



Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Iranian prisoner denies charges

The last of the 10 imprisoned Iranian Jews accused of spying for Israel denied the charges against him.

Three other Jews accused of espionage remain out on bail, and it is unclear whether they will have to face the court or be set free.

The judge announced he would allow the Jewish suspects to confront the alleged witnesses in court on May 24.

Population survey delayed again

The 2000 National Jewish Population Survey, initially scheduled for January and then postponed until mid-May, has been delayed until late June.

Officials at the United Jewish Communities, the New York-based umbrella group that is sponsoring the \$5 million survey of 5,000 U.S. Jews, said the latest delay results from fine-tuning and field-testing the 30-minute phone questionnaire.

Austria agrees to new fund

Austria and seven other countries agreed on the outlines of a new Austrian fund for Holocaust-era slave and forced laborers.

The U.S. representative at the talks in Vienna, Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, praised the planned fund.

But he called on Austria to act swiftly regarding property restitution, which he called "a matter of particular priority for the United States" that would affect relations between the two countries. [Page 4]

Israeli banks allow Shoah audits

Israel's banks agreed to let an external auditor inspect their records of dormant accounts that may have belonged to Holocaust victims or their heirs.

The decision was announced when the heads of the nation's biggest banks appeared before a Knesset committee probing Holocaust-era claims. [Page 4]

Barak vows pullback will proceed

Hezbollah attacks will not stop Israel from withdrawing from Lebanon by July, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said.

His comments Wednesday came hours after Hezbollah gunmen shelled Israeli outposts in southern Lebanon. [Page 2]

Israel to United Nations: Hold up your end of deal

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — After a long and costly occupation of southern Lebanon, Israel is now formally laying the groundwork to satisfy a United Nations resolution that for 22 years has demanded Israel's withdrawal.

Israel, in turn, wants the world body to uphold its end of the deal.

A far-less publicized component of U.N. Security Council Resolution 425 is that when Israel does withdraw, the United Nations is obliged to "restore international peace and security" and "assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area." With this in mind, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy visited New York this week and last, to urge the United Nations to expand the activities of its interim force in Lebanon.

If the force, known as UNIFIL, does not assume a greater role and there is no fluid handover of power when Israel pulls out as expected in July, Israeli officials believe that another player, such as Syria, Palestinian militants or Hezbollah — gunmen backed by Syria and Iran — will quickly fill the void.

Such a development could lead to further attacks against northern Israeli communities. It could also endanger the Lebanese who have sided with Israel in the conflict, namely the South Lebanon Army and civilians in the area.

"We cannot have a situation where you do something which is intended to be good, and at the same time you push others into a situation of a massacre of some kind," Levy told reporters last Friday. "We cannot desert people to an unknown future. We would like to reach an arrangement which is self-standing and we hope this will be the beginning of a new reconciliation in Lebanon."

Israel first sent troops into southern Lebanon on March 14, 1978, in an effort to halt terrorist attacks by the Palestine Liberation Organization, which had set up headquarters there after being ousted from Jordan.

Soon after, the United Nations passed Resolution 425.

The first noncombatant UNIFIL troops arrived in Lebanon on March 22. The force, which started at 5,900, currently stands at more than 4,400, representing nine different countries, including Fiji, Nepal and France. For 22 years, UNIFIL's stated duties have been limited to monitor the situation and protect civilians.

However, in 1996, about 100 refugees in the U.N. compound at Kana were killed in an Israeli mortar attack. The Israelis said it was accidental, and that they were targeting Hezbollah gunmen who were using the compound as a protective shield.

Israel is now eager to pull out for a number of reasons, primarily because the mounting death toll of troops has worn on the Israeli public.

Levy's visit was the first step in establishing Israeli-U.N. cooperation in the pullout. Some U.N. officials have expressed support for the partnership, with some reservations.

One of the major sticking points appears to be the issue of disarming the SLA of its heavy artillery, tanks and communications equipment.

Israel believes the SLA — seen as traitors by many Lebanese — needs to be equipped to defend itself, while U.N. officials are insisting that Israel disarm the SLA.

Enhanced U.N. involvement "will depend on what kind of guarantees the parties on all sides will provide," said a Western diplomat, who asked not to be identified. "If the heavy weapons remain on the ground, we'll have problems. We don't want a bloodbath in the region."

Without guarantees, the United Nations may be particularly reluctant to step up its

MIDEAST FOCUS

Ross returning home early

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross is returning to Washington several days earlier than planned.

The State Department would not comment on why Ross, who has been mediating Israeli-Palestinian talks in Israel, is returning home early.

West Bank clashes winding down

Intermittent clashes were reported between stone-throwing Palestinians and Israeli security forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

However, as Palestinian police intervened, the level of unrest appeared to be winding down from Monday's clashes, which included gun battles between Israeli and Palestinian security forces.

Back-channel talks to resume

Israeli and Palestinian representatives are expected to renew back-channel contacts in Stockholm aimed at reaching a framework for a final peace deal. Meanwhile, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat refused to accept the resignation of his chief negotiator, Yasser Abed Rabbo, who quit in protest against the secret talks.

Two bills would tie Barak's hands

Israel's Knesset gave preliminary approval to two bills that may make it harder for Prime Minister Ehud Barak to pursue his peace policies.

One of the bills bars Palestinian refugees from returning to the Jewish state under any future peace agreement.

The other bars any changes in the status of Jerusalem without the support of 61 legislators.

The bills passed the first of three required votes with support from members of the prime minister's coalition.

During the stormy session, Foreign Minister David Levy accused the opposition of seeking to stir up dissent.



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role, officials say, given the current fiasco in Sierra Leone, the African nation where several hundred U.N. peacekeepers were recently kidnapped.

Another hurdle may be Lebanon's opposition to a unilateral withdrawal.

Lebanese officials recently sent a letter expressing their concerns to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and Annan will review them carefully, according to a U.N. official. The letter addresses a new Lebanese claim for a patch of land and hamlets known as Shabaa Farms, which lies within Israel near the Lebanese and Syrian borders.

Israeli officials suspect Lebanon raised the issue to complicate Israel's planned withdrawal. The demand for Shabaa Farms could prove significant because it would enable Lebanon to maintain in the international arena that Israel did not fully withdraw from all Lebanese territory.

Moreover, Hezbollah has vowed to keep launching attacks on Israel if the Jewish state does not withdraw fully.

Levy stated last Friday that no maps exist that prove the area was ever Lebanon's.

Overall, though, Lebanon's primary concern appears to be the prospect of having to confront Hezbollah alone, a role Israel has played until now.

In addition to seeking a U.N. peacekeeping role, Israel is hoping to get "credit" for its withdrawal from Lebanon in the world body, where Israel is a popular target for condemnation. A withdrawal, combined with the expected inclusion of Israel into the Western European grouping at the United Nations, is expected to bolster Israel's standing within the world body.

"Hopefully, the pullout will remove some of that criticism" about the occupation, said a senior Israeli diplomat, "and will alleviate our general situation in the U.N."

Indeed, the recent developments are making an impression, helping, in the words of the Western diplomat, to "normalize relations" between Israel and the United Nations. But, he added, as long as there isn't peace in the region and "Israel hasn't implemented other U.N. resolutions, there's still a stumbling block to a completely normal relationship." □

Israel leaves Lebanon outposts before its full troop withdrawal

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With little fanfare, Israel's army is preparing for its troop withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

The Israel Defense Force this week transferred control of two outposts in the region to Israel's ally, the South Lebanon Army.

With one located along the Mediterranean coast and the other in the center of the security zone, the Rotem and Taibe outposts are considered relatively distant from the main concentration of Israeli positions in the region. Israel created the 9-mile-wide buffer zone in Lebanon to protect its northern communities.

The pullouts appear to reflect a strategy of first dealing with potentially vulnerable and less strategically important positions prior to the main troop withdrawal, which is to take place by July.

The pullbacks from the two outposts were similar. They took place overnight, after most equipment and personnel had already been removed. A brief handover ceremony was held with the SLA commander assuming responsibility.

Although the withdrawals came during a week of heavy Hezbollah barrages of Israeli and SLA positions in the security zone, the two pullbacks were carried out without incident and without drawing any Hezbollah fire. However, military observers believe that heavy fire may accompany the main withdrawal from the security zone.

As Israel continued preparations this week to fortify the northern border ahead of the troop redeployment, Prime Minister Ehud Barak announced a special budget of nearly \$400 million to beef up the defenses of Israel's northern communities.

Barak said the aid package proves that the government supports these communities, which Hezbollah has targeted in cross-border attacks.

Barak reiterated that Israel would retaliate harshly should cross-border attacks continue after the withdrawal. □

JEWISH WORLD

Survivor who lost God in Shoah to be oldest rabbinical graduate

By Brianne Korn

L.A. shooter has no regrets

The man accused of last August's Jewish Community Center shooting in Los Angeles told the FBI he is at war with the "Jewish-controlled" government of the United States, according to a court document.

Buford O. Furrow Jr. also told the FBI that he had no regrets about shooting five people at the North Valley JCC in Granada Hills, Calif., and subsequently killing a Filipino American mail carrier, according to the document filed Tuesday.

Furrow's trial is scheduled to start in mid-December.

Bill would cut immigrant red tape

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) introduced legislation Wednesday to help immigrants apply for U.S. citizenship.

The bill, supported by the United Jewish Communities and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, would fund the Immigration and Naturalization Service to help reduce the backlog of applicants.

It would also reduce the amount of time it takes to process an immigrant.

Russian leader plays Jewish card

The leader of a Russian region known for his anti-Semitic comments is at it again, according to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews.

Nikolai Kondratenko, recently awarded a medal "for outstanding service to Russia," recently said Zionism is the "most aggressive and bloody force" in the world since the Allies defeated Nazi Germany in World War II.

Kondratenko also said, "Zionists and American imperialists" are cooperating to incite ethnic conflict in Russia and divide the country.

Police and local security agents also recently detained and expelled a few dozen anti-fascist demonstrators who planned to stage a May Day rally in the major port city in Krasnodar, where Kondratenko is in charge.

Report: Writer was blackballed

New York Times columnist William Safire was blackballed from a club for newspaper journalists because of his pro-Israel views, according to the online magazine Slate.

Safire was "blackballed by UPI White House reporter Helen Thomas, who was then the club's president, when his name came up several years ago," the magazine said.

The reason was that Thomas "didn't like Safire's views on the Middle East."

Thomas told the magazine she wanted to "let bygones be bygones," adding that she is pleased Safire, who is Jewish, is now a member.

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Holocaust destroyed any notion of God that Helga Newmark may have previously contemplated.

But more than 50 years later, Newmark, 67, is being ordained a rabbi, marking the end of a long journey riddled with hurdles.

"I always liked challenges, I guess," Newmark said.

She'll join the rabbinate on May 21, when the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion, after rejecting Newmark's first application for admission in 1987, will make her its oldest female graduate.

An only child born in Essen, Germany, Newmark moved with her parents to Holland when she was 1. Her family was secular.

"I don't remember Shabbat candles being lit on a regular basis," she said. "My grandparents were Orthodox because there was not anything else around."

When the Nazis occupied the Netherlands during the war, Newmark and her family were sent to the Westerbork concentration camp.

"That was the last time I saw my father," she said.

Newmark was imprisoned in Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen and Terezin. She and her mother survived, but they lost most of their extended family.

"I came out of the camp and my mother said, 'There's no God. If there was then things wouldn't have turned out this way,'" Newmark recalled.

At 16, Newmark and her mother immigrated to America.

"I would have loved to take the first boat back," she said of the troubles she faced as a poor foreigner who did not speak English or understand American culture.

Throughout her adolescence, Newmark never identified as a Jew.

"I never gave God a thought," she said until she gave birth to her first child, a daughter. Because of a previous infection, doctors had told her that she had only a 50 percent chance of conceiving a child.

"When I had this child," she said, she wondered "how I was going to answer the questions, 'Is there a God?' and, 'Why can't I go to church with my friends?'"

"God didn't ever enter into it," she said. "I just wanted to see answers."

Newmark investigated many religions in search of those answers, but opted for her own in the end. "I figured I might as well remain Jewish," she said.

Her first formal introduction to Judaism came when she joined a Conservative synagogue, where a student rabbi suggested she become a Sunday school teacher.

"I don't know Hebrew. I don't know one holiday from another," she told the rabbi, who, along with his wife, began studying with Newmark.

"Something about my identifying as a survivor with the Jewish people being survivors," made Judaism relevant.

After years of studying and serving as principal of the Sunday school at Temple Emanuel in Westfield, N.J., Newmark, then age 55, decided she needed another challenge and approached HUC.

HUC, however, required a college degree for admission and Newmark only possessed a high school equivalency diploma.

She also suspects she was initially rejected because of her age.

She registered for college and graduated two years later with a bachelor's degree in administration. She followed that by earning a master's degree at Yeshiva University's Wurzweiler School of Social Work. Then Newmark returned to HUC.

Newmark was finally accepted and after eight years of training, is ready to receive her ordination.

"I've been striving and dreaming and reaching for so long," she said.

Newmark is unsure if she will seek her own pulpit, saying she would prefer to act as an assistant rabbi, "where I can do a little bit of everything."

As for Newmark's original ambivalence toward God, she now feels differently.

"Hopefully, I can role model what I believe in so strongly — one God and that there is a future for Jews." □

Israeli banks open their records to audit for Holocaust accounts

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's banks have agreed to let an external auditor inspect their records of dormant accounts that may have belonged to Holocaust victims or their heirs.

The announcement came Wednesday, when the heads of the nation's biggest banks appeared before a Knesset committee probing Holocaust-era claims.

The announcement represented a breakthrough for a small group of claimants, who have waged a campaign during the past three years for greater accountability from the banks. They waged their campaign in Israel as the world Jewish community pressed European institutions to come clean about their past.

"We must exhaust all of the processes, according to law, in order to ensure that everything will be done to expose the remnants of inheritances and to return them to their rightful owners," legislator Colette Avital, who is heading the committee, said at Wednesday's session.

Galia Maor, chief executive of Bank Leumi — Israel's second largest bank, which experts say has the most Holocaust-era accounts — said the bank would be happy to cooperate.

She added that the bank has publicized a list of all accounts that were dormant since 1955, but not those that had earlier been handed over to Israel's custodian general.

Bank Hapoalim, Israel's biggest bank, said it found only 170 accounts dating back to 1944 in its files, but could not locate one-third of the holders and transferred them to the custodian as well. An additional meeting will be held to discuss the details of the planned audit.

There are still a number of issues to be tackled, including legal questions regarding banking secrecy and how to calculate the current value of dormant accounts. □

Austria agrees on size of fund to pay Shoah-era slave laborers

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — Austria and seven other countries have agreed on the outlines of a new Austrian fund for Holocaust-era slave and forced laborers.

The U.S. representative at talks held this week in Vienna, Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, praised the planned fund. But he called on Austria to act swiftly regarding property restitution, which he called "a matter of particular priority for the United States" that would affect relations between the two countries.

The United States has been stepping up pressure on Austria to settle a broad range of Holocaust-era issues.

In a statement issued Wednesday, Eizenstat said Austria's actions on such issues "will play a crucial role in any decision we might make about future engagement between the U.S. and Austrian governments."

During the two days of meetings this week in Vienna — which brought together representatives from countries including Hungary, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus — Austria agreed to pay

some \$395 million to about 150,000 former slave and forced laborers. The slave laborers were concentration camp prisoners, most of them Jews, whom the Nazis tried to work to death.

The forced laborers, transported from Eastern European nations the Nazis overran, worked under better conditions than the slave laborers. Payments from the fund would range from about \$1,300 for forced laborers to about \$6,800 for slave laborers.

Many details of the fund still have to be negotiated. Another meeting is scheduled for May 30 in Washington.

The Austrian fund mirrors a similar fund created by Germany that totals some \$5.2 billion. Agreed to last December, the German fund still has not been finalized.

Austria has made clear in recent months that it wants to compensate Holocaust-era slave and forced laborers. But it has been far less forthcoming when it comes to paying for property looted from Jews under the Nazis' so-called Aryanization program.

Jewish groups and lawyers representing Holocaust survivors have responded to what they view as Austrian intransigence with volleys of criticism.

The Claims Conference, which has been spearheading efforts to get Austria to address the property restitution issue, is pleased to see the United States weighing in on the topic.

Eizenstat's "emphasis on property restitution is absolutely critical," said Gideon Taylor, the group's executive vice president. "Its importance cannot be underestimated. Survivors are dying every day, and they deserve to see a measure of justice."

While in Vienna, Eizenstat met with Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel, who said he is "seriously considering" the idea of appointing a special envoy to deal with property restitution issues, according to Eizenstat. Eizenstat also said Schuessel informed him that Austrian insurance firms plan to establish contact with an international commission dealing with insurance claims dating back to the war years. □

Wife of Peruvian candidate finds her politics in her Judaism

NEW YORK (JTA) — The wife of Peru's opposition candidate for president credits her time at an Israeli university with turning her life around, according to the New York Times.

"In Israel, I learned that you don't take no for an answer," the Times quoted Elaine Karp, the wife of candidate Alejandro Toledo, as saying of her time studying indigenous cultures at Hebrew University in Jerusalem in the early 1970s.

Toledo is running an uphill campaign against Alberto Fujimori, the incumbent who is expected to win the May 28 runoff.

But the Belgian-born Karp, with her Israeli experience in mind, is not giving up.

She has taken an active role in the campaign, in part because she speaks the ancient Inca language of Quechua and in part because she wants to take an active role in Peruvian politics.

A naturalized American citizen who has consulted for the World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development, she speaks about using Israeli techniques to improve Peruvian agriculture. Karp says she has found her political identity in her Jewish roots.

"My vision of Judaism is one of light and justice that is totally impossible to reconcile with dictatorship," the Times quoted her as saying. □