faced the restrictions because of Israel's refusal to swear off nuclear weapons.

numbers on that date," said the Chicago Board of Rabbis' Youdovin.

It will be almost precisely a year after Benjamin Smith shot and wounded six Jews on their way home from synagogue on Friday evening, July 3. The next day, Smith shot and killed a black man in Skokie, Ill., and, on Sunday morning, shot and killed a Korean American coming out of church in Indiana. He then turned his gun on himself after being overtaken by police.

"To come through on Shabbat with large numbers of Christians on that anniversary could set off some very very bad vibrations. It could achieve the kind of agitation that's the last thing anybody wants to achieve," Youdovin said.

Reaction to the overall Southern Baptist campaign has been deeply divided among Jews.

The Southern Baptist Convention — this country's largest Protestant denomination, with approximately 16 million members — has had a dicey relationship with the Jewish community going back at least two decades.

In 1980 Bailey Smith, then the denomination's president, said that "God Almighty does not hear the prayer of the Jews."

Announcement of the new conversion campaign last November came on the heels of a firestorm of controversy over the distribution of Southern Baptist prayer guides, each of which targeted a different religious minority — Jewish, Hindu and Muslim — and detailed ways to pray for their conversion to Christianity.

The guides were distributed right before each group's holiest annual holidays.

Last September the denomination also supported a conference, called "To the Jew First in the New Millennium: A Conference on Jewish Evangelism," in New York City.

That, on top of the resolution passed three years ago promoting evangelism specifically among Jews, laid explosive groundwork for the more recent campaign announced by the Baptists.

Now that the initial contretemps has blown over, some are downplaying the threat that the Southern Baptist campaign poses.

"Sixteen million people aren't going to converge, take out their swords, and try and convert Jews," said Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein. "The reaction on the part of some Jews is creating an environment conducive to that interpretation."

Eckstein is president of the Chicago-based International Fellowship of Christians & Jews, which raises millions of dollars each year from evangelical Christians for the resettlement of Jews from the former Soviet Union in Israel and other Jewish causes. But after two decades of working with Southern Baptist leadership, he officially broke from them when they made public their plans for targeted missionizing.

Still, he said, in terms of being converted during the Chicago campaign, "Jews don't have anything to worry about on the concrete side. But on the principle side, it shows just how far there is to go in the relationship."

Others, however, disagree with that perspective.

"If you go into a community and smother them with so many missionaries, they're bound to seize on people who are very vulnerable and who will fall into their hands," said Philip Abramowitz, director of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council's Task Force on Missionaries and Cults.

According to Tcath of the Chicago JCRC, "There is a tendency among some activists in the community to belittle the threat, who say we shouldn't overreact, but we know there are thousands of Jewish individuals who have left the fold, who have gone into Christianity, and we can't let that pass without an effort to prevent future loss of precious Jews."

He initiated a local task force representing about 20 local Jewish agencies and communal organizations to address the Southern Baptist issue.

It is bringing representatives of the organization Jews for Judaism to lead workshops for Jewish educators, youth workers, rabbis and the Chicago Jewish public in late March or early April, Tcath said.

It is also creating a couple of different pamphlets geared toward Russian immigrants and young people detailing "the arguments they cite, their tricks they use in shaping the discussion down their path. We look to list the types of issues they will raise and what appropriate responses are," Tcath said. One may be: "Save yourself the effort and don't knock my faith or on my door." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Austrians protest Haider

An estimated 150,000 people gathered in Vienna in the largest protest yet against the inclusion of Jorg Haider's far-right Freedom Party in the new Austrian government.

After holding demonstrations across the city in pouring rain and low temperatures, the protesters converged Saturday night on the Heldenplatz, or Heroes' Square, where thousands of Austrians welcomed Hitler in 1938.

Ohio schools to open for holidays

An Ohio school district will no longer be closed for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The district outside Cincinnati said a threatened lawsuit from the American Civil Liberties Union had no bearing on its decision to ban the two-year experiment, which was launched because of high absentee rates on those days.

Zhirinovskiy can't run

Russia's central election commission refused to allow ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy to register for the country's upcoming presidential elections. The move, based on Zhirinovskiy's failure to list a two-room apartment in his property declaration, is being seen as another attempt to pave the way for acting President Vladimir Putin's victory in the March 26 elections.

Meanwhile, a Communist lawmaker known for his anti-Semitic remarks registered as a candidate for a special election for a seat in the Russian Parliament. Gen. Albert Makashov was banned from the original race for the Duma.

Lawmaker urges Christian history

A Republican state senator who says Kentucky schools are censoring Christianity's influence on American history is sponsoring legislation that would exclude non-Christian religions from lessons on colonial America. "When the boat came to these great shores, it did not have an atheist, a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian and a Jew," Sen. Albert Robinson said. "Ninety-eight percent of these people were Christians." Rep. Kathy Stein, the General Assembly's only Jewish legislator, said she is tired of attempts to "impose a majority faith."

Golden Arches grow in Brooklyn?

Will Orthodox Jews in the United States be among the billions served? Amid reports that he is planning to open the first kosher McDonald's in the United States, Simon Elyakim refused to comment on his plans to the New York Jewish Week newspaper.

But an official with one Orthodox rabbinical group in New York said he wouldn't issue the restaurant a kosher certificate because McDonald's food is perceived as nonkosher.

Barak tells U.S. Jewish leaders he has a plan to break impasse

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he will try to formulate a package that could break weeks of deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Barak's comments came during a speech Monday to a delegation of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which was on its annual mission to Israel.

His comments also came before the U.S. Middle East peace envoy, Dennis Ross, arrived in the region.

Members of the Presidents Conference also visited the Golan Heights, where they were briefed by settler leaders regarding a withdrawal from the area as part of a peace deal with Syria.

During his speech to the delegation, Barak referred to efforts to revive the Israeli-Palestinian track as being "in the interests of both sides."

Barak downplayed the significance of the recent stalemates in talks with both the Palestinians and Syria.

Just the same, he blamed the Palestinians for the current situation. "Somehow they felt the time is not right for them to expose their flexibilities," he said.

Yet he remained confident that Israel's negotiating partners continue to consider peace a strategic interest. "It was quite predictable that difficulties will arise," Barak said.

During his address to the American Jewish leaders, Barak condemned a barrage of anti-Israel rhetoric in the Arab press and among officials in Arab and Islamic governments that followed the recent Israeli bombings of civilian power stations in Lebanon.

Some government-backed publications and officials in Syria, for example, have compared the Israeli attacks in Lebanon to Nazi acts.

Barak also said the harsh statements "reflect a certain level of frustration" with the current situation.

He defended the Israeli attacks in Lebanon, which followed the recent deaths of seven Israeli soldiers during fighting with Hezbollah gunmen.

He said the attacks were a response to systematic violations by Hezbollah of a 1996 cease-fire agreement in which Israel and the Shi'ite gunmen had agreed not to fire from or on civilian areas.

The Israeli airstrikes, Barak added, were also meant to tell Lebanon and Syria that they should prevent any attacks against Israel once Israeli troops withdraw from Lebanon — and to "shape the rules of the game gradually for the post-redeployment period."

Barak also reiterated his pledge to withdraw Israeli troops from southern Lebanon by July.

Although Israel would prefer that the withdrawal be part of an agreement with Syria, Barak was adamant that with or without such an accord, Israel's presence in Lebanon will end within months.

"In less than four months, our boys will be back home," he said.

"It will make our defense of the northern border more effective, rather than less effective."

Reflecting the hostile Arab reaction to the recent Israeli airstrikes, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak visited Lebanon on Saturday and voiced support for Hezbollah gunmen trying to oust Israeli soldiers from the country.

Mubarak became the first Egyptian leader to visit the Lebanese capital since Lebanon won independence in 1943.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy later told Israel Radio that Mubarak's remarks Saturday were "worrisome."

A top Israeli security adviser, Danny Yatom, traveled to Cairo on Sunday to defend Israel's policy in Lebanon. □

Britain expected to come clean on Nazi-looted art in its galleries

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Britain's public art galleries and museums are expected to admit in the coming days to having acquired thousands of artworks since 1933 that may have been looted from Holocaust victims.

London's Tate Gallery alone is expected to reveal that it may have more than 100 Nazi-looted paintings on its walls.

The anticipated statement from the museums follows a call by the government last year for all public galleries to audit their collections for suspected looted artworks.

It is believed that lack of time has prevented the galleries and museums from conducting full audits of major silver, stamp, coin and firearm collections that have been acquired since 1933, when Hitler came to power.

The "suspect list" to be declared by the Tate includes famous works by Monet, Degas and Picasso.

The gallery is also currently facing a claim for an 18th-century painting, "View of Hampton Court," by Dutch master Jan Griffier the Elder. Two brothers and their sister, who fled to England from their home in Dusseldorf, Germany, say the work was stolen after their father, a German Jewish banker, was shot by the Nazis in the 1930s.

In a related development, the British government announced last week that it is setting up a panel to adjudicate claims by Holocaust survivors and their heirs to artworks in national collections.

Arts Minister Alan Howarth said the government wants to create a system that would resolve questions of ownership that "arise from the terrible events of the Nazi era."

He hoped that the panel, which will include lawyers, historians and art specialists, will serve as an alternative to costly legal proceedings.

In another development, the British government last week declared that it had met all claims on property seized in Palestine during World War II.

A report published by the Department of Trade and Industry concluded that the matter was "comprehensively settled" in agreements between Israel and Britain between 1950 and 1964.

The report was commissioned following allegations in 1998 that the British government had failed to return property confiscated from victims of Nazi persecution in Palestine.

In a related development, the government announced that it had paid out some \$2.5 million in claims by Holocaust survivors and their heirs — mostly in Israel — whose prewar assets in Britain were seized as "enemy property" and not returned.

Of the 948 claims that were received by the September 1999 deadline, a panel has considered more than 300 of the claims and reached a conclusion on about 160 so far.

Compensation ranged from \$800 to \$250,000.

Most of the assets involved cash that was deposited for safekeeping in British banks by residents of European countries that fell under Nazi occupation.

Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers expressed satisfaction that "such good progress has been made in righting this terrible injustice."

Announcing the compensation scheme in December 1998, the government apologized for the insensitive manner in which claims had previously been handled. □

Jewish leaders visit Russia, but acting president a no-show

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — When Vladimir Putin refused to meet with visiting American Jewish leaders, the U.S. delegation was told the acting Russian president was not receiving any foreign visitors so he could concentrate on domestic matters.

But some observers say political rivalry is the real reason Putin would not visit with the delegation from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which was hosted by the Russian Jewish Congress.

Observers say he wanted to distance himself from the RJC and its leader, Jewish media tycoon Vladimir Goussinsky.

Putin is allied with Goussinsky's rival mogul, Boris Berezovsky.

Goussinsky's national television channel has come under recent criticism from a business leader for "highlighting negative aspects" of Russia's war against Chechnya. Putin owes much of his popularity to his strong hand against Chechen rebels.

Despite the snub, the delegation met with several top Russian leaders, including Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and former Prime Ministers Yevgeny Primakov and Sergei Stepashin. The delegation also met with leading figures in the Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, including speaker and Communist leader Gennady Seleznyov.

Among the issues discussed were:

- **Iranian Jewish prisoners:** Ivanov said his office has been in contact with its Iranian counterpart on behalf of the 13 Iranian Jews arrested last month and accused of spying for Israel and the United States. The executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, Malcolm Hoenlein, confirmed that "the Russians have already helped us during the past couple of months."

- **Aid to Iran:** Russia has been accused of selling nuclear technology to Iran, but Ivanov said only nonmilitary technology has been transferred.

- **Anti-Semitism:** "We have included the Jews in the four traditional religions in Russia, so be happy about it," Seleznyov said in a reference to Judaism having been granted rights in a much-criticized 1997 religious law.

- **Synagogue security:** Luzhkov said he was ready to deliver concrete help to the Jewish community, including increased security for synagogues.

- **Chechnya:** Yevgeny Satanovsky, a Russian Jewish Congress leader, said he supports the Russian government's military action in Chechnya and reminded the delegation that several dozen Jews and Israelis, including children, have been taken hostage by the Chechens.

But if the delegation had hoped to gain insight into Putin, who is considered to be a shoo-in to win Russia's presidential elections next month, they appear to have been disappointed.

Said Ronald Lauder, the president of the Jewish National Fund, "It became very obvious to us that nobody knows who he is." □