



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 78, No. 49

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

IDF plans Lebanon withdrawal

Israeli army officials formulated a plan for a unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. The plan, code-named "Morning Twilight," calls for the creation of a 500-yard buffer zone north of Israel's border with Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Ehud Barak told a Knesset committee that Israel would withdraw from parts of the Golan Heights only after Syria normalizes ties with the Jewish state. He also said there are now no direct or indirect contacts with Syria.

In a related development, Israel Radio quoted senior political sources as saying the United States had informed Israel that Syria would give a response within three weeks on whether it intends to resume negotiations.

Clinton urged to wait for 'Iran 13'

A Los Angeles congressman is mobilizing colleagues to urge President Clinton not to lift an embargo on Iranian products until 13 Jews awaiting trial on charges of spying for Israel are freed.

Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.) said in a letter to the Clinton administration that opening U.S. markets to Iran would be "potentially catastrophic for the accused, as well as the larger Jewish community in Iran." Following the victory of moderate parties in Iran's February elections, U.S. officials have been exploring ways to support Iranian reformers.

Ex-HUC bookkeeper indicted

The former bookkeeper of the Reform movement's seminary in Los Angeles was charged with embezzling more than \$1 million from the institution.

Jean Thorbourn has been charged with 13 counts of forgery, one count of grand theft and four counts of filing false state tax returns. [Page 4]

Israel to release more prisoners

Israel announced it would release more Palestinian prisoners in the next few days. Chief Israeli negotiator Oded Eran said discussions were under way with the Palestinians on the releases.

Nazi-looted painting returned

An official from Bavaria's state art collections returned a Nazi-looted painting to the heirs of its Jewish owner. [Page 3]

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Pope packs 2000 years of baggage on trip to Israel

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — For Pope John Paul II, his upcoming historic pilgrimage to Jerusalem promises to be an overwhelming personal religious experience as he fulfills a lifelong dream to walk in the footsteps of Jesus in the Holy Land.

But the pope is keenly aware that his visit carries different symbols for different people. Some 100,000 Catholic followers will arrive to join the pope's spiritual journey, and the world media will track his every step. Palestinians will watch for political signals.

Diaspora Jews will marvel at the culmination of a dramatic change over the past 35 years in the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church toward Judaism and the State of Israel. But it remains to be seen whether Israelis will be equally interested in the pope's March 21-26 trip, which coincides with this year's celebration of the Purim holiday.

Although polls show that most Israelis want to welcome the pope, many appear oblivious to the bigger significance of the event.

"When the pope comes, it will be the visual testimony of what has taken place in the transformation of relations between the church and the Jewish people," says Rabbi David Rosen, the Israel office director for the Anti-Defamation League and an interfaith activist who has helped negotiate Israel-Vatican accords. "But I do not think that the majority of Israeli Jews have a grasp of its historic, momentous dimension."

A look at the Vatican's reaction to the nascent Zionist movement at the turn of the century underscores those dramatic changes.

In 1904 Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, met Pope Pius X to convince him to support the quest for a Jewish homeland. According to Herzl's diaries, the pope refused to support the Jews since they had not recognized Jesus.

"And so," Herzl recalled the pope saying, "if you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we will be ready with churches and priests to baptize you."

Six decades later, in 1965, the church published the *Nostra Aetate* decree, which repudiated the Catholic teaching that the Jews were collectively responsible for Jesus' death, a belief that fed much Christian malice toward Jews throughout history. The document paved the way for broad changes in Catholic-Jewish relations, including the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel in 1993.

Pope John Paul's "presence in Israel is a significant statement itself — that there is a Jewish state now," says the Rev. Michael McGarry, the Catholic rector of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, which was established by Paul VI after his visit to the Holy Land — the last by a pope — in 1964.

McGarry says the sea change in the church's public teachings about Judaism has filtered down from high-level documents to "the person in the pew."

"But most Israeli Jews do not have a clue as to what it all means," he says.

Some interfaith experts say the lack of interest of Israelis is related to the fact that in an insular Jewish state, few Jews have any contact with Christians.

In addition, the educational system teaches little about other religions, says Ya'acov Katz, director of the School of Education at Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv.

"Israelis do not study these issues and are not open to learning about Christianity or Islam," says Katz. "How can you expect people who know nothing about their own religion to know something about other religions?" Katz believes most Israelis understand the political significance of the pope visiting a sovereign Jewish state. But

MIDEAST FOCUS

Response mixed to pope's words

Israelis had mixed reactions to Pope John Paul II's appeal for forgiveness for sins against the Jewish people. Cabinet secretary Yitzhak Herzog called the gesture "historic."

But Shevach Weiss, chairman of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, said he is disappointed the pope did not refer specifically to the actions of the Roman Catholic Church during the Holocaust.

No-confidence motions defeated

The Israeli government defeated two no-confidence motions sparked by the education minister's decision to include the works of a Palestinian poet in the school curriculum. Yossi Sarid's proposal to have schools teach the works of Mahmoud Darwish has created controversy because of the poet's anti-Israel writings.

Palestinians boycott goods

The Palestinian Authority said it is boycotting goods made in Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A Palestinian minister said officials had begun searching Palestinian shops and would confiscate any products made in the settlements.

Plan would reunite Druse families

Israel agreed in principle to a Syrian proposal to allow regular reunions for Druse families living on opposite sides of the Israeli-Syrian border. A spokesman for the Red Cross said details still had to be worked out to allow reunions between Druse living in Syria and their relatives living in the Golan Heights.

Crocodile kills Israeli tourist

A crocodile at a nature reserve in Botswana killed an Israeli traveler. Israel's ambassador to Zimbabwe said Eran Alon, 23, had gone to a river to get water or fish when the crocodile seized him and dragged him into the river, where he drowned.

unlike Diaspora Jews who live among Christians, they do not understand the greater historical ramifications. In Israel's fervently Orthodox, or haredi, community, the reaction to the papal visit has been less positive. Some haredi newspapers have rallied their readers against the pilgrimage.

"The haredim live in a medieval world where Christianity is still the enemy," says Rosen. "If you are a priori convinced that the Christian world is, if not out to get you then out to get your soul, this is going to influence your position."

Rabbi Avraham Ravitz, a legislator from the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc, says the fervently Orthodox world "attributes most of the tragedies that the Jewish people suffered throughout history to the Christian world."

Ravitz does not believe this has been relegated to ancient history, and he thinks many modern Christians are still inherently committed to converting Jews.

Yet Ravitz says Israel must let the visit proceed, if only to prevent a backlash against Jews in Catholic countries.

"We must be a state that allows freedom of religion and respects leaders of other religions," he says. "But that does not contradict the criticism we have."

While haredi misgivings are not expected to have an impact on the pope's pilgrimage, JTA has learned that pressure from fervently Orthodox leaders is the main reason why Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Israel's Ashkenazi chief rabbi, will not accompany the pope on his planned visit to the Western Wall.

Lau skirted this question at a recent news conference, saying, "The importance of the Wall is not dependent on the participation of this or that figure."

Lau also criticized opponents of the visit, saying Israel has no right to claim it is a defender of freedom of religion and then object to a personal pilgrimage of the Pope.

For Lau, who had a moving personal meeting with the Pope in 1993, the Vatican has indeed come a long way. He describes the late Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II as "the two popes who sympathized most with the tragedy of the Jewish people during the Holocaust more than any other 20th-century European leader."

Nevertheless, Lau and much of the Jewish world will be closely watching a speech the Pope delivers at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.

Vatican statements on the Holocaust in recent years, says Lau, mark the "first chapter" in reconciliation. But he maintains the time has come for the church to condemn Pope Pius XII, the target of criticism from many Jewish quarters for his refusal to speak out against the Holocaust.

"We wait for chapter number two," he says, adding that an apology at Yad Vashem will be "more satisfying" than all the Vatican has done until now.

Meanwhile, the pope will also meet President Ezer Weizman and Prime Minister Ehud Barak. While these meetings may not be as emotionally charged as the Yad Vashem speech, they mark a powerful symbol of the Vatican's recognition of the Jewish state as a political entity. As the pope hops from meetings with religious and political leaders on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, he is aware of the enormous political sensitivities of such encounters.

Every word will be carefully scripted by Vatican officials. In Jerusalem, the pope is expected to stick to spiritual messages and steer clear of any words that could be construed as supporting Israeli or Palestinian claims to disputed eastern Jerusalem.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy recently lashed out at the Vatican for signing an accord with the Palestine Liberation Organization on Jerusalem just weeks before the pope arrived. In a clear message to Israel, that agreement said unilateral decisions on Jerusalem were "morally and legally unacceptable."

Despite such criticism, the agreement was designed mainly to safeguard the church's property and religious freedom for all faiths in Palestinian areas.

JTA has also learned that Archbishop Pietro Sambi, the papal envoy to Israel, thanked Levy for lashing out at the agreement because it was Israel's anger that convinced the Arab world to back an accord anchoring religious freedom and human rights in Palestinian areas. Ultimately these matters may prove far less interesting for the average Israeli than the impact of the unprecedented deployment of 8,000 police during the papal pilgrimage.

For many, the most memorable part of the pope's visit may turn out to be infuriating traffic jams of historic proportions. □



Daily News Bulletin

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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

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JEWISH WORLD

Protest at first lady's N.Y. home

Some 20 Jewish extremists demonstrated outside the suburban New York home of first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Sunday's protesters denounced Clinton's support for the Middle East peace process and claimed she opposes freeing Jonathan Pollard, who is serving a life sentence for passing secret U.S. military information to Israel.

The demonstrators belonged to Kach and Kahane Chai, which are on the U.S. State Department list of terrorist organizations.

U.S. victims' relatives sue Arafat

The children and family of American citizens murdered in 1996 by Palestinian terrorists are filing a \$250 million lawsuit in a U.S. court against the Palestinian Authority, the PLO and Yasser Arafat.

The suit claims the defendants are liable for the deaths of Yaron and Efrat Ungar because they provide Hamas shelter, safe haven and a base of operations from which to carry out terrorist attacks.

Pope's hometown OKs plaque

Officials in Pope John Paul II's hometown approved a plaque commemorating a Holocaust victim who owned the house where the pope lived as a child.

City officials in Wadowice, Poland, said Monday they had accepted an inscription proposed by Ron Balamuth, the grandson of the home's former owner, Chaim Balamuth.

The decision came after the grandson was granted a papal audience last Friday.

About 20 Jews from Wadowice are slated to meet the pope during his planned visit to Israel next week. Before World War II, about 2,000 Jews lived in the town, but only a few hundred survived the Holocaust.

In another development, the chairman of the London-based Holocaust Educational Trust called on the pope to open the Vatican archives so that researchers can examine the conduct of church leaders during the Holocaust.

Lord Greville Janner's call followed a Day of Pardon Mass in the Vatican during which the pope sought forgiveness for the church's "mistrust and hostility" toward other faiths, but notably omitted any specific reference to the Holocaust. Janner welcomed the pope's "worthy and generous gesture," but said his sentiments must now be translated into action.

Film festival opens in Moscow

An Israeli film festival began a weeklong run in Moscow. Sponsored by the Russian Jewish Congress, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Israeli Embassy in Moscow, the festival features Russian-language movies shot in Israel by Russian-born directors.

Art looted by Nazis finally returned to British heirs of its original owner

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A German art official has returned a Nazi-looted painting to the British heirs of its original Jewish owner.

The director general of the Bavarian State Collections, who handed back the work Monday, acknowledged that "our behavior in the past was quite wrong."

"But," declared Reinhold Baumstark, "we are very pleased to do a little bit of justice now after the injustice of all these years."

The painting, currently on loan to London's prestigious Royal Academy, is an 1898 triptych, "The Three Stages of Life," by Count Leopold von Kalckreuth.

Elizabeth Gotthilf, who died in 1983, abandoned the work when she fled to Britain from Vienna with her husband and children after Germany's annexation of Austria in 1938.

The Bavarian State Collection formally acquired the work in 1942, and it has been held in the collection of the Neue Pinakothek museum in Munich.

The painting was returned this week, more than 60 years after it was looted, to Elizabeth Gotthilf's descendants, Ernest and Marietta Glanville, who now live in London.

It will be physically returned to the family in September when it has completed its current tour.

The painting was originally given to Gotthilf as a wedding present by her parents — her father was the Austrian art collector Fritz Redlich — and the family, which changed its name to Glanville after arriving in Britain, started the search for it in 1948.

When the family finally tracked it down to the collection in Munich in 1971, the German authorities rejected its appeals on the grounds that the deadline for restitution had passed in 1948.

The Commission for Looted Art in Europe took up the case, and found that the painting had been unlawfully acquired from the family.

The Bavarian authorities then decided to return the work.

"Today's joy is tinged with regret that our mother is not alive to witness the restitution of the picture," said Marietta Glanville.

"It has meant a lot to us — it's an icon of my childhood."

"It has great sentimental value" because "it was given to my mother as a wedding present.

"Our hope now is that other victims of Nazi persecutions will have their pictures, their treasures, restored to them."

It is not known how much the painting is worth, but the family says it has no intention of selling.

The painting is the first artwork being exhibited in Britain to become the subject of restitution by the looted-art commission.

Earlier this month, British museums published a list of some 350 art treasures in the permanent collections of 10 national museums that might have been looted by the Nazis.

The National Museum Directors Conference hopes to discover whether the works — which include scores of major paintings, mostly by Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and Modern masters — were looted by the Nazis from their Jewish owners.

The artworks, which were acquired since 1933, are estimated to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars. □

Anti-Semitic essay resurfaces

NEW YORK (JTA) — The latest round of an anti-Semitic essay that first surfaced in 1995 arrived in mailboxes around the United States and in Europe.

The essay, which was sent last month from a ZIP code outside Chicago, is a pseudo-scholarly attack on Jews and recommends a reading list that includes a book by Klansman-turned-politician David Duke. □

Ex-bookkeeper charged with embezzling from Reform seminary

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The former fiscal administrator for the Los Angeles campus of the Reform movement's seminary has been arrested and charged with embezzling \$1.179 million.

Jean Thorbourn, 61, forged numerous checks between 1989 and 1997 using a Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion dean's signature stamp and apparently applied a considerable part of the money to finance production of independent films, according to the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office.

Thorbourn, who also doubled as bookkeeper, had considerable latitude in her job, and her supervisors were slow in detecting the embezzlement, said Gary Judge, a senior investigator in the D.A.'s Office.

The alleged thefts first came to light in September 1997, when Rabbi Lewis Barth, who had been named dean of the HUC campus two months earlier, questioned Thorbourn about an expected but overdue payment of \$381,000. Thorbourn said she had given the money to a friend, but a month later admitted that the money was used to finance a film titled "Jamaica Beat."

Barth said he immediately notified authorities and Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, president of HUC, which has campuses in Cincinnati, New York, Jerusalem and Los Angeles.

Thorbourn was fired after her confession, but at the request of the district attorney the case was not made public while his office investigated the matter in depth. Thorbourn has now been charged with 13 counts of forgery, one count of grand theft and four counts of filing false state tax returns.

She is being held on \$1.179 million bail, the exact amount she allegedly embezzled. She was to have been arraigned last Friday, but her appearance was postponed until this week.

Her attorney, Stephen Jones, was not available for comment.

Thorbourn has apparently returned some of the money used in the film production, and Zimmerman said in a statement that additional funds have been recovered through the college's insurance carrier.

He emphasized that no dues from Reform congregations or from private donations were affected by the alleged embezzlement.

HUC's Los Angeles campus has an enrollment of 673 students and operates on an annual budget of about \$3.5 million. □

Rabbis join other clergy in a pledge to end racism

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish religious leaders are promising to intensify their efforts to end racism and move toward racial reconciliation.

At a White House meeting with President Clinton on Thursday, 150 religious leaders of all faiths pledged to work within their own communities and in interfaith and national efforts to bring about racial healing.

"We need to join hands more," said Rabbi Kenneth Hain, president of the Rabbinical Council of America, an Orthodox umbrella group.

The continuation of the President's Initiative on Race, the "One America" program is a "grand expedition," Clinton told the diverse group of religious leaders. Racial and ethnic conflicts around the world inevitably have a religious component, Clinton noted, and the role of religious leaders has become even more important.

Orthodox, Conservative and Reform rabbis joined ministers, priests, imams, preachers and others in labeling racism as a sin.

But in addition to recognizing racism as a sin, Hain said, people must take an active role in ending prejudice.

The Rabbinical Assembly has designated May 6 as the Shabbat on which it will begin its "One Humanity" project. As part of the yearlong program, the council will urge its rabbis to speak openly about racism and reconciliation, create new outreach programs to the poor and homeless and reach across racial and social lines with substantive educational programs.

As part of its response to "One America," the Reform movement will initiate a plan to reach out to the Asian, Latino, and American Indian populations and a broad spectrum of faith communities. □

Reports of yeshiva army plan set off political chain reaction

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli legislators from across the political spectrum are criticizing the reported recommendations of a commission probing how and if to draft yeshiva students into the army.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported Monday that the Tal Commission was about to present its recommendations on the matter.

According to the reports, the commission will recommend that yeshiva students be given a year to leave their studies and do as they please, including working. Whoever does not return to yeshiva at the end of the year would continue to work or be drafted based on personal considerations and family status.

The head of the commission, retired Justice Zvi Tal, said the reports were premature and that he did not expect the commission to complete its work for at least another 10 days. He added that portions of the reports about the panel's recommendations were wrong. His remarks, however, came only after the media reports set off a political chain reaction, with legislators from both the right and left calling the supposed recommendations insufficient and demanding new legislation to deal with the issue.

"I was hoping the commission would find a way to steer the students toward the army, instead of perpetrating this inequality in which only a select part of the population bears the burden of serving," said Eli Goldschmidt, a legislator with the Labor Party.

"This doesn't resolve anything. It returns us to square one," said Likud Knesset member Meir Sheerit.

However, legislator Avraham Ravitz, a member of the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc, said the reported recommendations of the Tal Commission were "the right thing."

The Tal Commission was formed in the wake of a 1998 ruling by the High Court of Justice that canceled a decades-old arrangement under which yeshiva students are entitled to army draft exemptions. □