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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

'Iran 13' may face trial in April

Thirteen Iranian Jews arrested last year amid allegations they spied for Israel and the United States will go on trial April 13, according to media reports in Iran.

According to Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the families of the 13 prisoners have been told to get a lawyer by the end of the week.

Hoenlein has heard reports from inside Iran that some of the 13 are being targeted for conviction and that the remainder will be set free.

Chechens free Jewish hostage

Chechen gangs released a Jewish hostage after ransom was paid by a Moscow-based Chechen businessman, according to Russia's security services.

Yefim Kazarets, 51, who had been held in Chechnya for eight months, was reported in relatively good condition. [Page 1]

Knesset bill could kill Syrian deal

Israel's Knesset gave preliminary approval to a bill that could kill the chances of a peace deal with Syria.

The bill, supported by three parties in Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's governing coalition, requires that a referendum by Israelis on a withdrawal from the Golan Heights be approved by more than 50 percent of all eligible voters — rather than by the more easily attainable majority of those who actually vote.

Meanwhile, Israeli and American officials are denying that a date has been set for a resumption of Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations.

But Israel's deputy defense minister, Ephraim Sneh, said he has a gut feeling talks would renew within a month. [Page 4]

Eichmann: Shoah a death dance

The Holocaust was the "greatest and most violent dance of death of all time," Adolf Eichmann wrote in his memoirs.

"I want this only to be a warning," Eichmann wrote in the manuscript, which Israel released to the public this week after holding it under lock and key for nearly 40 years.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Russia's Mountain Jews support war in Chechnya, but are eager to get out

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — As Russian troops inexorably push Chechen separatist rebels deeper toward the border with the former Soviet republic of Georgia, Western protests are mounting against the Russian army's crimes against civilians.

But Jews in the Caucasus region appear to be overwhelmingly supportive of Russia's military solution.

"I think, and many of our people here think, that the military operation has to be accomplished. Only then are we going to have a stable situation in the region," said Svetlana Danilova, a Jewish community leader in the city of Nalchik, which is located in a republic bordering Chechnya.

Boris Shubayev, who works for the Jewish Agency for Israel in Nalchik, said his mother and sister gave homemade pirogen, or Russian-style dumplings, to Russian soldiers passing through town on their way to the front. "We want them to finish the Chechen rebels. There is no other way out."

"We are not against the Chechen people," he added apologetically. "My family lived in Chechnya and had always been friendly with the Chechens. When Stalin deported the Chechens in 1944, many of them left their houses to their Jewish neighbors and knew that not a single cushion on the bed would be touched. Now everything has changed."

Shubayev and other Mountain Jews here say the Chechen war and the atrocities committed by the Chechens and other "ethnic gangs," including the kidnapping of Jews, has destroyed the tenuous multicultural balance that had served as the underlying fabric of life in this region.

The first Mountain Jews, who currently constitute more than 50 percent of the roughly 25,000 Jews of the North Caucasus, came from Persia to the North Caucasus not later than the eighth century. They spoke a sort of "Persian Yiddish," a Farsi dialect with a heavy mixture of Hebrew.

Living for many centuries as an enclave surrounded by Muslims and Christians, this oldest Jewish community in Russia managed to maintain its identity and keep stable relations with its neighbors.

Today many are concentrated in the cities of Derbent, Makhachkala and Buynaksk in the Republic of Dagestan, where the Jewish population has diminished from 50,000 to fewer than 10,000 during the past 10 years. Most of the Jews who have left, many of whom fled before the first Russian-Chechen war in 1996, have emigrated to Israel or America, or moved to Moscow.

Despite their drastically diminished numbers, the Mountain Jews in Dagestan and elsewhere in the North Caucasus maintained their communities — and until recently many of them intended to stay on. But the increased ethnic tension and the number of kidnappings and acts of violence — which have rapidly spread to the neighboring republics and even to Moscow — have convinced many of the remaining Jews to leave.

Roman Ashurov, of Nalchik, was already considering a move to Israel.

Then Ashurov, whose children had already moved to Israel, was kidnapped by Chechen gangs who believed that the international Jewish community and Israel would be willing to pay dearly for Jewish captives.

Released a month ago after having spent a year in captivity, Ashurov, 61, is physically and emotionally fragile and reluctant to speak, but his relatives told JTA that

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon: Don't aid Syria

Even if Syria makes peace with Israel, it should receive no financial aid from the United States because it would use the money to buy weapons, according to Israel's opposition leader. Financial aid would allow Syria "to equip itself with modern Western weapons," Ariel Sharon told the Associated Press.

He charged that Syria used \$2 billion in U.S. aid after the 1991 Persian Gulf War to buy arms.

Hezbollah kills 5 SLA soldiers

Five members of the Israel-allied South Lebanon Army were killed in a roadside explosion in southern Lebanon. Three other SLA soldiers were wounded in exchanges with Hezbollah.

The Israeli army said the blast was a violation of understandings not to fire on or from civilian areas.

Israel to proceed with China deal

Israel will take into account any U.S. objections if China again asks the Jewish state to install an advanced airborne radar system into more planes, according to Israel's deputy defense minister.

But Israel would go ahead with the delivery of one such plane, Ephraim Sneh said Tuesday.

Levy: Palestinians freed militants

The Palestinian Authority recently released Hamas activists from prison, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy told the visiting British secretary of state for Northern Ireland. During Tuesday's meeting, Levy told Peter Mandelson that a terrorist infrastructure continues to operate in the self-rule areas "like an inactive volcano in danger of erupting."

Billions flow into Israel

Israeli firms raised some \$5 billion in capital locally and abroad last year, according to the Bank of Israel. It was the largest total during the past decade, the central bank said.



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female members of the gang had mutilated his genitalia. Ashurov, who urgently needs an operation, arrived in Israel on Wednesday — and is planning to stay.

Chechen gangs released another Jewish hostage this week after a ransom was paid by a Moscow-based Chechen businessman, according to Russia's security services.

Yefim Kazarets, 51, who had been held in Chechnya for eight months, was reported in relatively good condition.

Fewer than 50 Jews are being held hostage, but as knowledge about each case spreads, more Jews are tempted to leave. The war is also creating a refugee problem — and Jewish organizations in Russia and the West have recently launched a fund-raising campaign to aid both Jewish and non-Jewish refugees fleeing Russian troops.

Martin Horowitz, director of the Jewish Community Development Fund in Russia and Ukraine, said 400 Jewish refugees have been identified by the Russian Jewish Congress. But data from Jewish sources in the North Caucasus cities shows that the actual number of Jewish refugees — Jews who fled the current fighting or persecution in Chechnya — is probably fewer than 100.

There are likely thousands of non-refugee Jews who want to leave.

Karen Gurshumov, one of the leaders of the Dagestani Jewish community, is disappointed with the aid programs, with the exception of the Chesed social service programs run by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Gurshumov and other Jewish activists say the real problem is the deplorable situation of thousands of "non-refugee" Jewish families, who can't sell their apartments or houses and don't want to leave without any money at all.

The economy of the region is poor, and many people are unemployed.

Yeshsya Abramov, a Moscow-based RJC leader in charge of helping Caucasian Jews who want to resettle elsewhere, says he is negotiating with municipal authorities to acquire an apartment for 300 families near Moscow. Some 30 percent of the apartments, he says, will be given to non-Jewish refugee families.

Abramov says he expects most of the Jews from the North Caucasus to emigrate.

"Seventy percent of Jews," says Abramov, would "leave immediately if they had the opportunity to sell their homes." □

Hezbollah: Israel fight continues with or without Syria peace deal

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Hezbollah will turn its attention to resisting normal relations with Israel if Syria and Lebanon reach a peace settlement with the Jewish state, according to the Shi'ite group's leader.

"We will continue to consider it an illegitimate, alien and cancerous entity which we cannot recognize," Sheik Hassan Nasrallah recently told the Egyptian semiofficial daily Al-Ahram. "We will engage with other parties in resisting normalization with this entity, because that is how Israel will be prevented from becoming a superpower in the region."

Just as the territorial ambitions of Israel had been thwarted, he said, "Resistance to normalization will foil a Greater Israel in political, economic and cultural terms."

But, like other Hezbollah officials before him, he preferred to remain ambiguous on the subject of future military action in the event of an Israeli withdrawal from the southern Lebanon security zone.

"That is a question we will not talk about now because keeping the answer secret serves Lebanese interests at the moment."

While Hezbollah refrained from launching Katyusha attacks on northern Israel in retaliation for the recent bombing of Lebanese infrastructure targets, he continued, "It reserves the right to respond at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way."

Nasrallah vehemently denied that Hezbollah's actions are dictated by Syria or that they are affected by the state of Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

"There is friendship, brotherhood, trust, cooperation and exchanges of views with Syria," he said. "But it is Hezbollah which takes the decisions it deems fit to serve national interests." □

JEWISH WORLD

Conservative, Reform movements ask Israelis to tie the knot their way

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Conservative and Reform movements have launched an advertising campaign aimed at attracting more Israeli couples to marry through a non-Orthodox rabbi.

The campaign will include ads in major newspapers and radio commercials, appealing to young Israelis to choose an egalitarian wedding service.

A campaign poster shows a photo of a bride placing a ring on a groom's hand, an image meant to contrast the Orthodox marriage ceremony in which only the man gives his wife a ring.

Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of the Masorti movement in Israel, told a news conference Wednesday, "Our ceremony is no less Jewish and no less religious than the Orthodox ceremony."

He said the Israeli Conservative movement is offering a ceremony that is "relevant" to the lives of modern Israeli couples.

The advertising campaign will target Israeli couples from all walks of life who seek an alternative to the state-recognized Orthodox wedding.

It will not specifically focus on couples whom Orthodox rabbis refuse to marry, such as a divorced woman to a Kohen, or priest.

Since the Orthodox establishment controls marriage in the Jewish state, couples who are wed by a non-Orthodox rabbi are not eligible to be registered as married by the State of Israel.

Instead, most opt to fly to Cyprus afterward to be married in a civil ceremony, which is recognized by the state. Liberal rabbis called for an end to this "absurd" situation.

The publicity drive is the second stage of a campaign launched five months ago under the banner, "There Is More Than One Way To Be Jewish."

That campaign caused a ruckus when Israel Radio first refused to air the commercials, claiming they were too controversial.

The cost of the campaign — nearly \$500,000 — is being paid for by the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund of San Francisco.

Rabbi Meir Azari, chairman of the Progressive Rabbis Council in Israel, said the campaign is the latest stage of a "revolution" taking place regarding Israeli awareness of non-Orthodox movements.

"The younger generation, the high-tech generation, is looking for an alternative and I see this very clearly in Tel Aviv," Azari said. "This campaign comes to strengthen that feeling."

The Reform and Conservative movements say they married 600 and 300 couples, respectively, in Israel last year.

Both movements say they are witnessing increased interest in their marriage ceremonies.

The liberal streams also hope to generate added exposure through the thousands of guests who attend the weddings.

Idit Lev, a 29-year-old Israeli who got married in a Conservative ceremony last September, said many guests to her wedding "were sorry when they saw there is another way" to get married.

"The ceremony we had was a Jewish ceremony but it was also our ceremony," she added.

Both movements say their wedding ceremonies are fully founded in Jewish tradition.

They differ from Orthodox ceremonies by allowing couples to play a bigger role in crafting the ceremony in a more egalitarian way.

For example, the liberal ketubah, or marriage contract, is designed to stress the partnership of marriage instead of the Orthodox concept of kinyan, or "acquisition" of a bride by a groom.

The non-Orthodox ketubah is also written in Hebrew instead of Aramaic. □

Legislator's office vandalized

Anti-Semitic graffiti was scrawled on the door of a U.S. legislator's district office. "Acts of hate directed against Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims or any other group or person in this country are unacceptable and will not be tolerated," said Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), who is Jewish.

ZOA blasts U.S. report

The U.S. State Department seriously under-reported the number of Palestinian attacks on Israelis last year in its annual report on human rights, according to the Zionist Organization of America.

ZOA President Morton Klein sent Secretary of State Madeleine Albright a list of 84 attacks in 1999, adding that the State Department's total of three attacks is "patently false."

Norway: Israel alone killed waiter

There was no cooperation between Norwegian security services and Israel's Mossad in a Lillehammer, Norway murder 27 years ago, according to a Norwegian panel.

In 1973, Mossad agents killed a Moroccan waiter they had mistakenly identified as a member of Black September, which was responsible for killing Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games.

The panel's report was highly critical of Israel for violating Norwegian sovereignty, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

Looted work may hang in D.C.

The National Gallery of Art in Washington announced that one of its paintings went through the hands of a well-known Nazi art dealer, according to the World Jewish Congress.

The work, "Still Life with Fruit and Game" by 16th century Flemish painter Frans Synders, was handled by Karl Haberstock, whom the WJC called "one of the most notorious of Nazi art dealers."

The work may have been looted from Jews.

Chicago man ordered deported

A U.S. immigration appeals board upheld a court order that Chicago resident Juozas Naujalis be deported to Lithuania for serving in a Nazi-sponsored unit there that murdered thousands of Jews.

In a separate development, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a deportation order against Ferdinand Hammer, a Michigan resident accused of serving as a guard at two Nazi concentration camps.

Pollard judge dies at 77

The judge who sentenced Jonathan Pollard to life in prison for spying for Israel died Sunday. Aubrey Robinson Jr., 77, died of a heart attack in Washington.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Knesset tries to make it difficult for Syrian referendum to pass

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is determined to forge ahead with his troubled peace process despite a dramatic blow from the Knesset.

The Israeli Knesset on Wednesday passed a bill that could kill the chances of a peace deal with Syria.

The bill requires that a referendum by Israelis on a withdrawal from the Golan Heights be approved by more than 50 percent of all eligible voters rather than by the more easily attainable majority of those who actually vote. Barak had pledged to hold the referendum when and if he reaches a final peace deal with Damascus.

"No parliamentary trick will block the will of the Israeli people," Barak told a group of Jewish journalists in Jerusalem on Wednesday.

Three parties in his governing coalition supported the opposition-sponsored bill. Wednesday's vote — 60-53, with one abstention — raised doubts about the stability of Barak's government and his ability to deliver on the promises he makes when and if the now-suspended negotiations with Syria resume.

When asked how he could continue to govern with coalition partners that voted against his position, Barak said that he would not let them derail the government in its attempt to move forward on the "important issues."

If passed, the bill would mean that if 80 percent of the electorate turns out to vote in the referendum — a typical Israeli turnout — more than 60 percent of the voters would have to approve it for the peace treaty to go into effect.

At present, according to the polls, the public's support in the referendum — even if only a majority of those actually voting is required — is by no means assured.

Meanwhile, Israeli and American officials are denying that a date has been set for a resumption of Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations. The statements follow reports in the Arab media of Syrian optimism about renewing talks. Israel's deputy defense minister, Ephraim Sneh, said he has a gut feeling negotiations would renew within a month. However, Barak said Wednesday, "I don't know when and if" talks with Syria will be resumed.

A peace treaty with Syria has to go through three stages: Cabinet approval, passage by 61 of the 120 Knesset members and the referendum. The legislation must still pass additional Knesset votes and two committees before becoming law. That process can take months, and the bill may never reach that stage.

During the debate prior to Wednesday's vote, Justice Minister Yossi Beilin attacked the bill as a "racist law," saying it would assure that the votes of Israel's Arab minority would not tip the balance in the referendum. "Those of you who have God in their hearts won't do this," he said.

Likud member Silvan Shalom, who introduced the bill, was heckled by Arab legislators when he claimed that "a majority of the people opposes a withdrawal from the Golan."

Predicting that the bill would be overturned in future Knesset votes, Barak also expressed confidence that the Israeli people would pass a peace referendum by a "landslide."

Just the same, the support the bill got from three of Barak's

coalition partners — the immigrant-rights Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party, the National Religious Party and the fervently Orthodox Shas Party — was a blow to Barak's prestige.

Under their coalition agreements with Barak, the right-leaning Yisrael Ba'Aliyah and NRP can vote according to their conscience on political matters. But Barak brought Shas, the third-largest party in the Knesset, into his government with the hope that its politically moderate views would provide backing for his peace policies. □

(JTA Editor Lisa Hostein in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Farrakhan's use of anti-Zionists not endearing him to mainstream

By Brigitte Dayan

JUF News

CHICAGO (JTA) — Louis Farrakhan says he is trying to reach out to Jews — but mainstream Jewish leaders aren't buying it.

The 66-year-old Farrakhan has spoken publicly of reconciliation since battling prostate cancer for the last several years, and the Nation of Islam leader invited a spokesman for a fervently Orthodox, anti-Zionist group to address a crowd of 20,000 black Muslims over the weekend in Chicago.

But Jewish leaders said the appearance of the Neturei Karta, who say the Holocaust was divine punishment for the Jews' abandonment of the Torah, was a ruse.

Farrakhan "hasn't mended fences with 99.99 percent of the Jewish community," said Ira Youdovin, the executive director of the Chicago Board of Rabbis, adding that the Neturei Karta are "about as far off the screen in Jewish life as they can possibly be."

Farrakhan's chief of staff, Leonard Muhammad, introduced the Neturei Karta rabbis at a news conference Monday, saying that the two groups have visited each other's communities over the last several months.

"These Jews are people of the book and they are a model of what black-Jewish relations could be," Muhammad said. "They are not handicapped by the pressures of organized Jewish groups," Muhammad added, referring to the widespread criticism that Farrakhan has received from virtually all segments of the Jewish community. The news conference came at the culmination of what has been called the 2nd International Islamic Conference, held in Chicago last weekend.

The conference, which was held in conjunction with Saviours' Day, the NOI's most important annual gathering, brought together Farrakhan's group with Imam W. Deen Mohammed, leader of the orthodox Muslim American Society and son of the late Elijah Muhammad.

The rabbis' participation in the Chicago event is just the latest indication of increased cooperation during the past year between the NOI and the Neturei Karta.

"The alliance between these two groups serves their mutual purposes," said Michael Kotzin, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation/Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago. "As far as the Jewish community is concerned, it certainly seems that what Farrakhan really seeks is the appearance of reconciliation but not the real thing." □