



Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clinton, Barak meet in Lisbon

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and President Clinton discussed Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and prospects for reviving talks with Syria during their meeting in Lisbon.

After meeting with Barak, Clinton said he plans to send Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to the Middle East to narrow gaps in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Clinton said both sides "have to be prepared to make an intense effort and to do things that they have not done in the past."

Clinton also said he plans to meet with Arafat in Washington soon. [Page 3]

Boy freed from Chechen gang

A 12-year-old boy who is thought to be the last Israeli citizen held hostage by a Chechen gang was set free.

With the intervention of a special police squad and a negotiator familiar with the tactics of Chechen abductors, Adi Sharon was freed Thursday in the city of Penza, east of Moscow.

Adi was abducted last August in Moscow, where his father, Yossef Sharon, an Israeli businessman and a Georgian Jew, had brought him for the summer. [Page 3]

No change seen in E.U.-Iran ties

Most European Union nations will likely maintain their current relations with Iran even if 13 Jews being tried for spying for Israel are given lengthy prison sentences, according to diplomats. "I expect the European attitude will be to criticize the procedure but carry on more or less with business as usual," one diplomat told Reuters. In another development, two of eight Muslims accused of helping the 13 Iranian Jews run a spy network were taken into custody after their bail was revoked.

New head for U.N. Watch

The executive director of the American Jewish Committee was elected chairman of U.N. Watch, a Geneva-based organization that monitors the performance of U.N. bodies headquartered there. David Harris plans to take a sabbatical year from heading the AJCommittee and will assume the U.N. Watch post in August. U.N. Watch was founded in 1993 under the chairmanship of the late Ambassador Morris Abram.

Israeli legislators propose prison for women worshipers

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — A week after the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that women are entitled to read from the Torah and wear prayer shawls at the Western Wall, fervently Orthodox lawmakers have initiated legislation that would send to prison for seven years any women who do just that.

Last week's ruling is also under attack from the Israeli government, with the state attorney preparing a request that the decision be reconsidered on grounds that alternative sites are available and a change could lead to friction.

The case concerns Women of the Wall, a group of women that has been fighting for more than a decade for the right to gather for prayer services at what is Judaism's holiest site.

Although the group includes Conservative and Reform women, its services follow Orthodox liturgy and do not recite prayers requiring a minyan, defined by Orthodoxy as 10 men.

Under the May 22 ruling, the government was given six months to arrange for police protection for the women to pray at the wall, also known as the Kotel.

Currently, the group is not protected and — according to a 1989 law — women worshipers who read from the Torah at the Wall are subjected to a six-month prison sentence.

The opposition to the decision, especially from the government of Ehud Barak, who needs his Orthodox coalition partners to push his peace efforts through, is raising questions about whether the rules for the women will actually change.

The group plans to hold services on Sunday at the wall to celebrate Rosh Chodesh, although it will not use a Torah.

In recent years, they have moved their monthly services to a nearby site.

While the ruling applies specifically to Women of the Wall, it also could have implications for the Reform and Conservative movements.

Both movements have petitioned unsuccessfully in the past for the right to hold egalitarian services at the Kotel.

The Conservative movement recently agreed to a compromise, whereby it will hold services at Robinson's Arch, a site at the southern end of the Western Wall.

In the Knesset on Wednesday, two bills responding to the May 22 ruling passed preliminary hearings.

One, introduced by the United Torah Judaism Party and passed by a 29-17 vote, imposes a seven-year prison sentence and monetary fine for women who wear prayer shawls, read from the Torah, blow a shofar or lay tefillin at the Western Wall.

The other, introduced by Shas and passed by 29-25, declares that one must behave at the Kotel and surrounding plaza as if in a synagogue.

It prohibits various activities, such as holding public gatherings without prior permission, wearing immodest clothing, eating, drinking, smoking, sleeping, violating Shabbat or festivals, photographing for a fee and slaughtering animals.

Legislation in the Knesset must pass three votes, known as readings, before it becomes law.

Knesset member Avraham Ravitz of United Torah Judaism said that by introducing the bill, the fervently Orthodox legislators were trying to convey the deep injury they felt the high court ruling had inflicted. He said the jail term was secondary.

"We wanted to point out that this issue is very important to us, and we feel that if

MIDEAST FOCUS

Report: Syria, Libya buy Scuds

North Korea sold a new version of the Scud missile to Syria and Libya and is negotiating with Egypt about buying the missile, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. The Scud-D has a range of some 435 miles, more than the distance between Syria and most of Israel, the paper said.

Israel OKs more Golan housing

Israel approved construction of another 76 housing units in the Golan Heights town of Katzrin, Israel Radio reported. The report said the units are part of an overall allotment of 200 homes approved in the wake of the freeze in Israeli-Syrian negotiations. Syria has demanded the return of the Golan Heights, which Israel captured in 1967, as a condition for peace.

New record set for high-tech

In the largest ever acquisition in the Israeli high-tech sector, U.S.-based communications systems giant Lucent purchased Chromatis Networks for \$4.5 billion. Chromatis, which has a research facility in Israel, specializes in optical networking systems for metropolitan areas. It recently signed a contract to help provide Internet service to large office buildings in 12 U.S. cities.

Syria demands land's return

Syria's foreign minister called on Israel to return a strip of land near the Golan Heights to Lebanon. Farouk al-Sharaa's call Thursday came one day after U.N. envoy Terje Roed Larsen said that Sharaa had agreed that Israel does not have to turn over the disputed Shabaa Farms area.

El Al to offer tickets on Internet

Israel's national airline plans to begin offering air ticket sales over the Internet starting July 1. El Al also plans to increase its transatlantic flights to 33 per week this summer compared to 27 last year.



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the order of the Supreme Court goes, the situation there will be that every day, instead of praying there, there will be arguments," Ravitz told Israel Radio, adding that the wall "is not the place for demonstrations."

In response, Knesset member Naomi Hazan of the left-wing Meretz, introduced a counterbill to legislate free worship at the Western Wall.

Hazan accused the United Torah Jewish bill of equating Israel to fundamentalist Iran.

"The Western Wall belongs to all Jews, to men and women, to ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and even secular Jews who come to the wall to pray there every once in a while when they feel the need," Hazan told Israel Radio.

Reform and Conservative leaders and Women of the Wall activists in the United States joined Hazan in condemning the fervently Orthodox parties' proposed legislation, although they were skeptical that it would actually become law.

Passage of such a law would "make the conversion crisis look like child's play," Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Reform movement's ARZA World Union, said, referring to the controversy over whether non-Orthodox conversions should be legally recognized in Israel.

"To codify through the highest sovereign body of the Jewish people — the parliament of Israel — that this is an ultra-Orthodox synagogue and all others need not come is to violate the fundamental unity of the Jewish people," Hirsch said.

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive director of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, said he finds the proposed legislation "outrageous and abhorrent," but is not surprised by it.

"They're going to do everything they possibly can to block the decision of the court," he said of the fervently Orthodox parties.

Phyllis Chesler, a New York-based scholar and psychotherapist who was one of the plaintiffs in the Women of the Wall suit, agreed that the proposed legislation is not surprising, but said it imposes far more extreme penalties than have ever been proposed in the past.

Rabbi Avi Shafran, a spokesman for the fervently Orthodox Agudath Israel of America, said it is important to legislate against the Supreme Court decision.

The decision, Shafran added, could spur groups such as humanistic Jews and Hebrew Christians to demand prayer space and thus "lead to the balkanization of the Kotel."

It is unclear whether the government's request for a review will be accepted by the court, and whether this might jeopardize the Reform and Conservative movements' fairly warm relations with Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

So far, Reform and Conservative leaders are willing to give Barak the benefit of the doubt.

ARZA's Hirsch said the government's action is "disappointing," but it is better than under former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which supported the so-called conversion bill, which would have overturned Supreme Court decisions recognizing non-Orthodox conversions.

Of the Barak government's request for a review, United Synagogue's Epstein said, "I don't regard it as a positive sign."

"But he's got to do what he's got to do because the truth of the matter is that his agenda is not this," he added, noting that the peace process and economy are higher priorities right now for Barak, and that he cannot risk upsetting the fervently Orthodox parties. □

WW II Japanese envoy honored by hometown

NEW YORK (JTA) — A hall commemorating a Japanese diplomat who saved some 6,000 Jews during the Holocaust was completed in his hometown.

The memorial for Chiune Sugihara recreates the interior of the Japanese consulate in Lithuania where he worked during World War II and includes replicas of the transit visas he issued to Jews fleeing Poland into Lithuania.

The hall, located in the Japanese town of Yaotsu, is scheduled to open July 30, the 100th anniversary of Sugihara's birth. □

JEWISH WORLD

Group makes allocation plans

A Claims Conference panel will recommend to its board that 80 percent of the funds the group receives from restitution of Nazi-era heirless property should be spent on humanitarian programs for Holocaust survivors.

The rest would go toward education, documentation and commemoration projects.

Deportation hearing opens

Deportation proceedings began Thursday against an alleged Nazi SS guard who has lived in New York for almost 50 years.

The Department of Justice's Office of Special Investigations maintains that 84-year-old Michael Gruber, a Croatian native and Austrian citizen, should be deported for lying about his activities as a guard at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp between 1942 and 1944.

The government is expected to rest its case by Friday afternoon.

U.S.-German talks delayed

U.S. and German negotiators delayed the start of a meeting aimed at hammering out legal details related to Germany's plan to pay some \$5 billion to Nazi-era slave laborers.

The meeting between U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat and the chief German mediator, Otto Lambsdorff, was to begin prior to President Clinton's arrival in Germany on Thursday.

Austria faces lawsuit

A class-action lawsuit was filed against Austria and several Austrian banking firms on behalf of Holocaust victims.

The lawsuit claims the defendants derived economic benefit from the seizure of Jewish-owned assets during the Nazi era.

Krakow synagogue restored

A dedication ceremony was held Thursday to mark the restoration of the Tempel Synagogue in the Jewish district of Krakow, Poland.

The New York-based World Monuments Fund worked with city officials and the local Jewish community in the six-year restoration project.

Chipset's name deemed offensive

A company in Taiwan decided to rename the computer chips it manufactures to avoid hurting Jewish sensibilities.

VIA Technologies said it is renaming its Apollo KZ133 chipset because "KZ" were the German initials used to identify Nazi concentration camps.

The chips were renamed Apollo KT133.

Clinton to send Albright to Mideast in an effort to spur Palestinian talks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — President Clinton plans to send his secretary of state to the Middle East to see if she can narrow gaps in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Madeleine Albright's planned trip comes after Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak met in Lisbon, but did not announce any breakthroughs in bringing the Israeli and Palestinian positions any closer on a framework for a final peace deal.

Clinton, who said he will meet with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat in Washington soon, said both sides "have to be prepared to make an intense effort and to do things that they have not done in the past."

Barak also said that "the door is not closed" to peace with Syria.

Sources close to Barak said the prime minister's remarks were intended to send two messages — one to Damascus, that Israel is still interested in peace even after the unilateral Israeli troop withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

The other message was intended for the Palestinians, warning them that "foot-dragging" could shift Israel's priorities back to talks with Syria.

The Prime Minister's Office denied a Palestinian claim that Israel has agreed to hand over to the Palestinians as much as 95 percent of the West Bank as part of a final peace agreement.

Barak's office said no such agreement existed and that Israel would never agree to such terms.

Representatives in talks on these issues were expected to meet Thursday at an undisclosed location in Israel. Israel suspended the previous round of discussions in Stockholm last month following an eruption of violent Palestinian unrest in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Barak had requested that the meeting with Clinton, originally scheduled for Thursday night in Berlin, be moved forward and held in Lisbon, to allow him to return home in time to attend the state ceremony for Jerusalem Day. □

Russian squad rescues Israeli held captive by Chechen gang

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — A 12-year-old boy who is thought to be the last Israeli citizen held hostage by a Chechen gang was set free.

Following the intervention of a special police squad and a negotiator familiar with the tactics of Chechen abductors, Adi Sharon was freed Thursday in the city of Penza, some 500 miles east of Moscow.

Adi was abducted last August in Moscow, where his father, Yossef Sharon, an Israeli businessman, had brought him for the summer.

The family emigrated to Israel from the former Soviet republic of Georgia 20 years ago. Adi lost his mother when he was 4, and he frequently accompanied his father on business trips. The abductors, a group that included both Russians and Chechens, had originally demanded a ransom of \$5 million, then cut the sum to \$1 million.

The father paid a first installment of \$50,000 before contacts with the gang ceased, in part because of a Russian military advance in Chechnya. After the payments stopped, the gangsters cut off two of the boy's fingers and mailed them to his father.

At that point, the Israeli Embassy put Sharon in contact with a special Russian police team and with Vyacheslav Izmailov, a retired Russian major who has arranged the release of dozens of hostages held in Chechnya, including several Israeli citizens.

Subsequent phone negotiations with the gang led the police to several different places in Chechnya and in the neighboring republic of Ingushetiya.

Their efforts paid off Thursday, when Adi was traced to Penza, where police detained five members of the gangs and freed the youth.

Sharon is expected to return to Israel with his son in the coming days. □

Shoah denier launches U.S. tour with a pep rally for sympathizers

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — A high-profile Holocaust denier began a three-month speaking and fund-raising tour of the United States over the weekend by meeting with some of the top names among those who share his views.

Following a celebrated trial that ended in April, David Irving was judged by a British court to be an anti-Semite, racist and associate of neo-Nazis, and he did not disguise the severity of his defeat.

"It's rather like when you're beaten in school," he told some 140 sympathizers at a secret location in Irvine in Southern California, according to a report in the Los Angeles Times.

At the same time, Irving struck a defiant pose. Describing the verdict as "a great injustice," he likened himself to the biblical David, temporarily defeated by the Goliath of Jewish power and wealth.

He declared that American historian Deborah Lipstadt, whom Irving sued for libel because of her book, had received \$6 million for her legal defense, contributed by filmmaker Steven Spielberg, business executive Edgar Bronfman Jr. and others.

Lipstadt herself said in Los Angeles last month that the trial costs had come to \$3 million for her publisher, Penguin Books, and \$1.5 million for herself. She said that the Jewish community had not paid for her legal expenses or loss of income.

The weekend meeting was organized by the California-based Institute for Historical Review, a center of Holocaust denial for more than two decades. Participants included an international array of activists, such as Arthur Butz of the United States, Robert Faurisson of France, Germar Rudolf of Germany and Ernst Zundel of Canada, the Times reported.

Although the meeting was not publicized in advance, the proceedings were broadcast live on the Internet to nearly 2,500 people, organizers claimed.

The organizers said on Tuesday that Irving will appeal the verdict in the Lipstadt case.

Another speaker was former Northern California Rep. Pete McCloskey, who has brought a class action suit against the Anti-Defamation League, claiming that the organization spied illegally on U.S. citizens critical of Israel.

McCloskey's participation was denounced by Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, who said that his "appearance under the same tent as someone who has just been crowned the leading intellectual Jew hater in the world, I guess speaks volumes."

The Los Angeles Times news story on the meeting was strongly criticized by noted Holocaust scholar Michael Berenbaum. The newspaper had been faulted at the beginning of the Lipstadt trial for seemingly giving equal credibility to the overwhelming historical evidence on the Holocaust and a fringe group of deniers, or self-described "revisionists."

In a letter to the Times, Berenbaum wrote, "Once again, the Los Angeles Times has allowed itself to be used as a propaganda instrument for Holocaust denial."

Berenbaum charged that the Times story "portrays the deniers as persecuted lambs who are harassed because of their ideas." □

Athletes tell of trauma after Maccabiah disaster

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — An Israeli legislator was in Australia this week to gather testimony for a Knesset inquiry into a fatal bridge collapse at the 1997 Maccabiah Games.

Knesset member Eliezer Sandberg held hearings in Melbourne and Sydney, where Australian athletes testified about the injuries and trauma they suffered when the bridge collapsed during the Games' opening ceremonies, leaving four Australian athletes dead and scores of others injured.

Victims' families also testified, telling how their lives had been affected by the tragedy.

Leaders of Australian Jewry spoke of how the local community has long been angered by the delay in paying compensation claims and by what it views as the lack of contrition on the part of the Maccabi World Union leadership.

In April, an Israeli court convicted five people — including the head of the Games' organizing committee and the engineer and contractor who built the bridge — for criminal negligence.

During this week's testimony, Suzanne Small related how she had watched desperate attempts to revive her husband, Greg, and how she has had to try to rebuild her life with her two young children since his death.

"My husband and my life was dead, his body was lifeless, his face blue and swollen," she said.

Lynne Zines, whose husband, Warren, died as a result of injuries sustained in the accident, said that every aspect of her life had been affected by the tragedy.

Denese Brick, the captain of Australia's lawn bowling team, which won a gold medal at the Games, told how she is now afraid of swimming and taking airplane flights.

Brick, who was resuscitated after almost drowning in the bridge collapse, told Sandberg that the water into which he fell was not deep but that "I just could not get through the bodies and the limbs above me."

Henry Sawicki, whose wife, Elizabeth, died in the accident, said angrily that he had received virtually no support from the Maccabi World Union.

After the tragedy, Maccabi Australia formally pulled out of the Maccabi World Union.

Jewish community leaders testified that Maccabi associations around the world had shown little sympathy or understanding for the plight of the victims.

Colin Rubenstein, executive director of the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, whose sister was one of more than 60 team members injured in the collapse, said it was ironic that the Maccabi World Union had enough money to run the next Maccabiah Games while many Australian athletes were waiting for compensation for injuries and suffering from the 1997 Games.

"Given the depth of feeling about this issue in Australia, it is important that no officials associated with the Maccabi World Union in 1997 or since accompany the Israeli Olympic team to Sydney later this year" for the Olympic Games, Rubenstein said.

"Otherwise, sadly, the result could be the painful spectacle of demonstrations against the Israeli Olympic Team by Australian Jews." □