



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 78, No. 72

Friday, April 14, 2000

83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

3 of 'Iran 13' may be cleared

Three of the 13 Iranian Jews accused of spying for Israel and the United States may have their cases dropped as early as Sunday, according to Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The trial opened Thursday as scheduled, but the judge soon agreed to adjourn the trial until May 1, after Passover. Later, the three prisoners who have been freed on bail were summoned back to court Sunday, which may indicate that their case will be closed, Hoenlein said.

The other 10 remain in prison. During Thursday's closed hearing, four of the men were accused of having confessed to espionage.

Their lead attorney dismissed the claim as invalid.

One prisoner — "clearly under great stress," said Hoenlein — reportedly broke down and pleaded for forgiveness. [Page 3]

Forward editor out May 25

The editor of the Forward will resign effective May 25.

Seth Lipsky's forced resignation comes after a protracted ideological battle with the Forward Association, which owns half of the paper.

Israel makes Birthright pledge

The Israeli government signed a contract pledging \$70 million over five years to send young Diaspora Jews on a free 10-day trip to Israel.

Israel's support for Birthright Israel, a project spearheaded with \$10 million from North American philanthropists Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhart, comes in the wake of announcements that 12 additional donors have contributed a total of \$60 million and that the federation system plans to vote in June to give \$39 million to the project.

Conversion issue likely to drag

A solution to the question of whether Israel should recognize non-Orthodox conversions performed in the Jewish state will likely be found outside the courts, according to the minister dealing with the issue.

"I'm very much against a court solution," Rabbi Michael Melchior, who heads a panel seeking a compromise to the conversion issue, told JTA. [Page 4]

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Teach tolerance, Republicans say, but don't say 'hate crimes' education

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Federal funding for hate crimes prevention programs in America's schools, in place since 1994, is in jeopardy.

Apparently, the problem is with the phrase "hate crimes."

If those words were not used, some Republicans say, the funding might not be at risk. For some legislators, the term has become so taboo that any mention of it clouds an issue.

But supporters of the programs say the need for prevention should not be ignored.

Parents and political candidates often cite safety as a top priority for the nation's schools, especially since last year's Columbine High School shooting, which some have called a hate crime. Support for prevention programs is now caught up in the larger debate on hate crimes legislation, a controversial law that would remove impediments to federal prosecution of crimes committed on the basis of race, religion, color or national origin, and would expand federal protections to crime victims who were singled out because of their sexual orientation, gender or disability.

Hate crimes prevention programs have been included in education funding bills since 1994. Since then, the Department of Education has spent millions of dollars on different initiatives across the country.

"Tens of thousands of students have been impacted by these programs," said Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League.

Lieberman said the anti-bias and hate crimes prevention programs are a "critical component" of the current law. Many educational and training programs to reduce the incidence of bias-motivated crimes have been developed and piloted in local communities nationwide.

Also in use in schools are materials that promote awareness of alternatives to violence and improve conflict resolution skills of students, teachers and administrators.

Some anti-bias materials developed or produced by the Department of Education include "Healing the Hate," a national bias crime prevention curriculum for middle schools, and Protecting Students from Harassment and Hate Crime, a resource guide for teachers. The ADL received a \$200,000 grant from the Department of Education to develop "Stop the Hate," a yearlong program designed to inform school administrators about hate crimes and instruct teachers in skills to combat prejudice and discrimination. The program was used in San Diego, Los Angeles, New York and Omaha.

Federal funding for the programs is intact on the Senate side because an amendment to strip the hate crimes prevention language out of the education funding bill was defeated. On the House side, however, the language has already been stripped from the proposed legislation, so it must be reintroduced.

The House Education and Workforce Committee is continuing its debate on the Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act this week. Rep. Robert Scott (D-Va.) plans to introduce an amendment that would restore to the Department of Education its authority to fund hate crimes prevention programs.

Scott will propose that a certain percentage of Safe and Drug Free Schools money be reserved for hate crimes prevention programs to combat prejudice and intolerance. The funding for that program accounts for about \$1 billion in state grants and \$20 million in national programs.

Republicans say they want a "clean" education bill and do not want the focus of the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Jiang visits Yad Vashem

China's president wore a yarmulka and laid a wreath at Israel's memorial to the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust.

During his visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, Jiang Zemin wrote in the guest book, "In memory of the Jewish victims who suffered in the Second World War." Later in the day, Jiang toured the Knesset.

Meanwhile, Jiang issued veiled criticism of American opposition to Israel's sale of advanced radar systems to China. Jiang said at an Israeli state dinner in his honor that since the end of the Cold War, superpowers no longer determine international affairs.

Panel: Keep yeshiva deferments

Fervently Orthodox yeshiva students will continue to be exempt from compulsory Israeli military service under recommendations presented by a committee appointed by Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

But in a proposed change to the arrangement, the committee said students could opt to take a break from full-time religious studies at the age of 24, work a year and then serve in a rear-guard army unit for four months.

Court verdict prompts resignation

The former head of Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service asked to resign as the prime minister's adviser on missing and captured Israeli soldiers in reaction to an Israeli Supreme Court order to release 13 of 15 Lebanese detainees held as bargaining chips.

Ya'acov Perry said that he respects the court ruling, but believes it removes one of Israel's main tools in its attempt to find and free missing soldiers.

Meanwhile, Israeli media reported that the attorney general is considering bringing charges against two Lebanese nationals, Mustafa Dirani and Sheik Abdel Karim Obeid, who have been held in Israel without trial.

debate turning to hate crimes legislation, just as Democrat-backed gun-safety amendments to the bill have so far turned the debate toward gun control. Terminology is important but also causes a lot of the dispute, said Niel Wright, press secretary for Rep. Thomas Petri (R-Wis.), the Education Committee's vice chairman.

"Hate crime sends up red flags," Wright said. Working to fund anti-bias programs in schools but leaving out the term "hate crime" would be a positive step, he added.

Republicans are disingenuous when they say they support anti-bias programs but only object to the terminology, a Scott staffer says, because they removed all references to prejudice and discrimination in the bill as well.

Rep. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) will not support Scott's amendment and believes the education committee is not the proper jurisdiction to discuss hate crimes.

First, there needs to be agreement on what constitutes a hate crime, said Kevin Bishop, Graham's press secretary.

Republicans have included in the proposed legislation a new section that calls for developing and implementing character education and training programs that "incorporate elements of good character, including honesty, citizenship, courage, justice, respect, personal responsibility, and trustworthiness."

Some Republican committee members said they feel that encouraging positive behaviors is "a lot more important than highlighting negative ones," said Dan Lara, the Education Committee's press secretary. □

Barak came to talk Mideast peace, but China sales raised U.S. tension

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Despite friction over Israeli sales of military technology to China, President Clinton had a "good, productive, serious discussion" with Israeli Prime Minister Barak this week.

Clinton said he feels encouraged that there is renewed energy in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

"We've solved everything," Clinton announced jokingly at the end of a nearly four-hour Tuesday session with Barak that also dealt with the planned Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and stalled peace talks with Syria.

Barak offered a "variety of ideas" about how to move the Palestinian talks forward that Clinton will discuss with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat at a meeting next week, a senior administration official said. While the meeting focused on negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, another hot topic was Israel's sales of weapons systems to China, including the Phalcon early warning radar system.

U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen recently pressed Barak to cancel plans to sell the systems. Cohen said publicly that it was "counterproductive" to the region, especially with escalating tensions between China and Taiwan.

Senators have written a letter to Barak expressing concern over the deal with China, according to the Israeli media.

There is speculation that Barak may have used this trip to practice some damage control from the U.S. opposition to the sale. Barak called Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and Sen. Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) to discuss several issues, including the sale. Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.), chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee, has said he would block \$250 million in foreign aid to Israel if it goes ahead with the sale to China.

Contrary to prior media reports, which implied that U.S. opposition to the deal was new, a spokesman for the Defense Department said the United States has consistently voiced its opposition to the sale since 1996.

However, an Israeli official said that although some concern was raised by the United States during the early stages of the deal, the level of opposition is much higher now. Israel told the United States about the sale at the outset, though it was not required to because no U.S. technology was involved.

Israel's deputy defense minister, Ephraim Sneh, said Wednesday that Israel would honor its contract to deliver technology to China, but would "take account" of American sensitivity with regard to additional deliveries. □



Daily News Bulletin

Shoshana S. Cardin, *President*

Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*

Lisa Hostein, *Editor*

Howard Lovy, *Managing Editor*

Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

JEWISH WORLD

Terror victim's father slams U.S.

Families of terrorist victims pledged their support at a U.S. congressional committee hearing for legislation that would free frozen assets of terrorist countries and allow families to collect damages. Steven Flatow, whose daughter Alisa was killed in an Iranian-sponsored bus bombing in Israel in 1995, blamed the United States for changing its policy and blocking his collection of a \$247 million court judgment.

"The Iranians are still in the terror business, and our own government has the dubious distinction of keeping them in it," he said.

Ad lashes out at Reform rabbis

By affirming rabbinic officiation at same-sex unions, Reform rabbis have "gravely misled not only other Jews but the entire world by fostering the notion that Judaism tolerates homosexual acts," a fervently Orthodox group charges in an ad slated to appear Friday in *The New York Times*.

Agudath Israel of America's ad, coming in the wake of a March 29 resolution adopted by the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis, says that the Torah "explicitly" considers homosexual relationships "deeply sinful, condemns them without qualification and leaves no room for their formal recognition."

Austria faces \$18 billion suit

Lawyers acting on behalf of Holocaust victims filed an \$18 billion lawsuit against the Austrian government and private industry, according to Munich attorney Michael Wittl.

The lawsuit came amid efforts to get Austria to settle claims for Nazi looting of Jewish property.

Germany drops Arafat probe

German prosecutors decided not to open a formal investigation into whether Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat was involved in the 1972 massacre at the Munich Olympics, the German Justice Ministry said Thursday.

The newsweekly *Focus* reported that the prosecutors began a probe after a onetime associate, Abu Daoud, wrote in a book that Arafat had prior knowledge of the attack.

Museums post artworks on net

Three leading American museums posted lists of paintings on their Web sites in an effort to learn whether any of the works were looted by the Nazis.

New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art posted a list of 393 paintings at www.metmuseum.org. Similar moves were taken by New York's Museum of Modern Art (www.moma.org) and the Art Institute of Chicago (www.artic.edu).

Schoolchildren join hundreds in show of solidarity for 'Iran 13'

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — The teachers at Salanter Akiba Riverdale Academy in the Bronx gave their students a democratic choice: attend class, or take to the streets to demand the release of 13 Jews in Iran accused of spying for Israel and the United States.

The yeshiva students voted, resoundingly, in favor of protest.

So they boarded a bus Wednesday to be among the hundreds of demonstrators who prayed, sang and chanted "Let Them Go!" on a windy New York City street corner.

"We feel this is a repetition of the fake show trials that happened against Jews in Europe," said Leeya Hadas Preiss-Bloom, 14. "We won't stand for it anymore."

Her classmate, 13-year-old Anna Hertzberg, added, "We want to show Iran that it's no crime to be Jewish."

Organizers of the Leadership Prayer Vigil said their aim was twofold: to voice their disgust at Iran's treatment of the Jews and to inject Jewish consciousness with the spirit of solidarity and activism.

About 500 protesters were on hand — half of them schoolchildren — though another three busloads of kids were said to have gotten stuck in the midday traffic.

"Tyranny draws no distinction between Sephardi or Ashkenazi," said Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the North American Boards of Rabbis. "Not only do we share the same faith with the Jews of Iran, but we share their fate."

Yet, it's unclear whether Iran — whose Mission to the United Nations is located in a skyscraper near the demonstrations — was fazed by the one-hour vigil.

On Thursday, an Iranian judge cut short proceedings against the 13 Jews and adjourned the case until May 1, said the lead attorney for the accused.

The Revolutionary Court judge approved a request by the defense to wait until after Passover before continuing with the trial, attorney Esmail Nourani told reporters.

In a similar case three years ago, two Iranian Jews were executed in Tehran.

"The Talmud teaches that when one saves even a single life, it is as if the entire world is saved," Ronald Lauder, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, told the crowd. "We are here, Jews and non-Jews alike, to raise our voices in harmony for the freedom of these 13 people whose lives hang in the balance."

There were indeed several Christian leaders in attendance, but the vigil was clearly a Jewish happening.

To somehow humanize a trial that will take place roughly 8,000 miles away, vigil organizers handed out placards with the names and ages of the "Iran 13." They range from 16 to 48 years old. All are Orthodox, and most are community or religious leaders.

"We have to put a name to this story," said Hillary Barr, of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns — Amcha, who was one of those passing out signs. "For the people here, it brings" the prisoners "closer to them. For the passers-by, it shows that we care about each and every individual."

This vigil, said Schneier, will be a model for Jewish activists across the country.

On Sunday in Los Angeles, the Council of Iranian American Jewish Organizations was scheduled to hold another vigil in conjunction with the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles and the Simon Wiesenthal Center. □

UJC reports increase in donations

NEW YORK (JTA) — North American Jewish federations raised some \$881 million in 1999, a 4 percent increase from the previous year and an 8 percent increase from 1989, according to a report compiled by their umbrella organization.

The United Jewish Communities report also says the number of donors has dropped in most communities. Among the 19 largest Jewish communities, only New York, Atlanta and San Francisco have seen their donor rosters grow in the past year, and even those federations have lost donors during the past decade. □

High court cuts short hearing on non-Orthodox conversions

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Reform and Conservative leaders in Israel had hoped Israel's Supreme Court would resolve a years-long struggle for recognition in Israel.

Instead, the court Tuesday heard only two hours of arguments in the bitterly disputed question of whether the state should recognize non-Orthodox conversions to Judaism, then adjourned.

Court President Aharon Barak said the court had other issues to address and gave no date for the hearings to resume before an expanded panel of 11 justices.

"There is no doubt I am disappointed," Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of the Masorti, or Conservative, movement, in Israel told Israel Radio.

"I expected a full day of deliberations. I did not expect a decision today, but I hoped at least for the deliberations to be concluded and we are now awaiting a final decision.

"After five years of this case being dragged around, I see it is a hot potato each side is trying to pass off to the other. The court is handing off to the Knesset; the Knesset returns it here. It is unfortunate there is a lack of courage to try to resolve the matter."

Bandel did say, though, that there is a "ray of hope" in the delay because it would aid a return to the negotiating table to "find a solution to the sensitive matter outside the court room and not in Knesset legislation."

Tuesday's court session was to consider petitions filed by the Reform and Conservative movements seeking recognition of conversions performed abroad and in Israel, as well as a state appeal of a lower court decision to register non-Orthodox converts as Jews in the Interior Ministry's population registry.

Orthodox leaders have long rejected the validity of non-Orthodox conversions, calling them "quickie" conversions that are done for convenience.

Legislator Avraham Ravitz, of the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc, said the question for potential converts is simple: "Are you ready to join the Jewish religion?"

Deputy Minister Shaul Yahalom of the National Religious Party has repeatedly urged the Knesset to set clear criteria for non-Orthodox conversions performed in Israel.

If legislators "continue to ignore the matter and put it off, it is clear the court will one day have to decide the matter and rule that these people should be registered as Jews," Yahalom said.

The refusal of Israel's Orthodox establishment to recognize the validity of non-Orthodox conversions has long divided Israel and the Diaspora, where most Jews are affiliated with the liberal streams.

The Orthodox have sole authority over such religious matters of conversion, marriage and divorce.

In the state's appeal of a Jerusalem district court ruling that recognized non-Orthodox conversions, state attorney Yochi Gennissn warned that easing conversion regulations would cause "divisions, confusion and chaos."

Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center, said efforts to reach a compromise outside the courts have been exhausted.

"What is left now is for the matter to be determined based on

the law and a ruling, and I hope the court will do this."

In the courtroom Tuesday were people whose non-Orthodox conversions had not been recognized, as well as parents of children adopted abroad. One Israeli couple had adopted two children in Lithuania, whose Conservative conversions were not recognized.

"My wife and I have two adopted children, whom we want to be part of our people. We first went and tried an Orthodox conversion, which was refused because it would only be granted if the children go to religious school, and we refused to have that imposed on us," the father, Uri, told Israel Radio.

"So we instead went to the Conservative movement, which in my view are no less good Jews than any other." □

Report: Anti-Semitic acts down, despite violent incidents in 1999

By Brianne Korn

NEW YORK (JTA) — Although high-profile violence against Jews grabbed headlines in 1999, overall anti-Semitic incidents nationwide declined by 4 percent, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

The group's Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents, published annually since 1979, tracks anti-Jewish acts reported to the ADL and law enforcement agencies. While not a scientific measure of anti-Semitism, last year's audit counted 1,547 incidents in 41 states and the District of Columbia, the lowest number recorded since 1989.

The numbers, however, do not tell the whole story. Last summer, Jews were targeted in shootings and synagogue arsons in Chicago, Sacramento and Los Angeles.

"While the drop in number of anti-Semitic acts over the last five years is in one sense very encouraging, unfortunately, the horrific acts of violence and intimidation we have witnessed in the last year overwhelm the statistics," said Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director.

The audit broke down anti-Semitic incidents into 868 acts of harassment, down 3 percent from the previous year, and 679 acts of vandalism, down 5 percent. Continuing a nine-year trend, acts of harassment outnumbered those of vandalism.

States with highly concentrated Jewish populations — including New York, Massachusetts and California — reported the most incidents, with all three showing increases from the previous year.

The audit referred to the overall decline as a reflection of "the continuation of a downward trend that has resulted in a 25 percent drop in anti-Semitic incidents over the last five years."

The ADL partly attributes the decline to improved security measures at high-risk locations like synagogues and Jewish community centers.

Additionally, a significant decline of anti-Semitic acts was noted on college campuses. Sixty incidents were documented, the lowest number reported since 1989 and a 30 percent drop from the previous year.

A growing forum for anti-Semitism not easily combated or tracked, however, is the Internet.

"Extremists and hate groups are using the Internet to spread their anti-Semitic message which can inspire others to violence," Foxman said. □