



Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Jews hail pope's visit

Israeli and Jewish leaders hailed Pope John Paul II's visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem. In his speech, the pope said that he regrets any Christian anti-Semitism toward Jews "at any time, and in any place." But the pope, who is on a historic weeklong tour of the Holy Land, did not specifically address the Roman Catholic Church's silence during the Holocaust. [Page 1]

Agreement reached on slave fund

German and Jewish negotiators reached agreement on how to distribute a \$5 billion fund for Nazi-era forced and slave laborers.

Each of the approximately 240,000 ex-slave laborers who are still alive will receive \$7,500, while up to \$2,500 will go to each of the approximately 1 million living forced laborers. The German government Wednesday approved a bill that would create the foundation necessary to set up the fund, which was hammered out by representatives of the German government, German industry and survivors groups.

Senator: NRA cheapening Shoah

The National Rifle Association is "cheapening the memory" of the Holocaust by comparing gun safety measures proposed by President Clinton to Nazi Germany's laws preventing Jews from owning guns, Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) said Thursday. Joined by Holocaust survivors, Lautenberg called on the NRA to remove from its Web site an article that claims "resistance to Nazi oppression was hampered by the lack of civilian arms possession."

U.S.: Mood at talks 'excellent'

The United States again said the atmosphere at the Israeli-Palestinian talks in Washington is "excellent." But U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said Thursday he did not believe that there would be any breakthroughs at the current round of talks.

Chile bans neo-Nazi gathering

Chilean President Ricardo Lagos banned a planned pro-Nazi international gathering slated for April 17. The announcement of the ban to a B'nai B'rith delegation in Santiago came after Chilean Jewish protests.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jews should relax criticism, say leaders after pope's speech

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Give the pope credit for what he said, rather than criticism for what he didn't, say many Jewish leaders.

The sight of the leader of the Roman Catholic Church standing in the Jewish state to express sadness for Christian contributions to Jewish persecution moved many to tears.

But did Pope John Paul II utter the combination of words that would tell the Jewish people — a half-century later — not only that the church is saddened, but also sorry for its silence during the Holocaust?

In a somber memorial ceremony conducted at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem on Thursday, John Paul, 79, said, "I assure the Jewish people that the Catholic Church, motivated by the Gospel law of truth and love and by no political considerations, is deeply saddened by the hatred, acts of persecution and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place."

Many Jewish groups and leaders said the pope could have gone further during his long-awaited speech at Yad Vashem.

Rabbi David Rosen, director of the Israel office of the Anti-Defamation League and a veteran interfaith activist, said he would have been pleased if the pope had used stronger language about the Holocaust and issued a call for repentance for the church's silence during the Holocaust.

"Nevertheless it was a very important moment," Rosen said.

"The significance of the event was that it happened, and he said the words he said where he was."

Rosen and other Jewish leaders say Jews should acknowledge how far the Vatican has come in acknowledging its history of anti-Semitism and the contributions of Pope John Paul II to Jewish-Catholic reconciliation.

"The drumbeat of negative criticism over the last month" gives the impression that "what was omitted was more important than what was included" in the pope's recent comments on the church's role in fostering anti-Semitism, said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Some of those who criticize "are not representative of the sentiment of the community," said Yoffie on Thursday, as he was preparing to deliver a speech on Jewish-Catholic relations at Assumption College in Worcester, Mass.

He declined to cite those critics by name.

The pope's speech at Yad Vashem was watched closely, coming just weeks after he issued a broad apology for sins committed by the Catholic Church throughout the ages.

That speech, delivered at the Vatican, included sins against the Jews, but did not specifically mention the Holocaust.

Many who criticized those remarks for stopping short of a specific apology for the Holocaust had hoped to hear more from his speech at Yad Vashem during his visit to Israel this week.

As the eternal flame flickered at Yad Vashem's vast Hall of Remembrance, the pope laid a wreath in memory of the 6 million Jews slaughtered during the Holocaust.

He also met with Holocaust survivors, including a childhood friend and a woman

MIDEAST FOCUS

Minister wants Ethiopian funding

Israel's minister of absorption told American Jewish leaders that she is reluctant to support the speedy processing of thousands of Ethiopians who hope to come to Israel unless U.S. Jews promise \$50 million for the project.

Participants at a Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations meeting Wednesday with Yuli Tamir, however, said that until Israel decides who among the Falash Mura — descendants of Jews who converted to Christianity — are eligible to immigrate, they cannot mobilize a fund-raising campaign.

Papal suspect stays in jail

An Israeli court extended until the end of the week the detention of a fervently Orthodox Jew suspected of arranging a ceremony that called for the death of Pope John Paul II.

The suspect, Meir Biranes, admitted to organizing the ceremony in the town of Safed, saying his group wanted to draw attention to its anger over the visit.

Peres: Water is key to peace

Water rights can be the "beginning of a real peace" in the Middle East, according to Israel's regional affairs minister.

Shimon Peres made the comments Tuesday during an international conference on water in The Hague, where politicians, business leaders and volunteer groups gathered to discuss water preservation.

Purim marked at killer's grave

Jewish extremists marked Purim on Tuesday by reading the Book of Esther at the grave of Baruch Goldstein in the West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba.

Six years ago on Purim, the American-born Goldstein sprayed a mosque at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron with submachine gunfire, killing 29 Palestinian worshippers.

whom he helped save while a young priest in Poland.

"There are no words strong enough to deplore the terrible tragedy of the Shoah," the pope said.

"I have come to Yad Vashem to pay homage to the millions of Jewish people who, stripped of everything, especially of their human dignity, were murdered in the Holocaust," the pope said.

His remarks touched on personal memories of Jewish friends, some of whom perished and others who survived the Nazi atrocities.

"We wish to remember for a purpose, namely to ensure that never again will evil prevail," he said.

To Seymour Reich's ears, the pope's speech didn't go far enough.

"I was disappointed that he did not address the silence of the church during the Holocaust," said the chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, the main Jewish partner in formal dialogue with the Vatican.

"It was a lost opportunity. Maybe our expectations are higher than they should be but they are still there, and they haven't been met," Reich said in a telephone interview in Jerusalem after attending the Yad Vashem session.

But Rosen of the ADL believes that it was "unrealistic" for the pope to say anything more.

"Anybody who expected him to distance himself from the church or Pius XII doesn't understand the theological frame of reference of this pope," Rosen said.

Rabbi A. James Rudin, interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee, said the pope's statement had "enormous power."

"This is a denunciation and a repudiation of anyone, anywhere, who would minimize, trivialize or deny the reality of the Holocaust," Rudin, who was also in Jerusalem for the event, told JTA.

Rudin added that the speech did not break any new ground, and some things were left unsaid.

The next step, he said, would be for Jewish and Catholic scholars to fully explore all relevant Vatican documents relating to the wartime period.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak called the pope's visit to Yad Vashem a "noble act," and a "climax of this historic journey of healing."

But that healing, the prime minister said, will take time.

"The silence was not only from the heavens," Barak said of the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust.

"It is impossible to overcome all the pains of the past overnight," said Barak, calling for reconciliation between Jews and Christians.

"It is our wish to continue productive dialogue on this issue, to work together to eliminate the scourge of racism and anti-Semitism."

During the ceremony, Yad Vashem officials presented the pope with reproductions of illustrations of the Bible drawn by a Belgian Jewish painter who died in Auschwitz, but whose daughter survived.

In a brief relaxation of protocol, immediately following the memorial service the pope was reunited with some 30 Jewish friends from his hometown of Wadowice, Poland, some of whom he has kept in touch with.

Earlier in the day, the pope visited Israel's President Ezer Weizman at his official residence in Jerusalem.

The visit was seen as further recognition by the Vatican of Israel, with whom diplomatic relations were established in 1993.

During the last papal visit to Israel in 1964, Pope Paul VI did not go to western Jerusalem, and sent a letter to Israel's president addressed to Tel Aviv.

Also on Thursday, the pope met with Israel's two chief rabbis at their offices in Jerusalem.

The chief rabbis presented the pope with a Hebrew Bible, inscribed with a dedication from the book of the Prophet Micah, "For all the people who will walk, everyone in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of the Lord, our God, forever and ever." □

(JTA correspondent Avi Machlis in Jerusalem and JTA intern Brianne Korn in New York also contributed to this report.)



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JEWISH WORLD

Poles 'clean up' anti-Semitism

Thousands of volunteers in the Polish city of Lodz cleaned up city walls long defaced by racist and anti-Semitic graffiti.

Local officials and Jewish leaders judged this week's "Action Colorful Tolerance" a success — despite the fact that vandals scrawled anti-Semitic slogans on the home of a prominent local Jewish figure after the clean-up took place.

Alleged collaborator: I'm innocent

An alleged Lithuanian war criminal said he worked to prevent the massacres of Jews during the war, according to Lithuanian news reports.

But Jewish officials said the claims by the 92-year-old Aleksandras Lileikis, who served as chief of the Lithuanian security police, are ludicrous.

"He should crawl to a court and plead his innocence there," said Simonas Alperavicius, the leader of Lithuania's Jewish community. "He should repent because he's old, and doesn't have much time."

Woman got get, wants damages

A case is being heard in Montreal in which a Jewish woman is suing her ex-husband for damages because he refused to grant her a religious divorce for 15 years.

The woman is asking for \$1.3 million, saying that his refusal to grant her a get prevented her from getting on with her life.

Two high schools planned for S.F.

Two non-Orthodox Jewish day high schools are being planned for the San Francisco area, both with opening dates slated for September 2001.

Kehillah Jewish High School and Jewish Community High School of the Bay are among 13 Jewish day high schools in formation around the country, reflecting a growing interest in day school learning beyond the elementary years among religiously liberal Jews.

'Hitler' appears on Korean TV

A character dressed as Hitler is starring in a television commercial for a South Korean bakery. In the commercial, "Hitler" holds out a box of cakes in imitation of the Nazi salute.

Earlier this month, a Seoul bar called The Third Reich removed Nazi decor after protests from Jewish and Israeli groups.

Canadian Jewish leader dies

Ralph Snow, a former leader of B'nai Brith Canada, died Thursday. Snow, whose exact age was unknown but was in his 70s, served as president of the group in 1987-1988.

ARTS & CULTURE

Jewish author has older readers logging on to virtual romance novel

By Brianne Korn

NEW YORK (JTA) — From religion to romance, one Jewish author has stepped out of the Middle East and into the Midwest for a unique twist on an old pastime.

Naomi Ragen, an American-born novelist who has lived in Jerusalem for almost 30 years, is penning her first novel that does not revolve around a Jewish-oriented plot or Israel.

In "Running," Ragen is trying her hand at good, old-fashioned romance — but there is nothing old-fashioned about the way her fans can read this novel.

"Running" is being written as an online novel for the new Web site GenerationA.com, an online community specifically designed for Americans age 50 and over.

A new chapter of "Running" appears each week and readers can log on to read a romance story that centers around characters their own ages.

"Why do all romance novels have to be about 20-somethings?" the 50-year-old Ragen asked. "Why can't people like us have a novel about this age group," she added. "You don't have to be a perfect physical specimen to have love in your life."

GenerationA.com was launched in November because "the older generation is the most underaddressed population segment of the Internet," said Robert Slater, vice president for strategic development at GenerationA.com.

A friend of Ragen's for over 10 years, Slater asked her to write the novel because "she's a great writer of fiction" and "she likes to experiment with other things."

"I am a great believer that the Internet will change the world," said Ragen, who added that the online novel has an interactive quality not available to those who read a traditional book.

"It's almost as if I'm reading the book along with my readers."

Ragen said there are differences she has to be conscious of while writing an online novel.

"You can't change anything," she said of the plot, because a chapter is released each week. "You can't cancel the baby."

"It's more like real life."

The serialized novel, whose first chapter appeared on the Web site on Valentine's Day, centers around the love life of a divorced woman approaching 50.

The woman, who has one married daughter and a high school-aged son who lives at home, breaks her ankle during a scheduled run.

She is rescued by a married, middle-aged man — and the ensuing relationship is the main focus of the novel.

"A tiny little accident can just push you into old age so quickly," Ragen said. "The story is about her coming to terms with older age."

The secular aspect of the novel forced Ragen to stretch her imagination past her usual limits.

"The characters are different than I am," she said. "It involves imagining completely different ethos."

"There's an American part of me that hasn't been able to do that," Ragen added.

Ragen has not completed the novel yet but is one or two chapters ahead of her readers. Slater predicts chapters of "Running" will be released for a maximum of four months.

While she has no immediate plans for another online novel, Ragen says, "I have no objections to doing this again."

She is currently working on her fifth book as well, an autobiography that she says "I became a writer to write."

"I've been running away from it for a very long time," Ragen said, but it finally caught up to her. No release date has been set yet. Ragen is the author of four other novels with Jewish themes: "Jephte's Daughter," "Sotah," "The Sacrifice of Tamar" and, most recently, "The Ghost of Hannah Mendes." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Worried Balkan communities unite a year after start of NATO bombing**

By Ruth E. Gruber

SKOPJE, Macedonia (JTA) — One year after NATO began its bombardment of Yugoslavia, Jews in the Balkans are building links among their communities — even as they wait for the next shoe to drop in Europe's most jittery region.

"In Yugoslavia it's like a time bomb," said Lidija Petrovic, president of the 100-member Jewish community in Zrenjanin, which is located in northern Serbia. "On the surface, things are calm, but underneath things are still boiling. We feel insecure; we don't know what will happen and from where."

To better confront the future, Jews from half a dozen Balkan states this month discussed forming a regional umbrella group, the Union of Jewish Communities of Southeastern Europe.

They seek to buttress their tiny communities, share burdens and facilities, and work collectively in order to ensure Jewish survival amid the region's continuing economic, political and social uncertainty.

"There are very few Jews in the Balkans," said Viktor Mizrachi, the president of the 200-member Jewish community of Macedonia.

"We should work together as a fist, and not as individual fingers," he said. "Each can love his own country, but we have to form a fist or we will disappear."

A consensus to form the union came at a meeting in Skopje of Jews from Bulgaria, Greece and almost all parts of the former Yugoslavia — independent Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, as well as the current Yugoslavia's Serbia and Kosovo.

The inauguration of a new synagogue in Skopje and the energetic efforts at Jewish revival in Macedonia served as the catalyst for the meeting, which was coordinated by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

"I really think that this year something important and tremendous has happened in Macedonia," Yechiel Bar Chaim, the JDC representative for the former Yugoslavia, said at the meeting. "One couldn't have dreamt of such success."

Massive fallout from last year's conflict in the Balkans is still being felt throughout the region.

Most of the 800,000 ethnic Albanians who fled Kosovo in the wake of Serbian terror have returned home, but revenge attacks and ongoing ethnic strife have forced tens of thousands of Serbs and Gypsies to flee in turn.

Crime and violence are rife in Kosovo, and there are fears that despite the presence of some 30,000 NATO-led peacekeepers, serious conflict may erupt in Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro or even Macedonia, which has a large ethnic Albanian minority.

Moreover, the economic consequences of the conflict remain daunting. Homes, businesses and much of Yugoslavia's economic infrastructure were destroyed. Bombed-out bridges, roads and rail lines cut regional trade routes, aggravating local economic crises in neighboring countries as well as in Yugoslavia. In parts of Kosovo and Serbia, electricity, water and heating are sporadic — and jobs, consumer goods and cash are scarce.

"We don't have anything — clothes, medicines, food, money," said Petrovic. "The average salary is the equivalent of \$25 a month, so we use barter arrangements for some goods and services.

"If we could see the light somewhere, that would be something, but the uncertainty is killing," she said. "My mother survived Auschwitz by hoping. I can't, of course, compare our present situation with Auschwitz, but we have little hope that it will improve."

What Jews in the region do have is each other.

In the countries of the former Yugoslavia in particular, personal links are tight. Before the breakup of Yugoslavia a decade ago, its Jewish communities came under one umbrella organization and lived in one country.

"We all grew up knowing each other, meeting each other, going to summer camp with each other," said Zdravko Sami of Macedonia. Said Gorge Hajzler of Belgrade, Yugoslavia, "This cooperation exceeds the framework imposed by the crisis. It is a cooperation based on long-term links from the past — family ties, culture, history."

The crisis over the past year tested Jewish solidarity. It also bolstered Jewish communal identity.

NATO bombers did not directly target the city of Zrenjanin. Still, said Petrovic, "during those months we would gather in the tiny Jewish community office. We felt a togetherness. When we went home, we felt better." Now, she said, community members want to learn about their Judaism and expand. This month, with help from the JDC, they are taking possession of larger premises to serve as their community center.

Thanks to contingency plans taken months before the bombing began, some 600 of Yugoslavia's 3,000 Jews were able to find shelter in Hungary during the conflict.

"No Jew lost his life during the conflict," said Aca Singer, president of Yugoslavia's Federation of Jewish Communities. "This would not have happened without general Jewish solidarity and moral and financial aid from Jewish organizations and individuals." He paid special tribute to the efforts of community leader Mizrachi and fellow Macedonian Jews, who were spurred into action by the crisis, and presented the Macedonian community with an award honoring its help.

Mizrachi communicated daily with Jews in Belgrade throughout the bombing campaign, and the community also aided large-scale refugee relief efforts carried out by Israeli and other Jewish groups.

Last June, shortly after the end of the bombing, Mizrachi helped other Jewish officials evacuate the head of the Jewish community of Pristina, who, as a Serbian speaker, was classified as a Serb and threatened by ethnic Albanians.

Soon after, Macedonian Jews formed Dobre Volje, or Good Will, an organization aimed at funneling non-sectarian humanitarian aid to Albanian, Roma and Serbian refugees, which was modeled on Sarajevo's La Benevolencija organization, which earned international acclaim during the Bosnian war. □

CLARIFICATION: A March 20 DAILY NEWS BULLETIN item incorrectly implied that the Metropolitan Museum of Art had a work of Nazi-looted art in its collection. While the Nazis did loot "Guardroom With the Deliverance of Saint Peter," by the 17th-century Flemish painter David Teniers the Younger, the painting was returned to the Charles Neuman de Vegvar family, its rightful owner, after the war. The family then donated it to the New York-based museum.