

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Spain: Israel can join U.N. group

Israel came a step closer to full participation at the United Nations when Spain dropped its objections to letting the Jewish state join the European regional bloc at the world body. Spain became the last E.U. country to drop its objections, Vice President Al Gore told Jewish leaders Sunday. [Page 3]

Cabinet debates withdrawal

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak convened his Cabinet to discuss whether to keep Israeli troops in Lebanon.

Cabinet member Haim Ramon told Reuters before Sunday's session, "I hope that the outcome of this meeting will be" that Israel "will not remain in Lebanon later than July."

Papal official backs Pius' silence

The wartime pope was right not to publicly condemn the Holocaust because such a statement from Pope Pius XII could have cost more Jewish lives, the papal representative in the Holy Land told Israel Television.

Archbishop Pietro Sambi's statement on Saturday came less than a month before Pope John Paul II's planned trip to Israel and is likely to aggravate the resentment many Israelis feel toward the Roman Catholic Church for its failure to publicly condemn Nazism during the war.

French Jews praise Jospin

French Jewish leaders praised Prime Minister Lionel Jospin for describing Hezbollah attacks on Israeli soldiers in southern Lebanon as "terrorist acts."

"France should have a moderate policy, reaching out to Palestinians, Arab countries and Israel alike," Henri Hajdenberg, the leader of CRIF, the umbrella group of secular French Jewish organizations, told France's Radio Juive.

Russian stabber declared insane

A Russian court ordered that a student who stabbed a Moscow synagogue official last July be sent to a psychiatric clinic after it found him not guilty because he is legally insane.

An official with the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews criticized the decision to send Nikita Krivchun to a clinic for the attack on Leopold Kaimovsky. [Page 3]

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Hungary's Jews grow nervous with rising political anti-Semitism

By Michael J. Jordan

BUDAPEST (JTA) — When a leading Hungarian politician spices his speech with ominous references to "cosmopolitans" and "Communist Jews," it is not taken lightly.

Similar rhetoric half a century ago spurred a genocide that killed more than half a million Hungarian Jews. But speeches like Deputy Prime Minister Laszlo Kover's on Jan. 29 and assorted anti-Jewish provocations have become more common in Hungary during the past year. Which makes many in Central Europe's largest Jewish community jittery once again.

"I have a huge bottle of pills ready, just in case history repeats itself," said one 67-year-old woman, who survived the Budapest Ghetto. "I swear I'll never go through that twice."

Jewish observers say the increasing use of "political anti-Semitism" is more than a hate-mongering fringe at work. Instead, they contend, it is a cynical ploy by Hungary's crafty prime minister, Viktor Orban, and his advisers. Orban, 36, seems intent on carving out a future for himself as the Man of the Right.

No one suggests that Orban personally is an anti-Semite, but on his behalf some of his allies are skillfully employing nationalist Christian-conservative symbols and Holocaust revisionism.

"These are deeply coded messages to the far right to show that this is where their hearts beat," says writer Miklos Haraszti, a former dissident and liberal legislator. "They want these voters, even if they lose some sympathy from moderates and earn contempt from journalists and liberal opinion-makers."

Since last summer, a number of Jewish-related issues have grabbed the spotlight here, though the country's 100,000 or so Jews constitute just 1 percent of the population. First came a government attempt — dropped after Jewish experts protested — to rewrite the text of the Hungarian exhibit at Auschwitz, which was installed in 1965.

The new version would have shifted all blame for the Hungarian Holocaust onto Germany, which occupied the country on March 19, 1944, and made no mention of Hungary's role.

A second incident occurred last autumn, when the officials unveiled a plaque to commemorate the Hungarian gendarmerie.

It ignored the fact that these same police, for seven weeks in the spring of 1944, enthusiastically carried out Nazi orders to round up and deport 437,000 Jews from the Hungarian countryside.

Hungarian Jews assail these moves as an orchestrated campaign to whitewash Hungary's past.

But Maria Schmidt, a key adviser to Orban and oft-criticized as one of Hungary's leading revisionists, argues that after four decades of communism — during which historical documentation was indeed ideologically skewed — there's a need to relate history from a new perspective.

"For 40 years, they were lying about everything," Schmidt told JTA. "I'm glad that now there's competition in the telling of history, because no one should have a privileged position or monopoly. We all live in this country; we all have our own history and our own point of view."

Schmidt said she backs the unrestricted publication and distribution of "Mein

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon: Peace deal can wait

The leader of the Likud Party urged the Israeli government not to rush into any peace deal with the Palestinians. Referring to the pressure to reach an agreement before President Clinton ends his term, Ariel Sharon said, "Presidents come and go, but Israel has to stay forever."

Speaking Sunday to an international gathering of Jewish journalists in Jerusalem, Sharon also said that Israel should take strong action against Lebanon, which he said should be held responsible for Hezbollah actions against Israel.

The conference, sponsored by the World Zionist Organization, is bringing together more than 100 journalists, including dozens from the former Soviet Union and from North and South America.

Soldier won't serve in Lebanon

Israeli military officials jailed a soldier for four weeks for refusing to serve in southern Lebanon.

Tank technician Yigal Ben-Moshe, who had served before in the region, reportedly refused to return because he became frightened by recent Hezbollah attacks that killed seven Israeli soldiers.

Bar-Illan suffers heart attack

The communications director for former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was hospitalized after suffering a heart attack.

The Jerusalem Post reported Sunday that David Bar-Illan, 70, was rushed to Sha'are Zedek hospital in Jerusalem after he suffered the heart attack in his home Friday night.

Greek leader to visit Israel

The president of Greece plans to visit Israel in May.

Kostis Stephanopoulos' trip will mark the first time a Greek head of state visited Israel and reflects recently improved bilateral relations.



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Kampf," "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and other anti-Semitic tracts, which now populate many Budapest bookstores in new Hungarian editions.

More troublesome for Hungarian Jews, said Haraszti, is that Orban appears to welcome the parliamentary support of Istvan Csurka and his far-right Hungarian Justice and Life Party, or MIEP. Csurka was kicked out of the first post-Communist government in 1993 for his xenophobic views.

He returned to Parliament in July 1998, when MIEP squeaked past the 5 percent threshold, winning 14 seats out of 386.

Csurka and his minions are notorious for conspiratorial talk about "alien elements" and "liberal traitors."

They also have questioned the "disproportionate" number of Jews in the media, the leading symphony orchestras and the delegation of Hungarian authors to last year's Frankfurt Book Fair.

Last September the Council of Europe branded Csurka's party as "extremist."

As if to reinforce that judgment, Csurka is practically the only Central European politician to hail the stunning rise of Jorg Haider in Austria.

Some 500 MIEP supporters demonstrated recently in front of the Austrian Embassy in Budapest, at times chanting "Long Live Haider!"

Orban himself has said the European Union assault on Austria "surprised" him, as it "forces us all to think harder than usual about the deeper meaning of democracy."

He was also quoted as saying Haider's emergence was like "a stone being thrown into an intellectually and politically stagnant pond."

Ironically, while many of Hungary's Jews find the political climate increasingly stifling, some of them suggest that left-leaning Jewish intellectuals may be exacerbating it.

The left is sometimes too quick to decry right-wing rivals as "anti-Semites," said Gabor Szanto, editor of the Jewish magazine Szombat, or Sabbath.

The right then spins this claim into the countercharge that Jews are using anti-Semitism as a shield to deflect all criticism, even when it's legitimate.

"If you repeatedly accuse someone of being an anti-Semite and they really aren't, they grow angry and then they do become anti-Semites," Szanto said. "Each side is using anti-Semitism to discredit the other."

Orban, meanwhile, remains mum and above the fray. After all, Hungary is clamoring for full integration into the West.

Analysts suspect that Orban is searching for the fine line between how far rightward Hungarian society is willing to move and how much Hungary's Western partners are willing to tolerate.

At this point, compared to some of its neighbors — Austria, Yugoslavia, Croatia, Romania and Ukraine — Hungary seems like an oasis of economic and political stability.

So the West does not trouble itself with Hungarian domestic politics.

But international pressure — such as a scathing report by the Anti-Defamation League in December — may force Orban to change his ways.

Already the government announced in December that it would fund a Holocaust museum and documentation center.

And on Jan. 18, in a ceremony to commemorate the Soviet liberation of the Budapest Ghetto, Education Minister Zoltan Pokorni suggested that Hungary hold a Holocaust remembrance day every year.

Still, Hungarian Jews generally view these gestures as half-hearted attempts at damage control and public relations.

Many Jews were among the few thousand Hungarians who attended an anti-fascist demonstration in Budapest on Feb. 13.

"You won't be any better off by hiding or avoiding conflict; to them you'll still be the 'budos zsidó' [stinking Jew]," said Balint Molnar, 25, who attended the anti-fascist rally and has just completed a degree in international relations at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

"My grandfather, an 84-year-old Holocaust survivor, curses and swears and sometimes spits at the television set.

"But I think we should deal with anti-Semitism more dynamically. We should confront these people and make more noise about it." □

JEWISH WORLD

Spain removes an obstacle in path of Israel's membership in U.N. group

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israel came a step closer to full participation at the United Nations when Spain dropped its objections to letting the Jewish state join the European regional bloc at the world body.

Spain became the last E.U. country to drop its objections, Vice President Al Gore told Jewish leaders Sunday.

"We welcome the news," Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, told JTA. "This is an important step toward ending Israel's isolation at the U.N.

"Its inclusion in a regional group will end an injustice of 50 years standing," Hoenlein said.

The process of Israel joining the United Nations' Western European and Others Group will still take some time because there are still other nations, including Canada, New Zealand and Malta, that have to weigh in.

Membership in a regional group is a prerequisite for joining important U.N. committees and the Security Council.

Of all U.N. members, Israel alone is ineligible to sit on the Security Council, while nations cited by the U.S. State Department for terrorism — including Iraq, North Korea and Syria — are eligible because they are members of regional groups.

Admission in a regional group requires consensus on the part of its standing membership.

Not all members must approve the admission, but none can object.

Of the five regional groups at the United Nations, Israel geographically belongs to the Asian bloc, but members of that group — Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and others — have consistently blocked Israel's entry. □

Russian who stabbed shul official ruled not guilty and legally insane

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A Russian court has ordered that a student who stabbed a Moscow synagogue official last July be sent to a psychiatric clinic after it found him not guilty because he is legally insane.

In making its ruling on Nikita Krivchun for his attack on Leopold Kaimovsky, the court rejected the results of two previous psychiatric tests, which Krivchun passed.

Instead, the court based its decision on the results of a commission associated with the Serbsky Institute.

The institute, notorious during the Soviet era for concocting "psychiatric diagnoses" of Jewish activists and other dissidents, found the law student to be mentally ill.

It said he suffered from "paranoia with homicidal tendencies." Kaimovsky's lawyers agreed with this diagnosis.

An official with the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews criticized the decision, especially because Krivchun had passed the two previous tests.

"I don't understand why" Krivchun "was not sent to prison for attempted murder," said Micah Naftalin of the UCSJ.

Naftalin added that the decision "may represent a pattern of denial by some Russian leaders that anti-Semitism is a serious problem in their country."

But Lev Krichevsky, the director of the Moscow office of the Anti-Defamation League, says the diagnosis was correct.

"Krivchun is most probably really mentally disturbed to some degree," said Krichevsky.

"But his actions were triggered by the current atmosphere in Moscow," which is full of "ethnic hatred and xenophobia," he said. □

Lawyers seek Eichmann journals

Attorneys in a Holocaust denial lawsuit in London asked Israel for copies of the journal written by Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann prior to his execution in Israel in 1962.

The journals would be used to defend Jewish scholar Deborah Lipstadt in the defamation suit brought against her by Holocaust revisionist David Irving.

Group condemns Diallo verdict

A group of Jewish activists expressed "deep shock and outrage" after four New York police officers were acquitted of all charges connected to the shooting last year of Amadou Diallo, a West African immigrant.

The group, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, said it is "appalled at the miscarriage of justice in this historic trial."

Costa Rica presses collaborator

Costa Rica ordered an alleged Nazi war criminal to leave the country. Jewish groups have long criticized the nation for harboring Bodhan Koziy, who has been accused of killing Jewish children and their parents in Ukraine during World War II.

Under Costa Rican law, Koziy has several days to appeal the decision.

'Dr. Laura' slammed on gays

Some 180 clergy, health care experts, child welfare advocates and civil rights organizations sent radio talk show host Laura Schlessinger a letter asking her to rethink her anti-gay rhetoric.

Schlessinger, known to her audience as "Dr. Laura," is Jewish and frequently cites the Bible and Judaism in condemning homosexuality, calling it a "biological error."

Athlete vaults for the gold

Israeli pole vaulter Alexander Averbukh won the gold medal in the European indoor pole vaulting championship in Belgium, raising hopes he could also take a medal home in the Olympics.

Averbukh cleared nearly 19 feet in his first try.

He immigrated to Israel from Russia more than a year ago.

Lost Palestine film to be shown

A long-lost documentary about the pre-World War I Zionist community is scheduled to be screened next week in New York.

"The Life of the Jews in Palestine," which was filmed in Palestine in 1913, was discovered three years ago in a French film archive.

The 78-minute film was restored and shown in Jerusalem in 1998.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**German media focus on money, not morals, in slave labor coverage***By Toby Axelrod*

BERLIN (JTA) — The issue of money, rather than morality, has made headlines across Germany during the ongoing negotiations for a fund to compensate Holocaust-era slave laborers.

Before negotiators agreed late last year on a total of \$5.2 billion for the fund, the talks were snagged over differences involving billions of marks — at a time when more than 4 million Germans are jobless.

The focus on money has been a troubling and frustrating phenomenon for many of those at the bargaining table.

"It's not just an issue of Jews wanting more money. That pains me greatly," said Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which was among the groups negotiating on behalf of the laborers.

"You translate things into financial terms, so it is easy for people to say it is all about money, but it isn't. You can't pay anyone what they should get. That's the starting and ending point for me."

Rabbi Andrew Baker, director of European affairs for the American Jewish Committee, agrees that those who suffered cannot ever be paid enough.

But at the same time, he said the talks are about money — "and I don't think we should be embarrassed about it," he said at a recent seminar on the topic of compensation, sponsored by the organization's Berlin office.

For years, former SS members have received their old-age pensions, he reminded those in attendance. What about those who suffered under their hands?

Earlier this month, negotiators wrapped up the latest round of talks with no agreement on how to divide the \$5.2 billion.

Talks are slated to continue March 7-8 in Washington.

Survivor advocates have questioned whether the compensation package should include a planned \$1 billion "future fund" for memorials and educational projects, as well as a plan to set aside a small portion of the fund to compensate those who lost property due to the "Aryanization" of Jewish assets.

They say these well-meaning plans would come at the expense of survivors nearing the ends of their lives.

In addition, Wolfgang Gibowski, spokesman for the industry fund, expressed doubts that German industry would reach its goal of \$2.6 billion any time soon. The other half of the fund is coming from the German government.

Speaking at the seminar, Gibowski said he is about to contact some 240,000 German companies and ask them to contribute to the compensation fund whether they used slave laborers or not.

"It hurts, I can tell you," said Gibowski. "They tell me, 'For a million marks we can secure jobs or start a new company.'"

Distaste for all the focus on money was voiced by German legislator Erika Steinbach, who said money-hungry lawyers from America were responsible for bringing up the reparations theme.

She said it is little known that "millions of Germans had to suffer as slave laborers, even small children, after 1945."

Most Germans do not blame the Holocaust-era victims or exonerate the perpetrators. But they often appear more fixated on

the money to be paid out than on the crimes that occurred during the war.

Reparations are "important, but it hits the small person who will have to pay a higher tax," said a 58-year-old Berlin woman rushing home after work.

"What I don't understand is all this bargaining about money," said Uwe Glasbrenner, a 36-year-old travel agent. "News reports are all about how much money is in the fund, and how the German companies will have a hard time getting the money together. These are enormous sums."

When asked if he had an idea how many of the estimated 1 million surviving forced or slave laborers are Jewish, Glasbrenner guessed it was half.

In fact, less than 20 percent — about 168,000 — are Jewish.

Within that minority, some 140,000 are described as slave laborers because they were working as concentration camp prisoners, under constant threat of death.

The forced laborers, most of whom were deported to Nazi Germany from Eastern European nations, worked under better conditions than the slave laborers.

According to the best estimates of historians and survivors groups, said Alissa Kaplan, spokeswoman for the Claims Conference, there are 240,000 former slave laborers still living.

It is easy to see how the experiences of slave laborers can become lost in the tangle of financial discussions.

But, for an hour at the recent talks, the focus shifted to the crimes when those attending the seminar on compensation listened quietly to the testimony of Gunther Ruschin, a Berliner who was forced to work at an IG Farben factory at Auschwitz.

Deported as a teen-ager, he "became an adult man" upon arrival at the camp, where he was told, "The only way out of the concentration camp is through the chimney."

Ruschin described how he saw a 14-year-old prisoner hanged "because allegedly he had stolen potatoes. But the child was so light that he did not die. One of the people there almost went crazy — he was yanking the child down by his feet."

Many survivors today are destitute, living in former Soviet lands, and waiting for a token acknowledgment of their suffering.

But they will all have to wait at least a bit longer because, beyond the various disagreements about how to make distributions, the German Parliament has yet to approve a law endorsing the fund before payments can be made.

When all is said and done, each survivor may receive a few thousand dollars from the fund — at best a symbolic nod to their suffering.

"Can symbols help people? We think they can," said the Claims Conference's Taylor. "They can help survivors recover their dignity." □

California considers hate bill

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — California's governor has proposed legislation to combat hate groups, which he said pose a "very serious threat to public safety."

Gray Davis' bill would strengthen existing laws by expanding the definition of a hate crime, automatically lengthening by three years the prison terms of convicted felons whose crimes were motivated by hatred and extending the statute of limitations covering hate crimes from one to three years. □