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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

'Iran 13' trial may last one day

The trial of 13 Iranian Jews accused of spying for Israel and the United States will last no more than a day, according to the judge handling the case.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for Iran's judiciary said it would be up to the judge to determine whether the trial, expected to take place next month, would be open to the public.

In response, American advocates for the 13 said the Iranian government had promised an open trial with foreign observers.

They expressed concern that without such safeguards the trial will be a sham.

Families of the 13 are seeking lawyers, albeit with some difficulty, according to a spokesman for the Los Angeles-based Council of Iranian American Jewish Organizations.

Pooya Dayanim added that most Iranian attorneys are reluctant to take the case, fearing that association with alleged spies for Israel could hurt their chances of attracting future clients.

In a separate development, the Shiraz police chief who originally ordered the arrest of the 13 was killed Wednesday in a helicopter crash.

Israelis kill 2 militants

At least two suspected Palestinian militants were killed when Israeli security forces tried to storm the building where they were hiding out in an Arab town near Tel Aviv.

One militant was arrested, and a member of Israel's anti-terror squad had his foot amputated after he was injured by an explosion of materials the group was believed to be planning to use in a terrorist attack against Israelis. [Page 4]

Bill would penalize Russia

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the Iran Non-Proliferation Act on Wednesday by a unanimous vote.

The act, which authorizes sanctions on Russian entities that assist Iran's nuclear program, is not meant to undermine the recent democratic advances of the Iranian people, said one congressman.

"It is my hope that some day soon, Iran will play a key supportive role in the Middle East peace process," said Rep. Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.), a co-author of the bill.

NEWS ANALYSIS

French prime minister's blunt talk seen as effort to boost Mideast role

By Joshua Schuster

PARIS (JTA) — Does France suddenly have two foreign policies toward Israel? That's the question left in the wake of Lionel Jospin's visit to Israel last week.

The French prime minister broke ranks with the country's long-standing foreign policy by taking a surprising pro-Israel stance and denouncing the "terrorist attacks" of Hezbollah — the anti-Israeli fighters in southern Lebanon who are popular with many Arab states long allied with France.

Such comments, which spurred a barrage of rocks aimed at Jospin's head courtesy of Palestinian protesters, also created controversy in France because it diverges from the country's official policy of impartially supporting Middle East peace.

French government officials are scrambling to clean up after Jospin's unexpected statements and reassure the international community that France has not changed any policy.

The embarrassed French President Jacques Chirac, whose traditional control over foreign affairs could be threatened by his rival Jospin, upbraided the prime minister with a stern lecture as soon as Jospin returned to France.

While France is reeling at the sudden bluntness of the prime minister, analysts see the prime minister's move as calculated to boost France's role as a power broker in Lebanese and Israeli relations as well as bolster his own power-brokering capacity at home.

Since elections in 1997, the socialist Jospin and conservative Chirac have been in an uneasy power-sharing agreement termed "cohabitation."

Pundits saw Jospin's statements as a political swipe at Chirac as France starts to look forward to elections in 2002.

The prime minister's candid remarks riled supporters and opposition alike, who have grown accustomed to balanced, staid policy pronouncements ever since cohabitation began.

Many protested that the largely tacit agreement that Chirac focus on foreign affairs while Jospin conducts domestic policy now seems jeopardized to the detriment of France's power and unity in international affairs.

Such destabilization, according to analysts, would hinder France's effectiveness as president of the European Union in the second half of this year.

Chirac told Jospin in a telephone call that his outbursts "could undermine the credibility of our foreign policy."

Jospin seemed to scoff at his rival's worry. Upon first hearing of Chirac's ire, Jospin, still in Israel, muttered, "What is Chirac going to tell me, that I transgressed Middle East politics?"

"It's not true. He can't tell me that the Hezbollah are angels."

The United States, for example, has long classified Hezbollah as a terrorist group.

Jospin and Chirac agree that the quick withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon is the best way to improve the stability of Lebanon and the security of Israel.

Many interpreted Jospin's remarks as paving the way for French forces to act as a buffer in Lebanon after Israeli troops withdraw.

"France is ready to facilitate" peace agreements, "even assume a role as guarantor in such or such a place," Jospin said in Israel.

A spokesman from France's Department of Foreign Affairs said by telephone that

MIDEAST FOCUS

Syria to Barak: Hang tough

Syria urged Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to stand firm after the Knesset won preliminary approval of a bill that placed obstacles in front of a possible peace treaty between the two countries.

Al-Ba'ath, the newspaper of Syria's ruling party, said Barak must not be swayed by "racist and rancorous hotheads" in Israel.

In another development, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa told Israel it would be suicide to withdraw from southern Lebanon without making peace with Syria first.

Interfaith summit in jeopardy

An interfaith summit planned during Pope John Paul II's pilgrimage to the Holy Land later this month is in jeopardy because the mufti of Jerusalem, the highest Muslim official there, refuses to participate. Israel's Ashkenazi chief rabbi said Thursday that Israel's chief rabbis have already agreed to participate.

Yisrael Meir Lau also said he believes the pope may offer a message of apology to the Jews for the church's silence during the Holocaust.

Civil rights activist gets award

Former Israeli Knesset member Shulamit Aloni was awarded this year's Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement.

The panel of judges cited Aloni, a champion of civil rights, for her contribution to a "fair, just and moral Israeli society" throughout her career as a teacher, lawmaker and publicist.

Israelis linked to Ecstasy ring

A crime ring run by Israelis and Russians brought large quantities of the drug known as Ecstasy into the United States, according to U.S. officials.

The officials made the announcement this week after cracking the multimillion-dollar international drug ring.



Daily News Bulletin

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"France is ready to put some troops on the border of Israel and Lebanon to monitor a peace agreement or a cease-fire. But that ought to only happen in the context of a peace settlement between the two countries."

While Jospin's visit marked a high in the often tepid relations between France and Israel, for many in France's Jewish community, Jospin's support was overdue.

Accompanying Jospin to Israel was Henri Hajdenberg, president of the European Jewish Congress, who told the French daily *Le Figaro* that Jospin's visit is "a re-balancing."

"France lost confidence in Israel in 1967 and had never rediscovered it since," said Hajdenberg, who is also the president of CRIF, the umbrella group of secular French Jewish organizations.

Other French Jews praised the visit, but were skeptical that one weekend could change much for either France or Israel.

"I am pleased at what Jospin said, but I am too worried to rejoice," said Theo Klein, honorary president of CRIF.

"I don't believe there is a change or turn in French policy and it is still between Lebanon and Israel and Syria to compose a difficult peace agreement. All that is new is that Jospin called Hezbollah by its real name."

Throughout his visit to Israel, Jospin praised the geographical and cultural ties between Israel and Europe.

According to Eliahu Ben-Elissar, Israel's ambassador to France, Jospin's visit "was a real success."

"He wanted to open a new chapter in French-Israeli relations and he clearly succeeded. He is a friend, and the rapport between our two countries is going to change."

However, once Jospin arrived back home, the French press quickly lambasted him for his seemingly rogue policy pronouncements.

The leftist daily *Liberation* called the Israel visit a serious "blunder" and saw Jospin's comments as maneuvering for the upcoming presidential vote.

The right-wing *Le Figaro* said Jospin's speech "introduces a rupture in the diplomatic and political contract of the state."

Moreover, the paper said, "It didn't just happen in a marginal place like the Ivory Coast, but the place that is most sensitive to the European civil wars: Israel and the Arab states!"

French government ministers did their best to clean up the chaos sown by Jospin's remarks.

France's minister of foreign affairs, Hubert Vedrine, said, "French policy on the peace process and its commitment to it seem clear to me."

Yet as much as Vedrine tried to present a unified front, the most telling admission of the confusion Jospin caused came from Vedrine after a recent news conference.

Believing the microphones had been turned off and that the press had left, Vedrine turned to Jospin and complained that his comments diverged from all previous French policy.

Jospin replied dryly that he intends to express himself with his own words and his own sensibility. □

German Jews could top 100,000

BERLIN (JTA) — The number of Jews in Germany could increase by 50 percent within the next five years, said the leader of the country's Jewish community.

The Jewish population could reach 120,000 by 2005, Paul Spiegel said in a magazine interview published Wednesday.

Citing the influx of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, he said, "This immigration is an enrichment and at the same time a task for which no Jewish communities in Germany were prepared for."

In the last decade of the 20th century, Germany's Jewish population has grown dramatically, making Germany the only country in Europe whose Jewish population is significantly growing. In fact, since 1990, Germany's official Jewish population has risen from 35,000 to 75,000, nearly a fifth of its prewar level. □

JEWISH WORLD

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Jewish group stiffens opposition to public funding for private schools

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Public funding for religious schools, one of the more divisive issues in the Jewish community, is being hotly debated again.

Just two years ago it seemed as if there was a shift toward some flexibility on the issue when the Jewish Council for Public Affairs adapted its strict resolution opposing public funding of religious education.

While the umbrella group of community relations councils and national agencies remained opposed to government funding in general, it granted exceptions where the public funds are used for court-approved, nonsectarian benefits, such as textbooks or computers.

This year, however, after a heated debate at its annual conference, JCPA delegates voted 318-259 to return to the stronger position, making a blanket statement that public funding should go to public schools only — without exception.

"We can't start subsidizing religious education," said Sammie Moshenberg, director of Washington operations for the National Council of Jewish Women.

Many delegates said the clause that allowed for court-approved exceptions was a "slippery slope" that could lead to vouchers or government influence in the classroom.

Moshenberg, who during the debate referred to the clause as "a loophole through which you can drive a Mack truck," believes government neutrality toward religion and the wall that separates church and state are ideals that are too important to alter even slightly. "We can't put a little chink in the wall just because it will benefit Jewish children," she said.

Not wanting to minimize support for Jewish education, NCJW joined together with the Orthodox Union in offering a resolution supporting private funding for private schools that was later adopted. But the O.U. stands firmly on the other side of the issue of public funding for religious education.

Nathan Diamant, director of the O.U.'s Institute for Public Affairs, was surprised by the JCPA vote. Public funding for day schools wouldn't take away money from public schools, Diamant said, but if private schools deny themselves government aid it could have devastating consequences for both types of schools.

"The worst thing for public schools is if the parochial schools shut down, which they'll do if they have to bear" the additional cost, he said.

Funding Jewish day schools exclusively with private money is not realistic, Diamant said. "The Jewish community hasn't shown it can galvanize the resources."

In Detroit, the exceptions to the rule of never using public money for private schools had worked well for the past few years, said David Gad-Harf, executive director for the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit. He said the exceptions allowed him to partner more effectively with day school leadership and parents as it clarified the difference between certain types of government funding and vouchers.

Public funding of private schools is particularly important to the Detroit community because vouchers will be on the ballot in Michigan in November.

Gad-Harf is unequivocal in his position that public money should not be spent for educational purposes at private schools, and he does not want money to be taken from the public school system. But receiving government money for auxiliary services, such as bus transportation, is "not a real diversion of funds," Gad-Harf said. "That's a lot different than siphoning off funds through vouchers," he added.

Raising money only from the private sector is feasible, Gad-Harf said. "If the Jewish community decided to make it a priority, it would work," he said. The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit recently established a fund for Jewish education and it already has attracted major donors.

Guila Franklin Siegal, JCPA's associate director for domestic concerns, understands the dilemma faced by local communities.

"The community relations councils continue to oppose vouchers," she said. "But they're dealing with day school systems that are sorely underfunded." □

Vatican releases Holocaust paper

The latest Vatican document to examine the Holocaust urges Christians to do more to preserve the memory of what happened.

But the 92-page "Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Errors of the Past," contains no apology for the Catholic Church's actions during World War II, a move demanded by some Jewish groups.

The Vatican had planned to unveil the document next week, but a French priest serving on the commission that wrote the document released it Wednesday.

Museums may keep looted art

Israeli Holocaust and art experts suggested that museums exhibiting Nazi-looted art keep the works as long as they explain how they were stolen from Jews.

Displaying a history of the theft alongside the work would educate museum-goers about the Holocaust, the directors of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and the Israel Museum said Wednesday.

The World Jewish Congress rejected the idea, saying museums should return looted works to the rightful owners.

France to hail Righteous Gentiles

French legislators passed a law calling for a national day of tribute to citizens who helped Jews escape arrest during the Nazi occupation.

Some 1,900 French people have been recognized as Righteous Among Nations by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem. They will be honored on the nation's already designated day of Holocaust remembrance, held annually on July 16.

Students to get new buildings

Jewish campus organizations in two U.S. cities announced plans to open their own buildings. The Jewish University Center in Pittsburgh will build a \$2.5 million building, while the Hillel at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore has purchased an existing structure.

Since 1990, 11 Hillels have moved into their own buildings, and at nine universities campaigns are under way for Hillel buildings, said a spokesman for Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

Spielberg foundation gives grants

Steven Spielberg's Righteous Persons Foundation announced grants of \$75,000 and more to Brandeis University's Genesis program for teens to explore their Jewish identities, and for the Los Angeles-based Jewish Television Network and Boston's Jewish Community Relations Council.

The foundation, created in 1994 with profits from Spielberg's Holocaust epic "Schindler's List," also announced smaller gifts to 16 other Jewish projects.

Israel thwarts terror attack in a deadly raid on hideout

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — At least three Palestinian militants were killed when Israeli commandos descended on an explosives-laden hideout in an Arab town in northern Israel.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak said the actions of the Israeli anti-terror squad Thursday prevented a major terrorist attack aimed at sabotaging the already faltering peace process.

The militants were members of Hamas, according to Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh, who said they planned to “inflict very heavy casualties” by launching a bomb attack within the Jewish state.

Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami spoke of “cooperation” with Palestinian officials, suggesting that Israeli security officials had been tipped off by their Palestinian counterparts.

Ben-Ami linked the Israeli raids to two other recent alerts about possible terrorist attacks — one in Jerusalem, the other in Netanya.

Both of these attacks were stopped in the planning stages.

Before dawn the commandos surrounded the two-story hideout, located in the village of Taiba, north of Tel Aviv.

When they ordered the militants to come out, one emerged and was taken into custody.

Then another two emerged: one wielding a pistol, the other carrying a suitcase filled with explosives.

The pistol-carrying Palestinian opened fire, and the Israeli forces returned fire.

In the exchange, the suitcase blew up, killing both militants.

A member of the Israeli squad had his foot amputated after he was injured by the explosion.

Throughout the day, Israeli forces remained at their positions surrounding the house and were posted on rooftops of neighboring buildings.

A helicopter buzzed overhead.

Immediately after the shootout, the commandos sent a bomb-sniffing dog inside the building. It died almost immediately in an explosion.

At midday, the commandos found the body of another militant inside, and the security forces believed a fifth was still in the building.

Believing another member of the terror cell was still at large, Israeli police and army troops set up roadblocks in Israeli Arab towns and at sites across the West Bank.

The building owner who rented out the apartment did not know the identities of the five militants, according to a friend of the owner.

The mayor of Taiba later said he was convening a town meeting to persuade local residents not to rent apartments to outsiders without conducting a background check.

“The incident has nothing to do with Taiba at all,” said Mayor Issam Massawa.

“I hope that the Israeli radical right does not use this against Arab Israelis.”

Two terror attacks carried out last year by Israeli Arabs prompted speculation that they were being recruited by Hamas militants. □

Anti-Semitic writer assigned to cover British Holocaust trial

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Australia’s Jewish community is outraged by a magazine’s decision to have a Holocaust revisionist cover a libel suit brought by another Holocaust revisionist.

Helen Darville has been assigned to cover the case in London of revisionist David Irving’s suit against American academic Deborah Lipstadt.

Darville, using the name “Helen Demidenko,” authored a 1994 novel, “The Hand That Signed the Paper,” that purported to be a fictionalized oral history of how European Jews brought the Holocaust upon themselves due to their mistreatment of Ukrainians.

Despite an almost universal view in academic and Jewish circles that the book promoted anti-Semitism, it received Australia’s most prestigious literary award, with special recognition given to the “ethnic” author.

During an inquiry into the writer’s background, it was discovered that Darville had taken the name “Demidenko” from a real perpetrator of one of the most notorious incidents of the Holocaust, the 1941 massacre at Babi Yar in which 33,000 Jews were killed.

The inquiry also found that Darville had a record of supporting right-wing political causes.

Later, Darville had a short-lived career as a newspaper columnist, which ended after she submitted a column plagiarized from an Internet site.

Jack Marx, the editor of Australian Style magazine, defended his choice of Darville, claiming that she “does know a lot about World War II.”

His comment came despite the debunking on historical grounds of much of “The Hand That Signed the Paper.”

Irving is suing Lipstadt and her publisher, Penguin Books, who are alleged to have libeled Irving in Lipstadt’s 1994 book “Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory.”

Irving, 62, who denies that Jews were systematically exterminated at Auschwitz, is claiming that Lipstadt ruined his career by labeling him a Holocaust denier and accusing him of distorting historical data to suit his ideological predilections.

Irving has been refused a visa to visit Australia by a succession of governments, which have declared him a person not of “good character.”

Robert Klarnet, public affairs director of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, said the “decision to have Helen Darville report on David Irving was media sensationalism of the worst kind.”

“To have a person whose reputation is based entirely on perpetrating a literary fraud, with an anti-Semitic novel, interview and write on a person who is an icon amongst the far right could only have been done with the intention of selling magazines rather than illuminating any issue,” he said.

Mark Leibler, national chairman of the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, said Darville and Irving “do have one thing in common: their integrity and reliability — or should I say the lack of them.” □