



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Rabbis OK same-sex unions

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### E-booksellers post disclaimers

Two major online booksellers posted disclaimers about a 19th-century forgery that claims there is an international Jewish conspiracy to rule the world.

A group that monitors civil liberties on the Internet questioned the moves by Amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com regarding "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," calling them an infringement of free speech. [Page 3]

### Decision reached on burial site

Jewish officials welcomed a decision by the Czech government to preserve a Jewish burial site that was unearthed two years ago during a construction project in central Prague.

As a result of Wednesday's decision, the remains of several hundred Jews will stay untouched underneath an office building being constructed by a Czech insurance company.

The remains are to be surrounded by concrete, and construction work that was halted several months ago will be permitted to continue around the site.

### Court mulls student-led prayer

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the constitutionality of school policies permitting student-led prayers at football games.

During Wednesday's session, the justices probed whether such a policy can be neutral and voiced concern over schools becoming forums for religious speech and debates. [Page 4]

### Body of Begin's grandson found

Israeli officials found the body of the grandson of former Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

Maj. Yonatan Begin, 30, had been missing after the F-16 plane he was piloting during a training flight crashed into the Mediterranean.

Searchers also found the body of the navigator, Lt. Lior Harari, 24, at the crash site 17 miles off the coast of Israel.

## Reform put kosher stamp on same-sex ceremonies

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Modification or compromise? Whatever you want to call it, the Reform rabbis' final decision on Jewish same-sex commitment ceremonies is being touted as "groundbreaking" and a major step forward for gay and lesbian Jews.

After years of often heated debate on gay marriage, Reform rabbis overwhelmingly passed a resolution Wednesday affirming that "the relationship of a Jewish, same-gender couple is worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual."

The resolution marks the first time a "major religious body has indicated its support for any of its clergy who decide to officiate at same-gender ceremonies," said Rabbi Paul Menitoff, executive director of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Rabbi Denise Eger of West Hollywood, Calif., who is one of the co-chairs of the CCAR's Gay and Lesbian Rabbinic Network, said the resolution will "create the opportunity for spiritual fullness for gay couples." Eger, who underwent a Jewish commitment ceremony with her lesbian partner under a chupah several years ago, also said the vote would "send a message of hope" to Jewish gays and lesbians, their friends and families. However, the resolution — which passed almost unanimously in a voice vote at the rabbis' annual convention in Greensboro, N.C. — is not the wholesale endorsement of gay marriage that some proponents originally had hoped for, or that Reform's critics will likely characterize it as.

The resolution does not use the words "marriage" or "wedding," and was modified shortly before the vote to say not only that "we support the decision of those who choose to officiate at rituals of union for same-gender couples," but also "and we support the decision of those who do not."

It is unclear whether the resolution will influence the practices of Reform rabbis or lead to an increase in the number of gay couples gathering under the chupah. Even before the resolution, many Reform rabbis, as well as Reconstructionist ones — who went on record in support of same-sex ceremonies in 1993 — were officiating at such ceremonies.

The resolution means that the CCAR can now distribute liturgy, wedding contracts and other resources for people officiating at same-sex commitment ceremonies.

According to the handful of rabbis who voted against the resolution and even some who voted in favor, the move may harm Reform Judaism's credibility among more traditional streams of Judaism and, possibly, Israelis.

In response to concerns from rabbis hesitant about endorsing religious officiation at gay ceremonies, the resolution was modified in the week preceding the vote to add support for rabbis who do not choose to officiate. Under their influence, the rabbis also omitted from the body of the resolution a quotation stating that "kedushah," Hebrew for holiness, "may be present in committed same gender relationships between two Jews."

In addition the rabbis added a background statement outlining the CCAR's positions over the years on the rights of homosexuals, including a 1995 Responsa committee that, by a vote of 7-2, concluded that gay relationships "cannot be called kiddushin," the Hebrew term for marriage.

Those rabbis who had pushed for these changes, among them Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin of Port Washington, N.Y., said they were pleased with the final version, which they described as a "compromise."

But proponents of the original resolution insisted that the changes were only

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Clinton: Ball is in Assad's court

The next move in Israeli-Syrian peacemaking is up to Syrian President Hafez Assad, according to President Clinton. "The ball's in his court now," Clinton said Tuesday in what were his first public comments about his failed summit Sunday in Geneva with Assad.

In another development, the United States reportedly asked Israel to delay efforts to rally a multinational force that would deploy along the Lebanese border following an Israeli troop pullout.

Following the request, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy canceled a scheduled trip to New York to discuss the matter with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

### Arafat: No assurances on state

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat denied that he had received assurances that Israel would agree to a declaration of an independent Palestinian state in September if the two sides fail to reach a final peace agreement by then.

Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's security adviser, Danny Yatom, issued the denials in the wake of an Israeli Army Radio report that Barak made the pledge during a recent meeting with Arafat.

### Mubarak discusses anti-Semitism

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak met Wednesday with the U.S. House International Relations Committee and discussed anti-Semitism in the Egyptian press, the Israeli-Syrian peace process, weapons of mass destruction and U.S. aid to Egypt.

Egypt has asked that its \$2.2 billion annual U.S. aid be delivered at the start of each fiscal year, so that the aid could increase with the interest it earns.

### Knesset OKs new TV station

Israel's Knesset approved the creation of a second commercial television station. The station, Israel's third overall, is expected to begin broadcasting next year.

"modifications" and that the final resolution still sends a strong message.

"The essential nature of the resolution remained," said Rabbi Shira Stern of West River, N.J., adding that the final resolution "affirms the sacred relationship between two Jews who are gay and lesbian and says that we are going to create materials to reflect that affirmation." Stern, who is co-president of the CCAR's Women's Rabbinic Network, which introduced the resolution, was one of many who insisted that they were pleased with the outcome.

Eger described the resolution as "very strong," and said she was pleased it was something the vast majority of Reform rabbis could agree upon.

"Even though Rabbi Salkin and I don't agree on every issue, we have one movement and to that we're both committed," she said.

The debate leading up to the convention was long and heated — at times even "McCarthyist" according to those who initially opposed the resolution and felt they were unfairly labeled as homophobes and bigots. However, reflecting the mutual satisfaction with the last-minute changes, the actual floor discussion lasted only an hour, with few people speaking out against the resolution.

The discussion's efficiency and prompt vote contrasted sharply to the CCAR's vote in Pittsburgh last year on adopting a statement of principles.

That vote, which was seen as a movement-wide acceptance of more traditional Jewish practices, took place almost 24 hours after it was initially scheduled, following a passionate, late-night debate. □

## 'Israeli mafia' in South Africa makes news with recent killings

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — The "Israeli mafia" has made headlines in South Africa following the recent discovery of the body of an alleged member of the group.

Shai Avishar, 36, disappeared from the trendy Johannesburg suburb of Norwood last October. His body was discovered in a shallow grave some 40 miles away following a tip-off to police. A South African police spokesman said the group posed no threat to the local Jewish community or other South African Jews.

The spokesman added that a member of the police investigating the group had received death threats from syndicate members.

"There are about 20 syndicate members all in all; whereas there are about 120,000 members in the police service," the spokesman said. "We will therefore not be intimidated by them."

Avishar allegedly had contacts with a reputed mob leader in Israel, Yossi Harari, who is reported to have been convicted in Israel of four criminal charges.

Avishar and his former wife, Johannesburg socialite Hazel Crane, were friends of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who has remained a prominent and influential politician since her divorce from former President Nelson Mandela a few years ago.

Crane is reported to have fled the country because she believed her life was in danger from members of the syndicate. Before fleeing, she reported receiving death threats from the group.

Police suspect that Avishar was murdered by another member of the syndicate after an apparent double-cross in a diamond deal. Police have linked an additional two murders to the syndicate, and they suspect a third. In the two incidents linked to the group, the victims' heads had been covered with a shawl.

Motti Raz, who came to South Africa in 1996, apparently launched the "Israeli mafia." He was later killed and his body found, also in a shallow grave, near Johannesburg. The syndicate has been implicated in various crimes, including illegal diamond dealing, drug trafficking, protection payments and illegal firearms.

The syndicate is said to operate primarily in the three largest cities in South Africa — Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban — where Jews have been the prime targets of the group. The police say that so far four syndicate members have been killed, all by their own people.

"They are powerful, but they are killing their own people because they are too greedy," the police spokesman said. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Albright: 'Iran 13' a U.S. priority

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told American Jewish leaders Tuesday that the Clinton administration sees the plight of the 13 Iranian Jews arrested on charges of spying as a priority and is trying to ensure they have a fair trial.

Albright spoke during a 40-minute conference call to members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

### Brandeis students protest NRA

Hundreds of demonstrators at Brandeis University protested an appearance there by National Rifle Association President Charlton Heston.

During the rally, which was sponsored by the American Jewish Congress, students chanted anti-gun slogans and some lay on the pavement, fake blood oozing from them. During his speech, Heston told a Brandeis audience to "question authority" when it comes to gun control laws.

### Senate panel to mull restitution

The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee plans to hold a hearing next week on Holocaust-era restitution efforts.

The panel plans to review efforts to return Nazi-looted artworks and the willingness of European insurers to pay Holocaust-era insurance policies.

### Judge scolds Chasidic family

A Brooklyn judge sentenced a Chasidic teen-ager to 30 months in a government-run boot camp for his involvement in a drug-smuggling ring.

The judge also had some stern words for the 70 members of the community who came to hear the verdict. "Where was the community when all of this was going on?" he asked. "Where was the family?"

### Jewish boarding school to open

A coeducational Jewish boarding high school, modeled on prep schools like Exeter and Andover, is scheduled to open in the fall of 2001 in Greensboro, N.C. Headed by Alvin Mars, an educator who used to direct the Conservative movement's Camp Ramah in California, the American Hebrew Academy expects to enroll 40 to 50 students in its first year.

### Cyclists to speak for the trees

A group of Jewish cyclists plan to ride from Seattle to Washington, D.C., this summer to raise money and awareness for environmental causes.

In what its sponsor, the New York-based Hazon, is calling The Cross-Country Jewish Environmental Bike Ride, the approximately 15 cyclists will visit Jewish communities across the country to promote environmental issues from a religious perspective.

## Online booksellers label notorious anti-Semitic forgery with disclaimer

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — The war against hate on the Internet is heating up.

Two major online booksellers agreed this week to post disclaimers about a 19th-century forgery that claims there is an international Jewish conspiracy to rule the world.

But an online civil liberties group is questioning the moves by Amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com regarding "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," calling them an infringement on free speech. The moves come amid increasing controversy about how to deal with hate speech on the Internet.

Earlier this year, the Internet portal Yahoo! vowed to remove racist and anti-Semitic clubs that it is hosting online, and eBay banned the sale of hate material on its online auction site after pressure from groups, including the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

The note on Amazon.com read: "Please note that Amazon.com does not endorse the views expressed in this book or those in the publisher's book description below."

"The book is considered a forgery," barnesandnoble.com spokesman Gus Carlson was quoted as saying. "In a situation where there is concern over the legitimacy of the book, it is our job to make certain facts clear."

In addition to their own disclaimers, the two companies are posting a rebuttal to the book provided by the Anti-Defamation League: "The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, circulated by the Czarist secret police at the turn of the 20th century, is plainly and simply a plagiarized forgery. The Protocols has been a major weapon in the arsenals of anti-Semites around the world, republished and circulated by individuals, hate groups and governments to convince the gullible as well as the bigoted that Jews have schemed and plotted to take over the world."

Abraham Foxman, national director for the Anti-Defamation League, emphasized that his group just wants potential customers to know what the book really is.

"We are not in the business of banning books, no matter how reprehensible or indefensible they are," he said.

But Deborah Pierce, an attorney with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, said the move "raises some flags." She worries what would happen with situations that are not as clear-cut, referring to a hypothetical case involving a how-to abortion book.

"This is the beginning of a slippery slope," she said.

The ADL's negative reviews of dozens of other "objectionable" books are also included on Amazon.com.

Marc Stern, the co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department, said that what distinguishes this case from other works that many would find objectionable is that by purporting to be written by Jews, the "Protocols" is not honest about its origins. "It really is a case of truth in advertising," he said.

Contrary to popular belief, the origins of the "Protocols" can be traced to France, not Russia. It was a collaborative effort of French intellectual anti-Semites and Russian anti-Semites within the czarist secret police. But the "Protocols" was never published in France. Its debut actually came in Russia, around 1903.

In America, perhaps the prime purveyor of the "Protocols" was auto magnate Henry Ford. Hitler cited it prominently in his "Mein Kampf" and made it a centerpiece of Nazi propaganda. In recent decades, the "Protocols" spread beyond Europe and America, popping up in Japan, South America and the Arab world.

The case also points to another significant phenomenon: the spread of information along the Internet. Foxman of the ADL said the controversy began after someone wrote on the World Wide Web that they had found a copy of the "Protocols" in the Judaica section of their local Barnes and Noble.

This problem was quickly resolved — the bookstore moved the "Protocols" to its world history section — but the online note spurred others to check to see how the book could be ordered online. When they found it available, they wrote in to the ADL — an "e-mail frenzy," Foxman termed it.

"What normally would be a complaint that you would deal with one on one now comes from 80 or 100 people," he said. □

## U.S. Supreme Court may settle conflicting school-prayer rulings

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Supreme Court may finally resolve conflicting rulings on student-led prayers at school-related events, such as graduation ceremonies.

The high court heard oral arguments Wednesday in a case involving student-led and student-initiated prayer at high school football games.

In 1992, the Supreme Court barred clergy-led prayers at public school graduation ceremonies, but a year later the justices refused to review a federal appeals court ruling that allowed student-led prayers. That ruling conflicts with another federal appeals court's decision barring student-led graduation prayers.

Justices appeared perplexed by the Texas school district policy of allowing a student representative to read prayers over the school's public address system at football games.

The school district maintains this policy does not violate the constitutional ban on establishment of a state religion because the message or invocation can be nonreligious and is decided by the student and not the school.

The parents and students who object to the school policy have argued that it is an imposition of religious practices on the student body. Any speech that is part of an official school event, even if initiated and led by a student, is under school control and therefore the government is really making the choice of whether to include prayer, they say.

Justice David Souter, vocal in his criticism of the policy at the oral hearing, challenged the school district to show how its policy is a neutral one. If a student chosen by his peers to give a message at the football game includes prayer, and the school "provides a forum and requires attendance of some students, what more do we need?" Souter asked.

"The school district is forcing students to participate in prayer," he added.

But Justice Antonin Scalia said that it should not be assumed that students would say a prayer every time.

Justice Anthony Kennedy voiced his concern over whether schools could become "forums for religious debates" and Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said the court must look at whether a similar policy could enter the classroom. Kennedy and O'Connor may hold the swing votes in this case, as they have been in other divisive cases. □

## Netanyahu's political comeback may be over before it ever begins

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A police recommendation that Benjamin Netanyahu be charged with a series of crimes may have quashed the former prime minister's political comeback aspirations.

Following a seven-month investigation, police officials recommended Tuesday that Netanyahu be charged with accepting a bribe, breach of public trust, fraud and obstruction of justice.

The officials also recommended that Netanyahu's wife, Sara,

be charged with theft and breach of public trust.

After Netanyahu announced last year he was taking a "timeout" from politics following his resounding defeat to Ehud Barak in the elections for prime minister, there has been speculation Netanyahu might be considering a comeback either in the Likud or another right-wing party. Sources close to Netanyahu have been quoted in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz as saying he had recently indicated that he would not consider such a move in the next elections — but that he might in subsequent elections.

But if justice officials decide to follow up on the police recommendation, Netanyahu's political career could well be over.

The investigation focused on official gifts the Netanyahus are suspected of taking when he left office. It also addressed allegations that a Jerusalem contractor had provided the couple with free services in exchange for political favors.

Netanyahu angrily denied during a prime-time televised address that he is guilty of wrongdoing, saying the allegations are "baseless" and accusing the police investigation of being politically motivated.

"This is not a pursuit, it is a manhunt," Netanyahu said Tuesday night, breaking the silence he maintained during the course of the investigation. Police commissioner Yehuda Wilk flatly rejected the accusation. The Netanyahus are suspected of illegally taking some 700 official gifts at a total estimated value of \$100,000 dollars when he left office.

Police found some of the items during a search of the couple's private home and located others in a state storage room with other personal effects belonging to the Netanyahus. Some of the gifts were never recovered.

In some cases, police said the original packaging of the items had been discarded and there were visible signs of efforts to rub off the identifying labels on the items.

Police also suspect a "give-and-take" relationship existed over several years between the Netanyahus and Jerusalem contractor Avner Amedi.

Police allege that Amedi performed various services for the couple without ever billing them, and in exchange, Netanyahu used his influence to secure government contracts for Amedi.

In addition, Netanyahu is suspected of having Amedi submit bills to the Prime Minister's Office in an attempt to get public funds to cover some \$50,000 worth of services that Amedi provided, including some at the couple's private home.

With regard to these suspicions, police recommended that the former director general of Netanyahu's office, Moshe Leon, and another worker there, Ezra Seidoff, be charged for trying to cover up the bogus billing. Amedi himself supplied evidence to the police regarding his dealings with the Netanyahus.

The police recommendation to charge Netanyahu is the latest in a series of police investigations of Israeli public officials.

The attorney general this week ordered a police probe of the spiritual leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas party, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, for remarks he made against a cabinet minister.

Police are currently conducting investigations of President Ezer Weizman for gifts he received from a French millionaire friend — and are looking into alleged campaign finance violations committed by nonprofit organizations that worked for Ehud Barak's election.

Netanyahu said in the television interview he was convinced nothing would come of the latest police recommendations. □