



Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Federations agree on money

A majority of local Jewish federations recommended that they maintain their current contributions to their umbrella system and to aid Jews overseas in this year's budget.

The recommendation, which still needs to be approved by the United Jewish Communities' executive committee, came during a meeting in Washington.

The federations also recommended that the plan be reviewed again next year and that federations that contribute less this year not be penalized.

Arab leaders: 'Iran 13' to fare well

Iran does not plan to execute the 13 Jews facing trial on accusations of spying for Israel and the United States if they are convicted, according to Egypt's president.

Hosni Mubarak, who said he received this assurance from Iranian officials, made the comments during a meeting with officials of the European Jewish Congress in Cairo.

The president of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, said he received assurances from Tehran that the 13 would receive a fair trial and "will most probably be set free."

The trial is set for April 18.

Looted-art Web sites launched

Germany launched a Web site to help Holocaust victims and their heirs find Nazi-looted art.

The site, located at www.lostart.de, has searchable listings in German and English, and will eventually add Russian.

Meanwhile, Boston's Museum of Fine Arts is displaying several of its paintings on its Web site to see if viewers can help fill in gaps in the history of their ownership.

The museum launched the site, www.mfa.org, because it is worried the paintings might have been looted by the Nazis. [Page 3]

Court backs soldier's extradition

An Israeli court ruled that an Israeli soldier could be extradited to Canada to face second-degree murder charges.

Daniel Weiz, 19, is suspected of involvement in the beating death last November of another teen-ager in a Toronto park.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Cuban Jews share fears over future return of Elian

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — When it first emerged in November that a Cuban boy named Elian Gonzalez had been fished out of the sea, Moises Asis relied on his lawyerly instincts.

To the Cuban Jewish attorney, who immigrated to Miami in 1993, the case was a cut-and-dry legal issue: The boy must be reunited with his father.

But once Fidel Castro sank his teeth into the affair and turned Elian into a rallying cry for his flailing Communist regime, Asis soon had a change of heart.

"It would be different if Elian were from any other country," said Asis, 47, who founded the Tikkun Olam Hebrew School in Havana.

"But I see all of Castro's propaganda, and how he's using it to distract the public from its economic problems. Elian will not be returned to his father, to a normal life. He will be sent to Castro and used as a propaganda toy."

To justify his belief that parents' rights do not always trump all other factors, Asis draws a provocative parallel: "If a boy fleeing the Holocaust lost his mother along the way, but the father were still alive in Nazi-occupied Austria, would you send the boy back to his father?"

Castro is no Hitler, of course. But Asis and fellow Cuban Jews in South Florida generally share the anger and frustration of the wider Cuban exile community.

They are deeply troubled by the U.S. government's determination to send Elian home, and by an American public that seems to generally support that decision.

At the same time, the Cuban Jewish exiles fret about Elian's future if he is forced to endure life under the Castro dictatorship.

"The Cubans and the Cuban Jews are praying for a miracle here," said Ines Matalon Kleiman, 66, the office manager for Torat Moshe Sephardic Congregation of Florida. "We want the child saved."

Cuban Jewry once numbered 15,000, but waves of emigration followed Castro's rise to power in 1959, leaving the community currently with some 1,200 people.

Many have come to America, with the vast majority settling in South Florida.

And through "Operation Cigar," a once-secret project of the Jewish Agency for Israel, some 700 Cuban Jews have landed in Israel since 1995. Another 50 or 60 are expected by the end of July.

Most Cuban Jews are descended from Ashkenazim who fled the pogroms that occurred throughout Eastern Europe around the turn of the 19th century. About 40 percent are of Sephardi Turkish descent.

Some 2,500 Cuban Jewish families, totaling 7,000 to 8,000 members, have settled in Miami since the Cuban revolution, according to Rachel Lapidot of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation.

In South Florida overall, the figure may be as high as 10,000, says University of Miami geographer Ira Sheskin.

Like other Cubans, many of them recall with bitterness the circumstances of their exile. It fuels their passion for the Elian case.

"The Jews of Cuba had everything to live for; they had money and businesses," said Kleiman. "But they left it all behind and came here with nothing. Because we know what the reality is in Cuba."

To American Jews, the situation is far less clear. U.S. observers concede the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Reports: Syria easing demands

Reports are reaching Jerusalem that Damascus is softening its stance behind the scenes, despite the public stalemate in Israeli-Syrian talks, according to Israel Radio.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak held talks in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak en route to Washington.

The Israeli premier will meet with President Clinton on Tuesday.

U.S. aliyah decreases 15 percent

U.S. immigration to Israel totaled 1,323 in 1999, a 15 percent drop from the previous year, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Overall, immigration to Israel rose 38 percent, with 77,921 immigrants arriving last year.

Israel considers new Arab towns

Israeli officials are considering the establishment of a new town for Arab citizens on state-owned land, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Meanwhile, Israeli Arab legislator Ahmed Tibi said he plans to introduce a bill in the Knesset requiring the equitable distribution of state-owned land to all its citizens.

Except for some Bedouin towns in the Negev, no new Arab towns have been established in Israel since its founding.

Israelis warned on Yemen travel

Israel's Foreign Ministry advised Israelis against traveling to Yemen.

Sunday's announcement came days after a group of Israeli Jews of Yemeni descent made the second such visit to the Arab state in recent weeks.

The ministry cited cases in which tourists were kidnapped or killed, the lack of diplomatic and telephone links, and the difficulty of bringing aid to Israelis in need.



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difficulty of comprehending life in a Communist system: the restrictions on every sort of freedom, the daily intrusion of the Communist Party into the private lives or the constant fear of police, whose sole purpose is to serve the regime, not the public. Even Miami Jews who live and work among Cuban exiles are divided about how to resolve Elian's case.

"I'm a parent, so I can imagine what the father is feeling," said Linda Brockman, a reporter for The Jewish Herald, a weekly supplement of The Miami Herald.

"I'm not knowledgeable about life in Cuba. The more I learn about it, the more difficult it is for me to form an opinion," she said, adding that "what's best for the child is the most important thing. Nothing else matters."

As for the reaction of the Jews remaining in Cuba, little is known about how they view the Elian situation. The community president, Jose Miller, could not be reached for comment.

However, both Cuban Jewish exiles in Florida and American Jews who work with Cuban Jewry assume they would be afraid to speak out publicly on the topic.

The community enjoys rather good relations with Castro — he apparently gave the go-ahead on the aliyah to Israel — and would not want to jeopardize it.

What news has emerged is that, according to sources in Miami, Cuban Jewry is anxious about the fact Elian's lead lawyer, Spencer Eig, is visibly Jewish. An Orthodox Jew, he wears a large black yarmulka and full beard.

"We heard there was discomfort about it within the community," said one source in Miami, who wished to remain anonymous.

"They're worried that when Cubans see a Jew as the lawyer, they might assume it is the work of the Jewish community rather than the work of an individual." □

Australian TV film spurs calls for probe of alleged war criminal

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Two leading Australian Jewish organizations are calling on their government to reopen its investigation of an alleged Nazi war criminal.

The calls for the investigation into Antanas Gudelis came following the broadcast of a documentary that included testimony from witnesses who said Gudelis ordered murders and was personally involved in brutality in the Baltic nation of Lithuania during World War II.

During the course of the documentary, which was broadcast recently on the nationally televised program "Dateline," Lithuania's chief prosecutor claimed that he needed the names of individuals whose deaths and suffering Gudelis was directly and personally responsible for in order to press charges against him.

A leading Australian historian, Konrad Kwiet, and the director of the Office of Special Investigations of the U.S. Justice Department, Eli Rosenbaum, responded by saying they are shocked that the Lithuanian official would make such a comment because the names of 800 people murdered at the hands of Gudelis' unit are held in Lithuania.

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the umbrella body of Australia's Jewish community said, "It would be outrageous if Australia's hospitality is being abused by Nazi war criminals remaining here as fugitives."

The council's president, Nina Bassat, added that "the presence of people who have committed crimes against humanity is a moral stain on our nation."

Colin Rubenstein, the executive director of the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, said, "Many Australians want to see re-established a body along the lines of the former Special Investigations Unit to enable the recurring problem of war criminals to be dealt with effectively in Australia, and to erase Australia's image as a safe haven for war criminals.

"The need for Australia to have the option of deprivation of citizenship and deportation in such cases is also overwhelming. Experience in the United States and Canada proves that it is not too late to achieve a measure of justice in this area," Rubenstein said. □

JEWISH WORLD

House to vote on workplace bill

A bill that would require employers to accommodate their employees' religious needs is scheduled to be introduced Tuesday in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The Workplace Religious Freedom Act has failed to pass several times in previous years.

But the act's advocates say it now has bipartisan support.

Jews add to Shevardnadze rout

Jews in the former Soviet republic of Georgia overwhelmingly supported the re-election of President Eduard Shevardnadze.

Shevardnadze, who easily won a second five-year term in Sunday's vote, has long been considered a friend of the Jewish community.

Ruling expected in Irving trial

A ruling is expected Tuesday in the libel trial brought by a self-described Holocaust revisionist against an American historian of the Holocaust and her publisher.

Jewish observers are concerned that if David Irving wins his lawsuit against Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books it will legitimate Holocaust deniers.

Swiss want to pay war orphan

Switzerland is offering to pay \$76,000 to a Jewish man whose parents were murdered in Auschwitz after Swiss authorities deported them in 1942.

The Swiss government's offer to Charles Sonabend, a 69-year-old London resident, is not an admission of wrongdoing, said a spokesman for Finance Minister Kaspar Villiger.

Melchior: Halt sales of 'Protocols'

Rabbi Michael Melchior, minister for Israeli society and world Jewish communities, appealed in a letter to Amazon.com to stop selling "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," calling the book a forgery and a distortion of history.

The online bookseller agreed recently to run a disclaimer that the book about an international Jewish conspiracy is "racist propaganda."

But the company says it will not act as a censor and will continue to sell the book.

Nun who rescued Jews beatified

Pope John Paul II beatified a Swedish nun who helped save Jews during World War II.

Sister Mary Elisabeth Hesselblad, who died in 1957, was one of five people beatified by the pope during a ceremony Sunday.

Beatification is the last step before sainthood.

Germany uses Web site to reunite Nazi-looted art with rightful owners

By Allison Linn

BERLIN (JTA) — Hoping to return art seized during the Nazi era to its rightful owners, the German government this week launched an online catalog of unclaimed items.

At the heart of the Internet site, www.lostart.de, are 2,242 items that have remained unclaimed since the 1940s.

The collection of artwork was dubbed the "Linzer Collection" because many of the items were part of a collection Hitler assembled for a planned museum in his hometown of Linz, Austria.

Much of the never-realized museum's inventory included items seized from Jews and political dissidents after his 1938 law "concerning the expropriation of clerical and Jewish property." Hitler also bought other items using profits from sales of "Mein Kampf" and portrait photographs of himself.

Cataloged by Allied forces in the 1940s, many of the items were reclaimed during the 1950s. In 1962, the unclaimed items were turned over to the German Finance Ministry.

An estimated 1,000 of those artworks ended up on loan to German museums, where many still sit today.

The Web site will serve as the public arm of the Coordinating Office of the Federal States for the Return of Cultural Property. Founded in 1994, the state-funded organization has built a data bank of approximately 3.5 million seized objects. The site, which is also in English, includes a searchable archive of items that remain unclaimed. The archive includes descriptions of artists and artworks, but does not have pictures.

Those who lost items during the Nazi era also can use the site to register information and request a search for their recovery.

At a news conference marking the Web site's launch, German Culture Minister Michael Naumann made clear that reviving the effort to return artworks to their rightful owners is one of his priorities.

"A renewed and critical examination of the existing cultural property that was once in the hands of the Third Reich is necessary," Naumann said.

Naumann apologized to victims of the Third Reich that the process of reclaiming items has been difficult and said he hoped the Web site would make it easier to research this chapter of German history.

Naumann, who is the first German to hold the title of culture minister since the Nazi era, said he is deeply committed to applying the concept of "Wiedergutmachung" — literally, "making good again" and the term Germans use to describe reparations for Nazi victims — in a cultural context. He spoke of the urgent need to find ways to return seized items from the former East Germany, which he said was not really able to start the process of returning items until reunification in 1990.

Gerd Harms, minister of culture, education and religious affairs for the state of Saxony-Anhalt, and one of the officials behind the project, echoed Naumann's sentiment.

He said that when he and his countrymen hear about "cultural goods that were robbed from the Jewish people that came from our states or from other European countries, we know that these things happened more than 50 years ago," but "because of our historical responsibility we are still dealing with these issues today." □

Canada: We erred during Shoah

NEW YORK (JTA) — Canada's prime minister has admitted that his country did not do enough to save Jewish refugees during the Holocaust.

"Yes, errors were made in 1940," Jean Chretien said during a ceremony at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.

Canada's policy toward Jewish immigration during World War II was summed up at the time by one Canadian official, who said, "None is too many." □

Chinese president's Israel visit reflects a deepening relationship

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Chinese President Jiang Zemin is due to arrive in Israel this week on the first state visit by a Chinese president.

The April 12-18 visit reflects the deepening relations between Israel and China since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1992.

Jiang's visit comes after Israel decided to sell China advanced airborne radar systems — a move strongly opposed by Israel's closest ally, the United States. Israel has already signed one contract estimated at \$250 million to equip China with one Russian-built aircraft with the Israeli-made radar system.

China has an option to order more early-warning aircraft, whose technology is similar to the U.S. airborne command centers known as AWACS, in a deal estimated at \$1 billion.

Israeli government sources were quoted by the Israeli daily Ha'aretz as saying Israel has a "vital interest" in close ties with China because of Beijing's role as a superpower and its links with Iran and the Persian Gulf states.

At the same time, the paper cited observers as saying Barak is less sensitive to American pressures because of the current stalemate in the Israeli-Syrian peace talks.

Had there been progress in that track, the paper said, there would have been concern that Congress might press Israel to cancel the deal with China as a precondition for approving an aid package linked to a peace deal with Syria. Cooperation between Israel and China is not limited to the military sphere.

The two countries are also interested in cultivating political, economic, agricultural and scientific ties. In 1997, Israel and China formed joint committees dealing with agriculture, telecommunications, health and electronics. China's second most powerful figure, Li Peng, visited Israel last November.

Jiang is being accompanied to Israel by a large delegation that will include several government ministers, according to an official with Israel's Foreign Ministry.

"It's the highest-level visit of a Chinese official ever, and we are looking forward to a productive visit," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

China is billing Jiang's visit as a chance for him to discuss the Middle East peace process. Diplomats were quoted as saying, however, that it is unlikely he will be bringing any proposals to advance peacemaking. During the visit, Jiang is due to meet with Israeli President Ezer Weizman, Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister David Levy. He will also visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, the Knesset, a number of agricultural sites and some high-tech businesses. He will not visit Israel Aircraft Industries, where the early-warning aircraft is being built.

During the visit, Jiang is also scheduled to make a one-day visit to the West Bank town of Bethlehem, where he is expected to meet with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

China was among the first nations to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1964, and to recognize Palestinian independence in 1988.

Jiang is also scheduled to spend one day in Egypt, where he will confer with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

But, with the remainder of his week spent in Israel, Jiang is clearly making the Jewish state the focus of his attention.

At the end of his visit on April 18, Jiang will travel to Turkey, and then to Greece and South Africa. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Czech translation of Hitler book angers Jews, human rights groups

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — A Czech publishing house is pressing ahead with a Czech-language translation of Hitler's "Mein Kampf," despite protests by local Jewish leaders, human rights groups and German authorities.

The Prague publisher, Otakar II, is producing up to 10,000 copies of the full text without footnotes or disclaimers, arguing it is a "historical document."

The Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic has condemned the move, and the group's executive director, Tomas Kraus, said it is considering launching a lawsuit to prevent distribution of the book in which Hitler spelled out his racist ideology.

The book's planned publication angered a human rights group, the Czech Freedom Fighters, that also may sue Otakar II.

"If somebody wants to launch the book without any commentaries, it is really fascist propaganda," said the group's chairman, Jakub Cermin.

Hitler's "Mein Kampf" should not be banned in the Czech Republic, President Vaclav Havel told a group of students recently.

Havel said the book should be available in libraries for those studying history.

But he added that he did not like the book being sold for profit.

Publisher Michal Zitko meanwhile said last month he would deny a request made by the German Embassy in Prague not to distribute the book.

"No one has made me think that I should not publish it. Hitler was one of the 10 most important people in history, and he influenced the whole of Europe. This is a historical document about a dead man."

Zitko argued that the text requires no footnotes.

"People have said there should be some sort of commentary on the text, but I don't know how long it should be, who should write it and what should be included."

Zitko also predicted that the publicity surrounding his publishing plans would likely boost sales.

"I had expected some kind of reaction, but not as much as it has had. Thanks to the huge media coverage, the books will obviously be sold."

The German state of Bavaria, which owns the rights to the book, is now seeking to stop its distribution in the Czech Republic and has asked the German government to take action, according to Czech press reports.

A spokesman for the Finance Ministry of Bavaria told the Czech daily Pravo that the Bavarian authorities had successfully prevented publication of "Mein Kampf" in Croatia, Turkey and Sweden in the early 1990s. The book was published in Hungary, however. □