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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Lipstadt rejoices after victory

A Holocaust denier lost a libel lawsuit he filed against an American scholar and her publisher.

A British judge ruled that David Irving failed to prove that his reputation had been damaged by Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher in a 1994 book.

"I see this not only as a personal victory, but also as a victory for all those who speak out against hate and prejudice," Lipstadt said after the verdict was read. [Page 4]

UJC board OKs two-year plan

The Board of Trustees of the United Jewish Communities approved a two-year non-binding plan for federations to maintain at least their current contributions to the UJC and to overseas needs.

Meeting in Washington, the board also approved a plan to work with local federations and the Jewish Agency for Israel to become partners of Birthright Israel, a program started by philanthropists to send unaffiliated Jews on a free trip to Israel. [Page 1]

Barak, Clinton meet on peace

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak met with President Clinton Tuesday evening to discuss the Palestinian and Syrian peace tracks.

The White House meeting came after Barak held talks earlier in the day with senior Clinton administration officials.

Minister vows to help Ethiopians

Israel's interior minister, back from a fact-finding mission to Ethiopia, promised to streamline the review process of Ethiopians seeking to immigrate to Israel.

But Natan Sharansky stressed that not all 26,000 Falash Mura, who claim Jewish roots, will be able to come to Israel.

Court delays conversion decision

After little more than a two-hour session, Israel's Supreme Court abruptly ended deliberations on the bitterly disputed question of whether the state should recognize non-Orthodox conversions to Judaism performed in Israel.

The petitioners from the Reform and Conservative movements suggested the judges might be trying to delay the case in the hope the controversy would be resolved in a compromise outside the courts.

Federation leaders build toward new system of trust

By Julie Wiener

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When leaders from 119 North American Jewish federations met here this week, they did not make any earth-shattering decisions or vote on anything binding.

Instead, they did what many involved described as even more revolutionary: They listened to each other, building trust and beginning to explore what it will mean for them to be "owners" of their newly formed umbrella organization, the United Jewish Communities.

"I've begun to see a trusting relationship start," Charles Bronfman, chairman of the UJC's board, said at the meeting's closing plenary on Monday.

Robert Aronson, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, observed as the meeting closed: "I don't think the decisions themselves were as important as the opportunity to sit and talk together."

Spawned from the merger of the United Jewish Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations, the UJC says it is attempting to transform a system that had traditionally been top-down and somewhat mysterious in its decision-making to one that is more open. Indeed, at this two-day "owners' retreat" which ended Monday and was followed by a series of meetings — the most oft-repeated words were "transparency," "consensus" and "change."

What happens with the UJC is significant because its 189 member federations across North America raised almost \$882 million last year for domestic and overseas Jewish needs — everything from day schools to rescuing and resettling refugees.

The federations have long been considered the central address of Jewish philanthropy and social services, but in recent years have been devoting larger portions of their funds to local causes rather than overseas needs. What remains to be seen is whether — in this climate of openness and without coercion — they will be able to come together and agree on enough to form a cohesive system.

At this week's retreat, representatives from the various federations spent time breaking into small groups for lengthy discussions and debating among the entire body.

Following the retreat, the UJC's Board of Trustees on Tuesday approved:

- A two-year nonbinding plan for federations to maintain at least their current contributions to the UJC and to overseas needs. The board also passed an amendment that would require UJC to come up with a formula by Dec. 31, 2001, that would determine the "fair share" contributions of individual federations in the future.

- A decision to work with local federations and the Jewish Agency for Israel to become partners of Birthright Israel, a program started by philanthropists Michael Steinhardt and Charles Bronfman to send young, unaffiliated Jews on a free trip to Israel.

The board set \$39 million as the target amount to contribute over three years — \$15.6 million from the UJC budget, \$15 million from federations and the rest from the Jewish Agency. So far, more than 70 federations — representing more than 83 percent of the North American Jewish population — have indicated they are prepared to participate, according to Stephen Solender, UJC president and chief executive officer.

In addition, leaders from within the UJC system agreed as a result of their discussions on their top three priorities for what they wanted the new organization to accomplish: coordinate overseas needs, help with training for lay and professional leaders and assist with fund raising. During the retreat, UJC leaders updated their constituents on their accomplishments — getting up and running, establishing pillars, or

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak OKs Golan housing

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak approved tourism and housing projects on the Golan Heights, including 200 new housing units in Katzrin, a Cabinet minister said. Haim Ramon added that in the absence of serious negotiations with Syria, which demands the full return of the Golan, Israel would continue to develop the area.

Jews work as Shabbat police

Tel Aviv is employing Jews to monitor whether other Jews are working on Shabbat, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The paper added that the city issues 15 times as many Shabbat fines as the rest of the country combined.

Microsoft launches Web portal

Microsoft Network launched its new Hebrew-language Internet portal in conjunction with the Israeli provider Internet Gold.

The joint venture joins sister portals in 32 other countries and 17 languages worldwide.

Barak doing Mordechai's job

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is taking over the duties of his transportation minister while Yitzhak Mordechai is investigated for allegedly sexually harassing a female employee, Barak's office said.

The announcement came as Israeli police are expected to recommend that Mordechai be charged with sexually harassing an employee in his office.

Officer: Soldiers more childish

Israeli soldiers are more childish than their predecessors and often have their parents intervene with their commanders on their behalf, according to the officer in charge of complaints from the public. Gen. Dvora Hassid attributed the change to lack of a national consensus on security issues.

focus areas, and forming tentative recommendations for a budget and overseas allocations.

They also outlined some goals for the future, including recruiting more women for top leadership positions, stepping up planning, identifying and publicizing "best practices" and developing training programs for federation leaders.

All in all, they seemed to be seeking the buy-in of federations and attempting to persuade them why they should be involved.

But there remain many points of conflict and uncertainty:

- Many small and intermediate-sized federations feel they do not have a large enough voice in collective decisions and have expressed fears that proposed budget cuts — particularly to regional offices that assist smaller federations with things such as fund raising and personnel matters — would adversely affect them;

- Issues of obligation and enforcement — particularly on the issue of financial commitment for overseas needs and the national system's overhead — were considered so divisive that they were moved off the agenda weeks before the retreat. Nonetheless, the UJC committee charged with assessing overseas needs is requesting federations contribute at least 105 percent of what they gave last year.

- Federations agree that they want to trim the budget — which is approximately \$40 million — for the national system but cannot agree what programs and services should be cut to achieve that goal.

Despite the difficulties, participants from both large and small federations overwhelmingly voiced satisfaction with the retreat even if some were skeptical about what will happen next.

"We have the opportunity to speak up and everyone's being heard," said Daniel Chefjec, executive director of the Central Kentucky Jewish Federation.

"Small communities have a history in which we've felt neglected and been forced to go into decisions we didn't like. But much of that is being dispelled by the fact that this is being kept clean."

Jeff Levin, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Washtenaw County in Ann Arbor, Mich., said the meeting was strengthening federations' commitment to the larger system.

"There's a growing recognition that whatever comes, everyone making Shabbos for himself is not a good thing," he said. "That's the main theme and all the rest is commentary."

Shelly Katz, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Santa Barbara, Calif., described the process as "a real turning point for the small cities."

"We feel we're being listened to especially in the small groups," she added.

For Joel Tauber, UJC's Executive Committee chairman, "We're building a culture of oneness and people are beginning to look beyond their own federation."

Despite the sense of growing confidence, leaders — particularly from smaller federations — noted that they were still not certain what the long-term impact of their discussions might be.

Sara Schreiberman, president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, N.C., described the retreat as a learning process, but noted that "the real test" will be "if the board really listens."

Arthur Paikowsky, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix, agreed, saying, "The devil is in the details. Once you figure out how you want to do it, what's the implementation?" □

Austrian leader to visit Hungary

NEW YORK (JTA) — Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel has accepted an invitation from Hungary's prime minister to visit Budapest later this month.

Viktor Orban's invitation prompted concerns among the Hungarian opposition that the visit would be a "provocation" to the European Union, which imposed diplomatic sanctions on Austria in February after Schuessel formed a coalition with the far-right Freedom Party.

The April 27 trip to Budapest will be the Austrian chancellor's second trip abroad, after he recently visited Switzerland. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Yahoo! pressed on Nazi stuff

A Paris-based group is taking Internet portal Yahoo! to court over the sale of Nazi memorabilia on one of the Web sites it hosts.

The International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism said it is seeking an injunction in a Paris court to force the California-based company to stop the sales in France, where it is illegal to exhibit or sell objects with racist overtones.

A Yahoo! auction site puts hundreds of Nazi and Ku Klux Klan objects up for auction each day, including films, swastikas, uniforms, daggers, photos and medals.

Swiss denier sentenced

A Swiss court sentenced a 79-year-old man to one year in prison for denying that the Holocaust occurred. Gaston-Armand Amaudruz was found guilty of having violated anti-racist legislation that was enacted five years ago.

Poland vows crackdown

A Polish human rights group won promises from Prime Minister Leszek Buzek to crack down on anti-Semitic publications sold openly at Polish newsstands, according to a local Jewish leader.

Buzek made the vow during a meeting with leaders of the Open Republic Association against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia, said Stanislaw Krajewski, a Polish Jewish leader.

The publications included what Krajewski described as the "madly anti-Semitic" periodical *Teraz Polska*.

Argentina pressed on 'lost' Jews

Israel pressed Argentina to investigate the disappearances of thousands of Jews during the 1976-83 military dictatorship.

Visiting Buenos Aires, Israel's deputy foreign minister, Nawaf Massalha, said he raised the issue with Argentine President Fernando de la Rúa and would discuss it further with government officials.

Human rights groups estimate that some 30,000 leftists and dissidents vanished after being detained by the military junta.

Of these, 2,000 were Jewish, according to Israeli-based groups.

Moroccan Jewish leader dies

Moroccan Jewish leader David Amar died at 80. A wealthy businessman, Amar used his close ties to the Moroccan monarchy to help members of the Jewish community immigrate to Israel.

He was also instrumental in helping Israel and Morocco improving relations.

Amid confusion and mixed signals, trial of 'Iran 13' likely to move ahead

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Despite unofficial assurances to the contrary, it appeared that the trial of 13 Iranian Jews accused of espionage would go ahead this week as originally scheduled.

Last week, American Jewish activists were led to believe the April 13 trial would be rescheduled to just before or after Passover, which begins April 19.

The delay would have allowed the prisoners to dump their court-appointed lawyers and choose their own, and would have given the new advocates more time to prepare their cases. What happens next is anyone's guess.

"It's impossible to confirm anything, because for every person who tells you one thing, someone will tell you the exact opposite," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Hoenlein has been spearheading American Jewish activism on behalf of the Jews, mostly through international diplomats and human rights groups.

The 13 Jews are mostly community or religious leaders from the southern cities of Shiraz and Isfahan. All are Orthodox and wear yarmulkas.

They were arrested in January and March 1999, along with eight Muslims. None has been formally charged, but are accused of spying for Israel and the United States. Three of the Jews were released on bail in February, while the other 10 remain in prison.

Israel and the United States have vehemently denied the accusations.

Speaking out for the accused, Jews have recently demonstrated in America, France and Russia.

Prominent non-Jews are now also speaking out. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Monday told the European Jewish Congress that Iranian authorities had promised him they would "not implement capital punishment."

The same day, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Tehran informed him "the trial will be fair, and the prisoners will most probably be set free."

In the face of this mounting pressure, Iran is trying to airbrush its image as a brutal, undemocratic regime. Iranian media reported that the chief of the Revolutionary Court, Judge Sadeq Nourani, took the unprecedented step last Friday of visiting the Jewish prisoners. Nourani reportedly wished them Passover greetings and even presented each with a small, unidentified gift.

The media quoted two of the Jewish prisoners, both of them cantors, as expressing profound gratitude to Nourani.

"I could not believe that [Nourani] would come in person to my cell," Asher Zadmehr reportedly said. "Tears fell from my eyes, and I could not talk. I hope I will be pardoned and forgiven by the great leader."

The news report may be part of a good cop-bad cop strategy in an attempt to appease both the Iranian public and international community, said Pooya Dayanim, spokesman for the Los Angeles-based Council of Iranian American Jewish Organizations. Dayanim noted that the report was followed a day later by a fiery public speech by senior Iranian cleric Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati. Jannati denounced the 13 as spies, and assailed these Jews as "by nature enemies of Muslims."

"People here often talk about the reformist and hard-line factions in Iran," said Dayanim. "But I believe they're just playing those roles. There is consensus in Iran on the Jewish question. They keep sending positive statements, but little positive actions to back up those statements."

Iran seems deliberately ambiguous about the fate of the "Iran 13," said Hoenlein.

Compounding the problem, he added, is a Jewish leadership in Iran that is politically unsavvy.

"People hear what they want to hear, and they have their own perspectives," he said. "And the Iranian officials are purposefully engaging in a disinformation campaign to confuse and undermine the credibility of us and the people we're working with in Iran." □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Trial gives scholar tools to teach Holocaust history***By Douglas Davis*

LONDON (JTA) — The day before she emerged victorious from a libel lawsuit against a Holocaust denier, Passover preparations occupied Deborah Lipstadt's mind.

She had just arrived back in London from her home in Atlanta, where she had spent 10 days cleaning for Passover and preparing for the annual influx of family for her second seder.

"Here we are on the eve of Pesach, and what is Pesach all about: To teach your children," she said Monday in an interview with JTA.

That, in essence, is how the Holocaust scholar perceives the significance of the legal ordeal she has endured.

Borrowing from the Haggadah, which will be used in millions of Jewish homes next week to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt, Lipstadt declared that "if, in the future, I can use this experience to teach and to write more history, then, in the spirit of the approaching holiday, dayeinu — it will be enough for me."

The day after she made that declaration, a British judge ruled that David Irving, who claims the Nazis did not use gas chambers to exterminate Jews and that Hitler had no plan for genocide, failed to prove his reputation had been damaged by Lipstadt and her publisher in a book that branded him a Holocaust denier.

"I see this not only as a personal victory, but also as a victory for all those who speak out against hate and prejudice," Lipstadt said after the verdict was read.

While she had set out in her book, "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory," to demolish Holocaust revisionism, Lipstadt said she was not looking for a fight.

"But once it came within the parameters of my life there was only one way I knew how to respond — and that was to fight back," she said in the JTA interview.

She did not seek the court battle that would overwhelm her professional and personal life: "I never would have gone into court with these people — I don't think it's productive," she said. "But once they came after me, I had no option but to fight with all my strength and with all my might."

Her only regret was that Holocaust survivors who had attended the trial were compelled to endure Irving's courtroom taunts.

She came close to tears when she recalled being "enveloped by survivors" who had approached her during the hearings to thank her for her stand against Irving.

Caught in the spotlight of a case that attracted standing-room-only public galleries and the constant glare of international media attention, Lipstadt maintained an internal tranquility by methodically organizing her time.

Days were spent in the courtroom; evenings at her apartment in London's West End, which was, ironically, just a few minutes walk from Irving's home.

"I'd come back to my apartment and generally change into exercise clothes.

"Sometimes I'd go and work out, then I'd answer e-mails, read transcripts, go over material that was going to be covered next day in the case.

"In the early part of the evening would come calls from every place east of here — friends in Europe and Israel. Later would come calls from west of here. Then I would go to sleep. It was all very routine."

There were few emotional roller coasters, but she admitted that "a couple of times, when real ugliness came out in the court, it was revolting.

"I just wanted to go home and take a shower."

What kept Lipstadt strong was what she described as her "A-Team" of lawyers, paralegals, researchers and experts, who, she said, would have been the toast of any university history department.

Then there was the flood of e-mails, letters, notes, cards and phone calls she received from well-wishers around the world — "Jews and non-Jews, people I know and people I don't, scholars and non-scholars, taxi drivers and hotel concierges, wanting to do things for me, wanting to be there, to help me."

But most moving and most touching, she said, was "the recognition by so many people — again, Jews and non-Jews — that while I was the person on the front line this was not my struggle alone, that it really was a struggle for truth, for memory, for doing the right thing."

Her contempt for Irving was boundless: "He is a liar, and he is a bully," she said matter of factly.

"To manipulate the historical record in such a contemptuous fashion and to take what appeared to me to be such glee in making fun of survivors — that was debilitating.

"But the effect was to make me even more convinced I was doing the right thing."

Did she now regret anything in the book? "Yes," Lipstadt replied. "I regret that I didn't know then what I know now, because then I would have been much more severe in what I wrote about Irving."

With the benefit of hindsight, would she have written the book at all?

"Without a doubt," she said emphatically, stressing each syllable. "To say I wouldn't have written it would be to give succor to scoundrels."

But even as her ordeal was ending, she warned: "The nightmare is not over.

"There is no end to the battle against racism, anti-Semitism and fascism."

The trial has transformed Lipstadt-the-academic into Lipstadt-the-celebrity. But she will not be cashing in on her new status.

Lipstadt's dream is to return to Emory University in Atlanta, which has stood by her steadfastly, and pick up where she left off before the start of the legal proceedings.

"I hope," she says, "that I can use this experience in what I do professionally — in what I do best and what my life has been all about: To teach, to teach, to teach." □

Poll: Israelis don't keep Passover

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Almost half of Israel's secular population eats prohibited foods on Passover, according to a Gallup poll.

More than 20 percent of those said they eat chametz on the night of the seder as well, the poll added. □