



Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Knesset passes equal rights law

Israel's Knesset passed a law decreeing equal rights for women — but only after a key sponsor of the bill gave up her seat on an influential committee in favor of a male legislator.

The fervently Orthodox Shas Party withdrew its threat to sabotage the bill after One Israel Knesset member Yael Dayan ceded her place on the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee to a Shas legislator.

Shas denied that any deal had been cut.

Clinton calls for Syrian proposal

President Clinton accused Syrian President Hafez Assad of stonewalling on terms for peace with Israel. If Assad disagrees with Israel's "quite significant" proposal for returning the Golan Heights in exchange for peace, "then there should be some other proposal, I think, coming from the Syrians," Clinton said.

The state-run Syrian daily Al-Thawra reacted angrily to Clinton's comments.

Sharansky to visit Ethiopia

Israel's interior minister plans to travel to Ethiopia next week to learn more about the situation of the Falash Mura, descendants of Jews who converted to Christianity.

Natan Sharansky's mission follows a recent Israeli Supreme Court decision calling on the government to expedite its processing of the 18,000 Ethiopians congregating in compounds in hopes that they will be allowed to immigrate to Israel.

Banks to publish more accounts

Swiss banking regulators agreed to let member banks publish the names of 26,000 more dormant accounts that might be linked to Holocaust victims.

The Swiss Federal Banking Commission said that as a result of this move, plans for distributing a \$1.25 billion settlement that Swiss banks agreed to in 1998 should come soon.

Conservative rabbis tab leader

A rabbi from the Chicago area was named president of the Conservative movement's rabbinical arm. Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, elected president of the Rabbinical Assembly at the organization's 100th annual convention in Philadelphia, will serve in his position for two years.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Barak's bad luck is bad news for peace and his government

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It was a bleak week for Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

His peace policy was reeling, following Syrian President Hafez Assad's rejection the day before of Barak's peace proposals, which were advanced by no less an advocate than President Clinton.

And his coalition was tottering, too, after the attorney general decided to launch a criminal investigation of the spiritual leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, which has been locked in an ongoing battle with another major partner in Barak's governing coalition, the secular Meretz Party. The attorney general ordered the investigation after Rabbi Ovadia Yosef called last week on his followers to lay a curse on Education Minister Yossi Sarid, the head of Meretz.

Where both Syria and the criminal probe were concerned, there were still voices to be heard assuring one another, and seeking to assure the prime minister, that all was not as black as it looked.

The "grave is not yet sealed" was how some officials described the all but moribund Syrian peace process.

The head of the Israel Defense Force, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, was among those taking this tack, suggesting in a Knesset briefing that there might yet be life after death on the Syrian track — despite the slap in the face that Assad had effectively delivered to Clinton, with the whole world watching, when they failed Sunday in Geneva to find a basis for resuming Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

Observers attribute Mofaz's optimism to the army's reluctance to embark on a withdrawal from Lebanon without an accompanying agreement involving Damascus.

Mofaz and his fellow officers are warning that a unilateral withdrawal could go awry if there are continued attacks by Hezbollah or other terrorists against Israeli border settlements after the pullback, and if the IDF replies with massive force against Lebanon's infrastructure. The Syrian army could quickly get sucked in, they warn, and full-scale warfare could erupt.

Similarly on the domestic front, Barak was assured by members of his Labor Party, and indeed by ministers in Shas, that it is not a foregone conclusion that Shas would withdraw from the coalition because of the criminal investigation, which party members see as a grave insult to their revered leader.

Shas ministers were still negotiating behind the scenes with their Labor counterparts over the substance of the crisis that triggered Yosef's outburst against Sarid: the minister's handling of Shas' financially troubled religious school system, which provides the party with its main pillar of political support.

Sarid has been insisting that the deputy education minister, a member of Shas, have no role in running the Shas school system. He has threatened to pull Meretz out of the government if Barak overrules him on this.

Despite the diehard optimists, however, most observers here feel that even if the Syrian negotiations continue through some back channel, there is unlikely to be any breakthrough before Barak's July deadline for a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon.

Some of these observers predict, in fact, that Barak will now speed up the pullout to May or June.

The Clinton administration, whose effort in Geneva was widely seen as a last-ditch attempt to reach a comprehensive Middle East peace before the president leaves office,

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. denies appointment of envoy

The U.S. State Department denied reports in the Israeli press that the United States would appoint a special envoy to use shuttle diplomacy between Syria and Israel. The United States will, however, continue to communicate with the parties and try to clarify positions on both sides, a spokesman said.

Palestinians protest on Land Day

Palestinians demonstrated in Israeli Arab towns and in the self-rule areas against Israeli land confiscations. Several Palestinians were injured during clashes with Israeli police.

The demonstrations were organized as part of Land Day observances, which mark the killing of six Arabs in violent clashes that erupted in 1976 during demonstrations against land confiscation.

China's president to visit Israel

China's president plans to visit Israel and the Palestinian self-rule areas in what will be the first such trip by a Chinese head of state. Jiang Zemin will make the visit during an April 12-27 trip that will also take him to Turkey, Greece and South Africa.

Israel vows to help militia allies

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's security adviser vowed the country would help its militia allies in southern Lebanon who fear revenge following a planned Israeli withdrawal from the region.

Danny Yatom said Israeli officials would help members of the South Lebanon Army find places to live in Israel or abroad should they decide to move.

Syria: ZOA uses Nazi tactics

A Syrian government Internet site is accusing the Zionist Organization of America of using the tactics of Hitler's propaganda minister. Attacking the ZOA's criticisms of Syria, the site charges that the group adopted Joseph Goebbels' methods.

will gradually grow less effective on the world scene as the U.S. election campaign proceeds.

The talks in Geneva are understood to have stalled over a tiny, but symbolically significant sliver of land: the eastern coastline of the Sea of Galilee.

Barak has vowed that Syrian soldiers will not "dangle their feet" in the Galilee, Israel's chief source of water. His pledge has become a mantra: There would be scant support in a referendum on a final peace deal with Syria if he were to abandon it.

For Assad, on the other hand, the memory of Syrian soldiers doing precisely that before the 1967 Six-Day War apparently burns bright — and he is determined to restore that situation.

Assad reportedly spurned Barak's proposal that Syria agree to let Israel hold a narrow strip of land along the eastern shore in return for the el-Hama hot springs, located southeast of the sea, which were clearly part of Palestine under the 1923 British-French demarcation of the border between Palestine and Syria.

Assad has maintained throughout the recent years of on-and-off negotiations that he does not recognize the 1923 international border and that he would only accept the June 4, 1967, line.

On that date, Syrian soldiers were in occupation of el-Hama — so, in Assad's view, it is not Barak's to cede.

Beyond the impasse over substance, the failed Geneva summit will almost certainly have a negative impact on Israeli public opinion, which is already wary of Assad's peaceable intentions.

The perceived humiliation of Clinton in Geneva will likewise not go over well in Israel. These are vital considerations, given that any agreement that Israel reaches with Syria must pass a referendum.

The erosion of public support for what is now a highly hypothetical peace policy will in turn have a negative impact on Barak's ability to hold his disparate coalition together.

A possible peace treaty with Syria served as something of a bond, since both Shas and Meretz, despite their vast differences on so many other issues, were both committed to a land-for-peace policy with Damascus.

With Syria's latest rejection of Barak's proposals, that bond will inevitably weaken.

Barak's aides say he will press ahead with the Palestinian track — but here, too, the domestic difficulties are likely to be no less dangerous for the premier.

If the pro-settler National Religious Party secedes over giving the Palestinian Authority additional portions of the West Bank, a disaffected Shas, seething over Yosef's "victimization" by the "establishment," would probably leave, too — leaving Barak with no majority in the Knesset. □

Yiddish lesson given in Canadian Parliament

TORONTO (JTA) — A recent use of Yiddish in Canada's Parliament can only be described as mishuganah.

Reform Party legislator Lee Morrison said in Canada's House of Commons recently that a government minister was mishandling her responsibilities with a great deal of chutzpah.

Although that Yiddish word has slipped into common parlance in recent decades, Morrison mispronounced it.

Canada's deputy prime minister, Herb Gray, who is Jewish, immediately jumped to his feet and offered additional Yiddish words to describe Morrison's question.

"Mr. Speaker," Gray said, "if the honorable member wants to ask a sensible question, I will give him two other words which more accurately describe his question and the questions of the Reform Party.

"His questions are all gornisht," or nothing, and absolute narishkeit," or foolishness.

Although it is doubtful they understood his Yiddish phrases, some of Gray's Liberal colleagues shouted "Hear, hear" in mirthful agreement.

"Order, please," said the house speaker. "I have no way of knowing whether or not those words are parliamentary." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Jewish leaders criticize mufti

A group of Jewish leaders and scholars from across the political spectrum issued a statement condemning the recent charge by the chief Islamic official in Jerusalem that Israel exaggerated the number of Holocaust victims to win international sympathy.

The Zionist Organization of America organized the protest.

Swiss paper refuses to publish ad

A Swiss newspaper refused to publish an ad paid by the European Jewish Congress criticizing the far-right Freedom Party's inclusion in the Austrian government. The EJC submitted the ad to the *Neue Zuercher Zeitung* before Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel's planned visit to Switzerland, which is the first European nation willing to host him.

'Seinfeld' star to portray Pollard

One of the stars of television's "Seinfeld" is taking on the role of a spy for Israel.

Jason Alexander, who appeared as George Costanza in the NBC hit, is slated to play Jonathan Pollard in an upcoming film on Showtime.

Pollard is serving a life sentence in the United States for spying on behalf of the Jewish state.

Matzah factory burns down

A matzah factory in Brooklyn burned to the ground just three weeks before the start of Passover.

But firefighters and workers managed to save several pallets of matzahs before the blaze destroyed the factory, which provides unleavened bread to the Belz Chasidim. The fire was caused by a blocked stove flue, according to fire officials.

Researchers combat toxic shock

Hebrew University researchers have developed a means to combat toxic shock, a condition caused by bacterial infections that has caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people annually.

The researchers designed an "antagonist" a small molecule that blocks the ability of the bacteria to cause the condition.

Choreographer dies at 90

Anna Sokolow, a choreographer who was a major influence on Israeli dance, died Wednesday at the age of 90. In the 1950s, Sokolow served as an adviser to the Inbal dance company, which used Yemenite Jewish traditions in its productions.

Sokolow was known for her use of pessimistic themes. "I'm not neurotic," she once said. "But I don't have that happy philosophy, because what the hell is there to be happy about?"

Evangelical's stealth tactics monitored by anti-missionaries

By Brianne Korn

NEW YORK (JTA) — Anti-missionary groups are not surprised that a Christian evangelical managed to sneak an ad into more than 80 unsuspecting U.S. Jewish newspapers.

It's all still wrapped into religious Y2K fervor, they said.

"The belief is that Jesus will resurrect in the first few years of the second millennium if enough Jews are converted," said Philip Abramowitz, director of the Task Force on Missionaries and Cults for the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York. Abramowitz was responding to the made-for-TV movie "The Rabbi," which billed itself as a film about a rabbi's struggle with modernity, but was actually a pitch for conversion sponsored by "messianic Jews." Jewish newspapers across the country ran an ad for the film without realizing its content. "The Rabbi" was produced by Morris Cerullo, a San Diego-based Christian missionary.

According to Mark Sanders, outreach director for the Los Angeles-based anti-missionary group Jews for Judaism, Cerullo previously sent copies of his books to 1 million Jewish homes in Israel. Now an observant Jew, Sanders is a former Christian minister who spent four years in Israel as a missionary. As such, he said, he is "intimately" aware of the methods used to convince Jews to abandon their religion.

The ad had come through an agency, Walter Bennett Communications in suburban Philadelphia, which has handled high-profile Christian productions, including Billy Graham's, Sanders said.

The advertising campaign for the movie was presented differently to non-Jewish newspapers, including USA Today, which ran the film's schedule along with a picture of Cerullo, Sanders said.

Sanders said Christian missionary groups normally aim their message at Jews with little or no religious background. In this case, though, the ads ran in Jewish newspapers, which are usually read by more-involved Jews. □

High court upholds barriers against benefits for immigrants

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish immigrants and refugees who entered the United States after 1996 and have yet to become citizens will continue to face problems in seeking public assistance.

The Supreme Court this week refused to hear a challenge to laws that limit welfare benefits to U.S. citizens. Jewish groups called the court's refusal a major disappointment. With its refusal, the Supreme Court keeps the congressional changes to the 1996 welfare reforms intact.

The changes made legal immigrants ineligible for benefits immediately. Refugees who have demonstrated a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality or social or political ties become ineligible for the benefits seven years after their arrival to the United States.

It is estimated that tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants have been affected by these changes.

Advocates for immigrants and refugees must now turn to Congress to continue attempts to restore the federal benefits.

The link between citizenship and benefits eligibility had never been made before, said Leonard Glickman, executive vice president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. Refugees and immigrants may face a wait as long as two years before their application for citizenship might be approved.

Before 1996 government assistance was available in the interim, but now noncitizen immigrants cannot collect food stamps or Supplemental Security Income, which recipients spend mostly on housing. □

NEWS ANALYSIS**Most recipients of slave labor fund will be non-Jewish victims of Nazis***By Mitchell Danow*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish groups were the driving force behind the creation of Germany's latest Holocaust compensation fund, but Jews will not be the primary recipients.

Indeed, only about 30 percent of the approximately \$5.2 billion fund will go to Jews or Jewish causes, according to a source close to the negotiations that resulted in the fund's creation.

After months of squabbling among the various parties — particularly involving lawyers representing competing interests — those negotiations wrapped up March 23 in Berlin with an agreement to provide the bulk of the fund to Holocaust-era slave and forced laborers.

Jews are receiving a smaller piece of the pie because there are fewer living slave laborers, most of whom are Jewish, than forced laborers, who are non-Jewish.

Nazi policies account for the sharply different proportion of survivors from these two groups.

The slave laborers were concentration camp prisoners whom the Nazis sought to work to death. The forced laborers, imported from Eastern European nations to free up Germans to serve in the army, worked under better conditions than the slave laborers.

Jewish groups have been pressing German companies to pay Nazi-era slave laborers since the end of World War II.

The strongest "moral argument came from the Jews, based on the slave-labor issue," said Karen Heilig, staff counsel for the Claims Conference, which was among the groups negotiating on behalf of the laborers.

This was the "driving force" behind all the negotiations with Germany, she added.

A series of lawsuits brought in recent years in U.S. and German courts on behalf of Jewish slave laborers are generally credited with getting Germany to agree to the fund.

Indeed, German firms had demanded that the agreement include a provision giving them protection against any future lawsuits.

Heilig said the presence of German subsidiaries on U.S. soil, which made them the targets of possible sanctions, also played a role in getting Germany to agree to the fund.

There were several other factors, she said, pointing to the reunification of the two Germanys, recently declassified Holocaust-era documents and a \$1.25 billion agreement involving Swiss banks that was reached in 1998 to settle claims surrounding Switzerland's handling of Holocaust victims' assets.

"A lot of different pieces of the puzzle started coming together," said Heilig.

Compared to the Jewish effort, Eastern European countries joined the negotiations far more recently.

Although Germany has paid more than \$54 billion in compensation to Holocaust survivors since World War II, no payments were made to those living in the Soviet-bloc countries during the Cold War.

The negotiators — including representatives of Holocaust survivors, the German, U.S. and Eastern European governments, and German companies — agreed last December on the size of the fund, to be split equally by German government and industry.

Since then, in talks alternating between Berlin and Washington, the negotiators have been wrangling over how to divide the money.

Jewish groups welcomed last week's allocation agreement, but felt it came too late for many who suffered in the Holocaust.

"It's important to note" that the agreement "comes five decades after the war," said Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Claims Conference.

"At best, what has been accomplished represents a measure of justice," Taylor said. "What is needed now is a German statement on the accord's moral dimension."

Taylor and other Jewish leaders have long stressed that their efforts focused on achieving justice — not simply on Jews getting more money.

Noah Flug, who serves as secretary-general of an umbrella group representing Holocaust survivors in Israel, called last week's agreement "an important step that for some has come a little too late."

Flug estimated that two-thirds of those survivors who would have been eligible to receive payments from the fund have already died.

The chief negotiator for Germany, Otto Lambsdorff, predicted that payments could be made later this year — assuming the German Parliament passes enabling legislation, a move expected in July. The German Cabinet approved the bill one day before the distribution agreement was reached.

U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, who represented the United States in the negotiations, said claimants will have eight months to apply for compensation after the legislation is approved.

Claims procedures are expected to be announced in the coming months. Under the terms of the deal, some 240,000 slave laborers — of whom approximately 140,000 are Jewish — will receive up to \$7,500 each.

More than 1 million forced laborers will get up to \$2,500 each.

People whose property was looted by the Nazis, victims of Nazi medical experiments and those with unpaid Holocaust-era insurance policies will also be among those entitled to claim payments.

The allocation agreement includes the following distributions:

- \$906 million to Poland; \$862 million to Ukraine; \$417.5 million to Russia; \$347 million to Belarus; and \$211.5 million to the Czech Republic. Jews living in these countries are expected to get payments from these allocations;

- The Claims Conference will get about \$906 million for distribution outside the above five countries;

- \$500 million for property claims, including looted bank accounts and unpaid insurance policies;

- \$350 million for a foundation to sponsor research and educational projects on Nazi labor policies. □

Group to retrace steps of Exodus

NEW YORK (JTA) — An interfaith group from the United States, Canada and Mexico plans to spend Passover together on a peace pilgrimage.

The 36 Jews, Christians, Muslims and Quakers participating in Festival of Freedom 2000 will retrace the steps of the Exodus from Egypt to the Sinai Desert to Jerusalem.

Festival of Freedom is an L.A.-based grassroots project dedicated to interfaith efforts. □