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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Jailed Iranians' rights set back

Ten of the 13 Iranian Jews facing trial on charges of spying for Israel are not being allowed to select their own lawyers, according to advocates for the 13.

The judge in the case is insisting that the 10, who are still in prison, take court-appointed attorneys.

Meanwhile, European rabbis urged their governments to press Iran to make next month's trial open to observers and the international media. [Page 4]

Irving claims Jewish conspiracy

David Irving told the High Court in London that some of the world's largest Jewish organizations are perpetrating an international conspiracy against him.

The self-described Holocaust revisionist's claim Wednesday against the Anti-Defamation League and JTA, among others, was the focus of his 104-page closing address at the end of a two-month libel case against American Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt and her British publisher, Penguin Books. [Page 1]

Security Cabinet OKs withdrawal

Israel's Security Cabinet approved by a narrow 5-3 vote the withdrawal maps for the upcoming hand-over of 6.1 percent of West Bank land to the Palestinians.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat later accepted the maps after rejecting previous Israeli withdrawal proposals. Israel's full Cabinet still has to vote on the maps, a move expected Sunday.

Survivors to wait for Swiss funds

A U.S. federal judge extended for a second time the deadline for a plan to distribute a \$1.25 billion Swiss bank settlement to Holocaust victims.

Judge Edward Korman on Tuesday cited Switzerland's failure to publish the names of dormant account holders and said potential claimants will have to wait longer for payments from the 1998 settlement.

Demjanjuk sues U.S. government

An alleged Nazi death camp guard filed a lawsuit last Friday claiming the U.S. government's investigation of him dating back to the late 1970s amounts to torture.

John Demjanjuk is seeking at least \$5 million in damages.

British Holocaust trial ends with claim of Jewish conspiracy

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — David Irving told the High Court in London this week that some of the world's largest Jewish organizations are involved in an international conspiracy against him.

The self-described Holocaust revisionist's claim Wednesday was the focus of his 104-page closing address at the end of a two-month libel case against American Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt and her British publisher, Penguin Books.

Irving has alleged that his reputation was damaged and his career wrecked by Lipstadt's 1994 book, "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory," which, he claims, depicted him as a Holocaust denier who distorts historical data to suit his own ideological goals.

The trial, which has attracted international attention, has been described as the most important trial involving the Holocaust since Adolf Eichmann, the chief engineer of the Holocaust, was convicted in Israel in 1961.

A ruling is expected to be delivered in about four weeks.

The plaintiff and defendant have shown sharply contrasting styles. Irving — who served as his own attorney and appeared to relish the spotlight — wasted no opportunity in and out of court in making statements supporting his claims that Auschwitz was not a death camp and that there was no systematic, mass destruction of Jews; Lipstadt, a professor at Emory University in Atlanta, has sat silently throughout the proceedings.

Asserting that Israeli Holocaust specialist Yehuda Bauer paid for and directed Lipstadt's book, Irving alleged that Bauer urged Lipstadt to incriminate him.

The book, said Irving, is part of a 30-year international campaign, led by the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, JTA, the Board of Deputies of British Jews and others, which had aimed to discredit him.

"It is quite evident that the ADL, in cahoots with Lipstadt, set itself the task of destroying my career," he said, asserting that "the real defendants in this case are not represented in this court."

But, he added, "We have them to thank for the spectacle that has been presented in this courtroom since January."

Without their financial assistance, he said, it is doubtful whether the expensive defense team could have "mounted this colossal assault on my name."

As a result of their campaign, he continued, Germany, Austria, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have banned him.

Irving claimed that the defense case had cost some \$6 million and at least 20 combined years of research.

"This blinding and expensive spotlight has been focused on the narrowest of issues," he said, "yet it has still generated more noise than illumination."

Irving has described Auschwitz as a "fable" and insisted there was no evidence to suggest that Hitler ordered the systematic mass destruction of the Jews.

Irving was particularly scathing about JTA.

He claimed the news agency provided material in 1992 for Lipstadt's assertion that Irving was to have participated in a gathering in Sweden, which was later canceled, that would have been a "confluence between anti-Israel, anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial forces."

Among others who Lipstadt said were scheduled to attend the conference were

MIDEAST FOCUS

Hezbollah shells land in Israel

Hezbollah gunmen fired several Katyusha rockets and mortar shells inside Israel, according to Israeli security sources.

Israeli jets retaliated by firing on Hezbollah positions in Lebanon.

Israel wants sway in Shoah group

Israel demanded a bigger role in a world Jewish body that seeks Holocaust-era restitution.

Rabbi Michael Melchior, the Jewish state's minister for Israeli society and world Jewish communities, said the structure of the Claims Conference must be changed since it is heavily weighted toward Diaspora Jewry.

Israel, he said Wednesday, should have "a decisive role in policymaking," since most Holocaust survivors live in Israel.

Hamas asks pope to slam Israel

The spiritual leader of Hamas called on Pope John Paul II to condemn Israel's hold over eastern Jerusalem during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land next week.

Sheik Ahmed Yassin also said the Arab-Christian relationship "has always been good and Allah told us to be nice to them."

Barak names new spy chief

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak named a senior member of the Shin Bet as the domestic security service's new head.

Avraham Dichter will replace Ami Ayalon when the latter completes his four-year term. Dichter, 47, has held a number of senior positions in the Shin Bet and currently serves as the organization's deputy chief.

Meanwhile, the deputy head of Mossad announced his resignation following Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's reported decision not to appoint him chief of the intelligence agency.



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Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, Holocaust revisionists, representatives of the Islamic fundamentalist groups Hezbollah and Hamas, and the ultranationalist Russian group Pamyat. Irving also claimed that a 1995 JTA report accused him of "having supplied the trigger mechanism for the Oklahoma City bomb."

"That item," Irving told the court, "was picked up by the American, and then faintly echoed by the British press. It was only months later that I found out who had started that lie."

A JTA report, dated March 4, 1996, said Timothy McVeigh's lawyer had gone to London to investigate whether British neo-Nazis provided components for the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995 that killed 168 people.

The report named Irving as one of three British citizens the FBI had subpoenaed to "provide information on the alleged European link" behind the bombing.

In his 24-page closing address, defense lawyer Richard Rampton declared that the trial had exposed Irving's views as a "fraud."

Irving based his claim that Auschwitz was not a death camp on pseudo-scientific research, said Rampton. He noted that Irving has never traveled to Auschwitz to examine the archeological remains or the documentary evidence in its archive.

"It follows that some other reason must be sought to explain his devotion over many years to the bizarre idea that no significant numbers of people were murdered in the homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz/Birkenau," said Rampton.

The reasons, he continued, were not hard to find: "As the evidence in this court has shown," he said, "Irving is a right-wing extremist, a racist, and, in particular, a rabid anti-Semite."

Whether anti-Semitism led him to become a Hitler apologist or vice versa was unimportant, added Rampton.

"Whether they are taken together or individually, it is clear that they have led him to prostitute his reputation as a serious historian — spurious though it can now be seen to have been — for the sake of a bogus rehabilitation of Hitler and the dissemination of his virulent anti-Semitic propaganda."

It will not be an easy wait for either Lipstadt or Irving. □

Australian Jews welcome news that Latvia will investigate accused Nazi

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — The Australian Jewish community is welcoming reports that Latvia is investigating an Australian citizen who allegedly participated in the killing of thousands of Jews during World War II.

Australia's own investigation into Karlis Ozols, accused of being a senior officer in the wartime Latvian security police, was abandoned in 1992 when Australia closed its Special Investigations Unit. Legal advice to the government at the time was that "the evidence establishes a strong prima facie case against Karlis Ozols," adding that Ozols was the highest-ranking alleged war criminal living in Australia.

Despite public assurances that the case was not pursued due to lack of substantial evidence, an Australian Jewish magazine published a leaked document that made it clear the government was unwilling to spend the additional funds required to complete the investigation.

Ozols was the commanding officer of Australian resident Konrad Kalejs, who is currently the subject of an investigation by Latvia after he was asked to leave England due to his involvement in war crimes.

Colin Rubenstein, executive director of the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, told JTA that the investigation "was welcome, as it reminds us that the issue of Nazi war criminals extends well beyond the Kalejs case."

"Ozols is one of a number of individuals resident in Australia who were involved in Nazi crimes and other persecutions who have managed to abuse Australian tolerance and escape justice, and this situation must be rectified as soon as possible," Rubenstein said. Ozols, a former Australian chess champion, is reportedly not healthy enough to stand trial. □

JEWISH WORLD

Putin vows to fight anti-Semitism

Russian authorities are firmly committed to battling anti-Semitism, acting President Vladimir Putin said in a letter to U.S. legislators.

"Any signs of anti-Semitism are considered an inadmissible display of aggressive nationalism incompatible with civilized society in Russia," the letter said, according to Putin's press service.

The letter came in response to a recent letter sent by 92 members of the House of Representatives and 98 senators who voiced concern about anti-Semitism and religious persecution in Russia.

10 Commandments made law

Indiana Gov. Frank O'Bannon signed into law a bill allowing the posting of the 10 Commandments in schools and government offices.

The law is scheduled to take effect July 1. O'Bannon, a Democrat, also said a monument featuring the commandments, the preamble to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, would be erected this summer in Indianapolis.

A spokesman for the Indiana Civil Liberties Union called the law unconstitutional and said it would sue the state after the monument is erected.

Americans back Darwin, God

There is broad public consensus in the United States that Darwin's theory of evolution, not creationism, belongs in the nation's science classes, according to a new survey.

But most Americans say evolution and creationism should be taught in the nation's schools, according to the poll commissioned by People for the American Way.

Rubens painting not looted

New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art said a 1597 painting by Peter Paul Rubens had not been looted by the Nazis.

The museum cited a 76-year-old article in an authoritative German art journal as proof that the Rubens portrait belonged to a New Jersey man nearly a decade before the Nazis came to power.

Y.U. offers Talmud to women

Yeshiva University is offering women a two-year graduate program in Talmud and Oral Law, a topic that Jewish women are traditionally discouraged from pursuing.

Reflecting the impact of Orthodox feminism, the program will admit 10 students each year.

The program will "enable an elite cadre of women to be better prepared to be leaders in Jewish scholarship and education," said program director Ephraim Karnarfogel.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Lebanon strikes have new meaning after Arab League's warnings of war

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — The cycle of retaliatory violence in southern Lebanon has been a familiar spectacle for years.

But this time there are major differences.

The fighting that erupted this week after a monthlong lull came after Israel's Cabinet decided to withdraw from southern Lebanon by July with or without an accompanying peace agreement involving Syria and Lebanon.

It also came after an Arab League meeting held over the weekend in Beirut at which Arab foreign ministers warned that the Cabinet decision could mean war.

During that meeting, some of the ministers indicated that radical Palestinian groups who reject the Oslo peace process and are operating in Lebanon may launch cross-border attacks on Israel in the wake of a unilateral withdrawal.

Israeli officials reacted angrily to the warnings emanating from Beirut.

These reactions first came in the form of words, but by Tuesday Israeli jets were striking two of the rejectionist groups, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — General Command and Fatah Uprising, both of whose camps are located near Lebanon's border with Syria, their longtime sponsors.

These were the first Israeli strikes on these camps in more than a year, and they came as a clear response to the Arab ministers' threats.

Israel's airstrikes also included more familiar targets — Hezbollah and another radical Islamic group, Amal.

On Wednesday Hezbollah gunmen retaliated with Katyusha rocket and mortar attacks, some of which landed in northern Israel, according to Israeli officials.

To answer those attacks, Israeli jets and gunboats were soon pounding targets in southern Lebanon.

It was the worst fighting since last month, when seven Israeli soldiers were killed during a three-week period of Hezbollah attacks.

During that period, Israel bombed three power stations in Lebanon, one of them near Beirut.

The Arab ministers convened over the weekend in the Lebanese capital instead of at Arab League headquarters in Cairo to show their solidarity with Lebanon following the strikes on the power stations.

Despite Egyptian efforts to soften the concluding resolution of that meeting, the foreign ministers sided with Syria, which has criticized the Israeli Cabinet's March 5 decision to pull out of Lebanon by July with or without an agreement. From Damascus' perspective, a unilateral Israeli pullback would deprive Syria of one of its bargaining cards in negotiations with Israel.

Along with the threats of war, the Arab ministers issued several demands to the State of Israel.

"The first rule of a comprehensive and just peace lies in full Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon," their statement said, "and from the Golan until the June 4, 1967, line and from the Palestinian occupied land, including Jerusalem."

Israeli officials said it is absurd that the Arab League would condemn an Israeli decision to pull out of Lebanon.

Justice Minister Yossi Beilin called the league's position "surreal," and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, a member of the current Cabinet, called the Arab League declaration "stupid."

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said the outcome of the Arab League meeting revealed that "hard-line opposition" to the peace process still dominates the organization.

"In the face of these threats, Israel will take decisive action in order to protect the welfare of its citizens and soldiers," Levy said.

By Tuesday, the "action" he promised materialized in the form of the air strikes on the Palestinian militant bases and on the Hezbollah and Amal targets in Lebanon. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

Jailed Iranian Jews cannot select own lawyers for trial

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Ten of the 13 Iranian Jews facing trial on charges of spying for Israel and the United States are not being allowed to select their own lawyers, according to advocates for the accused.

Instead, the judge is insisting the prisoners take court-appointed attorneys.

The judge is claiming that the lawyers selected by the 10 prisoners do not have signed retainers indicating that the lawyers are their chosen counsel.

However, the lawyers are unable to obtain the necessary signatures from the defendants because the judge has denied them access to the prisoners.

"This is more than a Catch-22 situation. It is a violation of the most basic legal and human rights," said Ronald Lauder, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which has been advocating on behalf of the 13 since last summer.

Three of the 13 were released on bail in February and were able to sign the documents enabling them to choose their lawyers, but the other 10 remain in jail in the southern city of Shiraz.

All could face the death penalty if convicted at next month's trial.

Both the United States and Israel have denied the 13 spied for them.

Several weeks ago, the families were notified of the trial date and told to find attorneys.

Some did not select lawyers right away because they had been informed by government officials that they did not need them, and they feared that hiring an attorney would appear to be an admission of guilt, said Pooya Dayanim, a spokesman for the Los Angeles-based Council of Iranian American Organizations.

In addition, Dayanim said, few Iranian lawyers were willing to take the case because most Iranians believe the defendants are guilty.

Advocates for the 13, who hope the defendants would receive a fair trial open to foreign observers and the media, consider the judge's latest move an ominous development.

"We are dismayed not only by this cynical maneuver, but what it bodes for the trial," Lauder said.

Many believe the arrest of the 13 is part of a larger struggle between reformers and hard-liners in the Iranian government.

Although reformist forces won an overwhelming victory in Iran's Feb. 18 parliamentary elections, hard-liners still control the judiciary.

Even before learning of the judge's decision regarding the retainers, American advocates for the 13 were urging President Clinton not to lift an embargo on Iranian pistachios and carpets, a move he is expected to announce this week as a way of expressing support for the Iranian reformers.

Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.) spoke on the House floor Tuesday against lifting the embargo until the 13 are released, and he is mobilizing colleagues on this issue.

Clinton's expected announcement drew fire from the Council of Iranian American Organizations.

"The Clinton administration decision is a slap across the face of the Iranian-American Jewish community," Dayanim said. "It was only last Saturday that the Iranian-American Jewish community in a private event raised over \$150,000 for the Democratic National Committee in an event which was attended by the president himself."

In a related development, a group of European rabbis urged their countries' governments to pressure Iran to free the 13.

"We are urging European governments to take a strong stand," British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said Wednesday at the end of a three-day conference held in the Slovak capital of Bratislava. □

Study finds fewer hate groups, but they're turning more dangerous

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — While the number of hate groups declined by 15 percent in 1999, these groups are consolidating into tougher organizations that are turning to neo-Nazism, a new report shows.

"The count is down so it sounds encouraging, but it's not," warned Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center, a human rights organization based in Alabama.

Independent groups have joined larger, established organizations, making the overall hate movement a much more dangerous one, the center shows in its annual "Intelligence Report," which it released on Tuesday.

Examples of this new trend include the neo-Nazi National Alliance, which lost three chapters in 1999 but saw its membership increase by half to about 1,500. The skinhead movement is rapidly becoming more violent, and the Hammerskin Nation, the largest coalition of neo-Nazi skinheads in the world, has added several chapters.

A Nazification of the white supremacist movement is helping to bring about increased targeting of Jews and a rise in Holocaust denial, Potok said.

At the same time, groups like the Council of Conservative Citizens, an organization that includes Southern lawmakers, are mainstreaming radical right issues such as race-based IQ theories.

Jewish groups ought to be vigilant and informed — and they should work with law enforcement and the government to make it more difficult for hate groups to proliferate, said Gail Gans, the director of the Anti-Defamation League's Civil Rights Information Center.

At the same time, the report also identifies a new convergence of radical left and radical right movements that may form the new extremism. The groups share a common enemy, globalism, and unite to fight it.

According to Potok, the new alliance has the potential to draw millions and form a mass, very dangerous movement.

"Hate has its reasons — there are real social conditions behind it," he said. "It's important to understand what's driving these movements."

The hate groups' increasing use of the Internet is concerning the Southern Poverty Law Center as well.

The Internet expands the propaganda reach of hate groups, energizes the movement and helps produce an environment for domestic terrorism, Potok said. □