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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clinton urges against China deal

President Clinton urged Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to cancel the sale of an advanced radar system to China when the two met at the White House on Tuesday night.

The next day, however, Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh said Israel would not bow to the "steamroller" pressure coming from the United States.

His comments came shortly before Chinese President Jiang Zemin arrived on a historic visit to Israel, where he plans to press for the sale.

Irving accuses rich Jews

A day after Holocaust denier David Irving lost his libel lawsuit against American academic Deborah Lipstadt, he used his Web site to accuse rich Jews, including the Bronfman family, of bankrolling Lipstadt's defense.

A spokesman for Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, told Reuters he hoped Bronfman had contributed, saying, "I can't think of a more worthy defense fund."

In another development, the Tehran Times newspaper praised Irving, calling the Holocaust "one of the biggest frauds of the outgoing century" and accusing "Zionists" of making it up "to blackmail the West."

Closed-door trial for 'Iran 13'

The trial of 13 Iranian Jews accused of spying for Israel and the United States will take place behind closed doors, Tehran Radio reported.

Several foreign embassies in Iran and international human rights groups had planned to attend the trial to ensure it would be free and fair.

The trial is slated to begin Thursday, but lawyers for the accused are expected to file for a postponement until next week.

ADL reports on hate crimes

Anti-Semitic violence in the United States is at its lowest level since 1989, but increased last year in California and New York, according to an annual report by the Anti-Defamation League.

There were 1,547 reports of anti-Semitic violence, harassment and hatred nationwide in 1999, down from 1,611 such acts a year earlier, a 4 percent decline, the report said.

Forward editor being forced out after ideological rift with board

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Seth Lipsky was negotiating to launch the English-language edition of the Forward more than a decade ago, many touchy subjects came up, but perhaps none more combustible than that of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Menachem Begin's ideological forefather.

Lipsky knew that Jabotinsky was the archenemy of the Labor Zionism that serves as one of the ideological underpinnings of the Forward Association, the longtime publisher of the renowned Yiddish paper.

But on that day in 1987, Lipsky, who considers the militant founder of Revisionist Zionism a hero, didn't back down — and the negotiations temporarily broke down, according to one source.

The talks with the board that owns about half of the paper were eventually restarted, leading to the creation in 1990 of the English-language Forward with Lipsky at its helm.

But as reports circulate of Lipsky's imminent forced resignation, the Jabotinsky conflict reflects the ideological struggles — over past as well as current politics — that accumulated and eventually led to his presumed ouster.

Lipsky's departure has not been officially announced, and he says it "is not appropriate for me to comment" at this time.

But sources close to Lipsky say there is a "zero percent chance" he will remain as editor and the terms of his departure are being negotiated.

The paper is jointly owned by the Forward Association and a partnership funded by philanthropist Michael Steinhardt.

If Lipsky does depart, it is unclear if Steinhardt would sell his share of the paper and leave the Forward Association alone either to absorb the financial losses the paper has been incurring or look for other donors.

Steinhardt said in an interview he could not comment about his future involvement with the paper, but he did say that negotiations about the paper's future have been going on for six to eight months.

He also said he believed the Forward could survive without his financial involvement if the Forward Association chose to let it.

Soon after Lipsky was appointed editor of the paper, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg wrote the Forward Association, saying that while he supported Lipsky's right to express his opinions, "to do so on the money accumulated on a socialist or social democratic platform" — as the Forward had — was "absurd."

At the time, says Hertzberg, now a visiting professor at New York University, the board virtually ignored his letter, turning it over to Lipsky.

But a decade later, the board appeared to share Hertzberg's conclusions. Sources say that after Sam Norich took over as general manager of the association in 1998, he began pressing for Lipsky's removal.

Norich made it clear that he did not feel the Forward's tradition was being well-served, according to a source familiar with the developments.

Norich and Harold Ostroff, chairman of the newspaper, declined to comment, citing the ongoing negotiations.

In retrospect, the relationship between Lipsky and the association was a marriage that was destined for divorce.

The Yiddish-language Forvertz, which in the 1920s had a circulation nearing

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak OKs expanded U.S. role

Prime Minister Ehud Barak agreed during his summit with President Clinton to a greater U.S. role in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, according to a senior Israeli official. Palestinian officials have long been pushing for an enhanced U.S. presence in the talks.

As Barak discussed the peace process with President Clinton in Washington, Jewish settlers resumed clearing land outside West Bank Jewish settlements for the construction of new neighborhoods.

Settler leaders said the expansion of the settlements had been frozen for too long.

Court orders detainees' release

Israel's Supreme Court ordered the state to immediately release eight Lebanese nationals, some of whom have been held in Israel without trial for up to 14 years.

Canadian leader stirs controversy

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien created a controversy when he said Canada would support a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood should peace negotiations with Israel fail.

His comment Monday during a visit to the Middle East ran counter to Canada's long-standing support for the Oslo peace process. A day later, Chretien created another uproar when he angered Syrians by saying Israel should retain control of the Sea of Galilee — a subject that has contributed to an ongoing deadlock in Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

Israel seeks French support

Israel's public security minister visited Paris to enlist French support for keeping the peace in southern Lebanon after a planned Israeli withdrawal from the area. "Any influence France can exert is of an importance that cannot be overrated," said Shlomo Ben-Ami, who met with French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and other top officials.



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250,000, had made its name as the voice of immigrant socialism — but not communism — and the Jewish labor movement. Lipsky, on the other hand, came from a background that included time at the staunchly free market and politically conservative editorial board of The Wall Street Journal.

Under Lipsky, the Forward hewed to a hard line on peace both with Syria and the Palestinians.

Most recently, he attacked Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak for having a "double standard" for "assiduously courting and praising the dictator at Damascus, Hafez al-Assad."

Perhaps as egregious to those members of the Forward Association, he published blistering editorials and incendiary front-page articles attacking beliefs long held by the majority of the Jewish establishment on such issues as welfare reform and school vouchers.

Indeed, the Jewish establishment came under constant criticism — some would say slander — for what Lipsky saw as its liberal ideology and clandestine operations.

A recent headline, "If Police Spot a Clown in the Capitol, It Might Be Steve Solender on the Job," referred to the president and chief executive officer of the United Jewish Communities.

Some 39 executives of local Jewish federations signed a letter in last week's edition, protesting the headline.

Lipsky wrote several editorials attacking the UJA-Federation of New York for what he saw as the unfair advantage that the New York Jewish Week enjoys because contributors to the New York federation automatically receive subscriptions to that paper. Reaction to the news of Lipsky's apparent ouster among Jewish organizational officials — many of whom assiduously read but simultaneously revile the paper — was swift.

"You can't go around slandering people and not think you're not going to pay a price for it," said a key leader in the Jewish organizational world, who asked not to be identified.

But, added this insider, the Forward might not be as interesting if Lipsky does leave.

Lawrence Rubin, the executive vice chairman of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella group that the Forward often attacked, said, "I think that the Forward has been independent, but it hasn't maintained journalistic standards."

Jewish officials often complained to Steinhardt, the hedge-fund manager-turned-philanthropist who has devoted increasing resources to the Jewish world, and to the Forward Association.

Some observers say all of this may not have mattered had the paper not lost so much money.

But the English-language version is suffering annual losses of approximately \$2 million, according to The New York Times.

Its circulation never topped 30,000, and it never achieved the daily publication envisioned by Lipsky.

"If Lipsky had succeeded in creating a going concern, he might have gotten away with it, but he didn't create a going concern," said Hertzberg.

Both past and current staff have come to Lipsky's defense.

In a letter to Forward Association officials, past staff members, several of whom have gone on to careers at such publications as The New York Times Magazine and The New Yorker, wrote: "It would be devastating both for the cause of free journalism and for the Jewish community if the Forward were to cease publication; it would be equally terrible, however, if the Forward were to continue to publish without Seth Lipsky at its helm. Seth is not merely the editor of the English-language Forward, he is its animating spirit."

The president of the company that publishes the Detroit Jewish News and the Atlanta Jewish Times says the developments at the Forward will not affect those papers, of which Steinhardt recently invested and became chairman.

"The reasons why Steinhardt is involved in Detroit and Atlanta stand on their own merits," said Arthur Horwitz. □

(JTA Editor Lisa Hostein contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

Panel focuses on looted art

A U.S. presidential panel held a hearing in New York on Jewish-owned artworks that had been looted by the Nazis.

Officials from New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art were among the museum directors discussing possible looted artworks in their collections during Wednesday's hearing of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States.

Argentina plans new AMIA probe

Argentina said it would set up a team of special prosecutors to try to determine who was responsible for a 1994 attack on a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires that killed 86 people. The team will investigate 57 cases related to the bombing that may help the investigation of the attack on the AMIA center, said Argentina's interior minister, Federico Storani.

Cuban Jews get Passover food

As it has done each spring for the past 39 years, the Canadian Jewish Congress recently shipped Passover supplies to the 200-family Jewish community of Cuba. The Cuban government and its national airline, Cubana, assisted with the 22,000-pound shipment.

HIAS offers help finding relatives

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society launched an online search service to help people locate friends or loved ones separated by social upheaval and immigration during the past 100 years.

Users can make location inquiries through the HIAS Website at www.hias.org/location.

Former envoy to head think tank

Dore Gold, Israel's former ambassador to the United Nations, became the new president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

The think tank in Israel was created and led by Daniel Elazar, who died in December.

Jewish fiction prize awarded

A writer whose first collection of short stories was published last year won a Jewish fiction prize.

The National Foundation for Jewish Culture announced that Nathan Englander, the author of "For the Relief of Unbearable Urges," is the first winner of the Samuel L. Goldberg & Sons Prize for Jewish Fiction by Emerging Writers.

The award will be presented May 23 in New York. At that ceremony, three other artists will be honored for their contributions — Tony Kushner in performing arts, Stanley Kunitz in literary arts and Nancy Spero in visual arts.

Sharansky: Ethiopians deserve fast response to aliyah requests

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The approaching Passover holiday provided an appropriate backdrop for the Israeli interior minister's mission to Ethiopia, where he reviewed the situation of thousands who seek an exodus to Israel.

Natan Sharansky said this week that he empathizes with the suffering of the 18,000 Ethiopians who have amassed at dusty transit camps, and he promised to streamline the process of applying for immigration to Israel.

But the minister made clear he could not promise that all of the country's estimated 26,000 Falash Mura — descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity — would be found eligible.

"To see the suffering up close is a difficult experience that is impossible to be indifferent to," said Sharansky, who spent nine years in Soviet prisons for trying to help Jews make aliyah.

At the same time, the interior minister said he does not intend to announce a mass immigration of the Falash Mura without a careful review of applicants' eligibility to immigrate under the Law of Return, under which any person with one Jewish parent or grandparent is entitled to make aliyah, or under the Law of Entry, which provides for family reunification.

Sharansky visited compounds in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa and in the northern city of Gondar, where thousands of Ethiopians who left their homes hoping to move to Israel live in crowded camps. Some of them have waited for years to receive answers to their immigration requests.

At the compound in Addis Ababa on Monday, some of the Ethiopians sang Israel's national anthem and baked matzot to show Sharansky what they had learned about Judaism since leaving their villages.

Some 18,000 Falash Mura are living in squalid conditions near compounds in Addis Ababa and Gondar operated by the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, an organization that has been pushing Israel to speed up the application process.

Prior to Sharansky's trip, two Israeli legislators returned from Ethiopia and warned that the Falash Mura are facing hunger and disease. Zevulun Orlev and Yuri Shtern also warned that a drought is approaching the areas where the Falash Mura are waiting.

Sharansky noted the dire conditions in the compounds and lauded humanitarian aid provided at the sites by such organizations as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. At the same time, he said, the criteria for determining immigration eligibility cannot be altered.

On Tuesday, Sharansky promised to streamline the review process by:

- Allowing requests for immigration to be submitted in Ethiopia itself, in order to shorten examination procedures and make them more efficient. Until now, the only way for Falash Mura to apply for aliyah has been through a relative in Israel.

- Increasing staff dealing with the requests at Israel's Interior Ministry. The ministry has until now had only one staff member handling all of the applications coming from Ethiopia.

In a conference call Tuesday to leaders of the United Jewish Communities meeting in Washington, Sharansky would not specify how much money is needed from American Jews to help the process of resettlement. But he did call it a responsibility not only of Israel, but of world Jewry.

Misha Galperin of the UJA-Federation of New York was the only representative of American Jewry on Sharansky's trip.

"I was very encouraged by the decisions made," Galperin said. "The situation is very complex, but the Law of Return will be adhered to."

Galperin also raised the issue of another player in the drama: the government of Ethiopia.

"The Ethiopian government is not going to be happy to see a flood of people leaving, especially at a time of severe famine," he said. □

(JTA staff writer Julie Wiener in Washington contributed to this report.)

Scholars: Irving verdict exposes shoddy historian, marginal crank

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — For much of the past five years, Deborah Lipstadt, an American Holocaust scholar, and David Irving, a British Holocaust denier, have been locked in a grotesque legal embrace.

That close encounter finally ended Tuesday, exactly three months after the start of a libel trial in which Irving accused Lipstadt and her publisher of ruining his career by labeling him a Holocaust denier.

Addressing a packed High Court in London, Justice Charles Gray ruled that Lipstadt had proved the central charges she had leveled against Irving in her 1994 book, "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory." The judge also exonerated her publisher, Penguin Books.

The verdict against Irving was significant because of his former status as a serious historian, said Omer Bartov, a history professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

Irving was long highly regarded for his treasure trove of documents on Hitler and other Nazi officials, he said.

Bartov added that it was important to expose people like Irving, "who has been published by respectable publishers and been cited by scholars like me. But in recent years, he'd become more extreme, and associated himself with neo-Nazi circles."

Michael Berenbaum, Distinguished Professor of Holocaust Studies at Clark University in Massachusetts, also said it is important for the court to help set standards for historians.

"Instead of going down into the gutter with Irving, we elevated the question into what is the obligation of a historian to interpret evidence and translate material. And Irving was found wanting," said Berenbaum.

"In a way, Holocaust denial has been defeated over and over and over again," he said. "A Holocaust museum is built in Washington. Sixty-five million people watch 'Schindler's List.' The German president apologizes to Israel.

Then what can you say about these guys who say the Holocaust never happened? They're a fringe movement of charlatans."

Judge Gray — the quintessence of British correctness, courtesy and understatement — did not mince words when he declared Tuesday that Irving was indeed, as Lipstadt had charged, "an active Holocaust denier."

The judge also called Irving "anti-Semitic and racist," saying he has "portrayed Hitler in an unwarrantedly favorable light."

Referring to Irving's political activities, the judge said, "The content of his speeches and interviews often display a distinctly pro-Nazi and anti-Jewish bias."

"He makes surprising and often unfounded assertions about

the Nazi regime which tend to exonerate the Nazis for the appalling atrocities they inflicted on the Jews.

"The picture of Irving that emerges revealed him to be a right-wing pro-Nazi polemicist," the judge said.

Gray found that, "for the most part, the falsification of the historical record was deliberate.

"Irving was motivated by a desire to present events in a manner consistent with his own ideological beliefs, even if that involved distortion and manipulation of historical evidence."

He ruled that Lipstadt had failed to prove some of her claims about Irving, including that he has a self-portrait of Hitler above his desk. But he added that the unproved charges would not have "any material effect on Irving's reputation."

Irving, who lives in a \$1.5 million apartment in London, but says he has no other assets, now faces a bill for legal costs estimated at some \$5 million.

Pelted with eggs as he entered the court building Tuesday, Irving also faces public humiliation and bankruptcy. After the verdict was announced, Irving said he would not be silenced.

"I will still continue to write what I find to be true history. I can't be intimidated," Irving told Sky television.

Lipstadt said after the verdict was read that although she regrets that Holocaust survivors attending the trial were forced to endure Irving's taunts, "I see this not only as a personal victory, but also as a victory for all those who speak out against hate and prejudice.

Jewish groups from all political and religious viewpoints universally praised the ruling.

"Irving tried to manipulate the British legal system in order to put the victims murdered in the gas chambers on trial," said the Simon Wiesenthal Center in a statement. "Instead the net result is that he will be relegated to the garbage heap of history's haters."

In court for the verdict, Lipstadt and Irving were in a state of active confrontation and conflict — as they were for each of the 32 days that the trial lasted.

But at no point did they either lock eyes or exchange words.

For his part, Bartov of Rutgers University admitted that he hadn't closely followed the Irving trial.

"Personally, I'm rather ambivalent about the whole public debate about Holocaust denial," he said. "It's a rather marginal phenomenon, and most of the people who use this rhetoric are marginal people.

"Arguments that there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz are for cranks. It's as if someone said, 'I am Napoleon.' It's somewhat bizarre to have to debate it. It places cranks in the center of a public debate, rather than where they belong, which is at the margins."

Even with the verdict against Irving, the assault on historical truth is far from over. A greater threat than Holocaust deniers are mainstream, nationalist leaders in Europe, said Randolph Braham, director of the Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies at the City University of New York.

"They are respectable, believable leaders who don't deny the Holocaust, but distort it or denigrate it to cleanse a particular history," said Braham. "As George Orwell said, 'Those who control the present control the past; those who control the past control the future.' "

(JTA staff writers Peter Ephross and Michael J. Jordan in New York also contributed to this report.)

CLARIFICATION: The April 7 JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN story on the recent Jewish Funders Network gathering in Phoenix may have unintentionally suggested that one of the speakers, Jack Wertheimer, was opposed to contributing to non-Jewish causes. While Wertheimer feels too much Jewish money is going to non-Jewish causes, he said at the conference that he would be happy with a 50-50 split.