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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Women hold service at Wall

Fervently Orthodox men taunted an estimated 200 women who turned out for services at the Western Wall on Sunday.

Police detained four men suspected of planning to throw eggs at the women, who were wrapped in tallitot and tefillin. [Page 3]

Barak gets more protection

Israeli officials increased security for Prime Minister Ehud Barak after Jewish settlers threatened him for planning to transfer additional portions of the West Bank to the Palestinians.

Barak said at Sunday's Cabinet meeting that he respects the settlers' movement, but that no attack could stop the peace process. [Page 4]

Barak, Arafat spar on Jerusalem

One day before U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was scheduled to arrive in the region, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat sparred on the issue of Jerusalem. Barak told the team negotiating a final peace deal with the Palestinians not to discuss the status of Jerusalem for now, according to a Cabinet statement.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat reacted by saying that Jerusalem will be the capital of a Palestinian state, adding that if Israelis don't like the idea, "They can go and drink the Dead Sea." [Page 4]

Leniency forecast for 'Iran 13'

The newly elected speaker of Iran's Parliament said the 13 Iranian Jews on trial for allegedly spying for Israel would be treated leniently. "Because of Islamic compassion and national interests, harsh sentences will not be imposed, as far as I know," speaker Mehdi Karrubi said in an interview.

Russian rabbi asked to resign

American Jewish community officials urged the Russian government not to interfere with the leadership of Russia's Jewish community.

The statement came after Russia's chief rabbi, Adolph Shayeveich, was asked to resign by Russian government officials. Moscow apparently would prefer that the chief rabbi be Berel Lazar, the Lubavitch movement's chief emissary in Russia.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

European Jewish communities discuss how to work as a team

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Experts are warning that European Jewry must find ways to better educate its leaders if it wants to become a full-fledged "third pillar" of world Jewry alongside Israel and North America.

"European Jews as individuals are highly talented and in good shape, but the collectivity — the communities — are in trouble," warned Barry Kosmin, executive director of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research. "There is a need to improve the knowledge base and skills of leaders so the 'team' performs better."

To begin this teamwork process, senior Jewish lay leaders from across Europe have targeted issues that they say are essential for European Jewish survival, and they pledged to work more closely together.

"There needs to be a new vision," Alberto Senderay of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee told a meeting of the European Council of Jewish Communities in Barcelona last week.

Some 116 delegates from 51 Jewish communities in 34 countries attended the Barcelona meeting. They included lay leaders from the emerging communities in post-Communist Eastern and Central Europe as well as from established communities in the West. The meeting was largely devoted to workshops addressing broad issues that are common to all European communities — from the 600,000-strong community in France to the 200 Jews who live in Macedonia.

More than 70 communal leaders were asked to rate the urgency of these issues.

According to their responses, the most important concern is outreach to the unaffiliated or alienated, and particularly to the so-called "missing generation" between the ages of 20 and 45.

Other priorities include raising money for local needs, rather than those of Israel, by tapping into European Union sources, among others; "Jewish coexistence" amid what the group described as fragmentation and polarization among Orthodox, Reform and other Jewish streams; improving and developing Jewish education, particularly for adults; property restitution; and social welfare.

"There was a lot of discussion, including an emphasis on the need to communicate and network, but not much concrete," said one attendee.

The meeting came one year after a landmark ECJC General Assembly, held in Nice, attracted more than 600 Jewish representatives — one of the biggest such Jewish gatherings in Europe since the Holocaust.

"The message from Nice was that European Jewry feels the need to organize itself and work together," said Cobi Benatoff, of Italy, who was re-elected ECJC president at the Barcelona meeting.

Based in Paris, the ECJC exists to foster the exchange of information and know-how among European Jews. Many of these meetings — which include issue-oriented conferences, training sessions and even singles' weekends — are aimed at fostering a sense of European Jewish identity and enabling a significant European Jewish voice to be heard alongside those of Israel and American Jewry.

"Finally, I can believe in the rebirth of Jewish life in Europe after the Holocaust," Michel Friedman, vice president of the Central Council of German Jews, told the delegates in Barcelona. "Now, Jews don't have to give thanks for everything, and we are truly citizens of our countries." A number of delegates to the Barcelona meeting had

MIDEAST FOCUS

Ayatollah: Fight on against Israel

Iran's supreme leader called on militant Palestinians to continue their struggle against Israel. In a speech broadcast on Tehran Radio on Saturday, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei spoke of the day when "parts of occupied Palestine, and ultimately all of occupied Palestine, will be returned to the Palestinian people."

Kidnapped boy returns home

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak phoned Russian President Vladimir Putin over the weekend to thank Moscow for rescuing a 12-year-old Israeli boy kidnapped by a Chechen gang last August.

At the same time, however, Israeli Defense Ministry officials charged that a Russian anti-terror squad had known since December where Adi Sharon was being held. Sharon, who had parts of two fingers cut off during his captivity, returned to Israel on Sunday.

Israel rejects Red Cross proposal

Israel rejected an offer from the International Committee of the Red Cross to include the Magen David Adom rescue organization, provided it drop the Star of David emblem and adopt a neutral diamond symbol. The Israeli group's director said the dispute over the symbol is really just a way to keep Jews out of the Red Cross.

Lebanese hurl stones over border

Hundreds of Lebanese civilians hurled stones at Israeli troops stationed along the Israeli-Lebanese border. The troops, who have been ordered to shoot only in self-defense, held their fire.

Chase to open Israel branch

Chase Manhattan bank plans to open a branch in Israel soon, Israel Radio reported. Bank representatives will soon visit Israel to finalize arrangements, according to the report.

met just a month earlier in Washington at a gathering of Jewish communal leaders and representatives from 40 countries that was sponsored by the American Jewish Committee.

The meeting was the AJCommittee's seventh annual International Leadership Conference.

"To date, it has been a paradox that if you wanted to exchange information, you went to Washington, not to somewhere in Europe," Tomas Kraus, executive secretary of the Union of Czech Jewish communities, told JTA.

He said such exchanges and the network of contacts that has grown out of them, have been vital in his community's development. It is just as vital, he said, for Jewish organizations to listen to local communities to learn of their needs before offering assistance.

"Among post-Communist Jewish communities, there are many needs in common, but each community is also unique and alive," he said. "Every Jewish community has to act differently because of its national mentality, or political climate. Most Israeli or other Jewish agencies want to impose some patterns — but this is not possible."

Several twinning initiatives have been undertaken between individual Jewish communities in recent years — mainly between communities in post-Communist countries and communities or congregations in the United States.

Last month, for example, representatives of the Jewish Community Center of Washington met in Budapest with Jewish community leaders to establish a partnership arrangement. □

Russian ignorance of Holocaust difficult for teachers to overcome

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — When Sweden's vice prime minister opened a conference on Holocaust education last week, the event went unnoticed by the Moscow media.

They were busy discussing Russian President Vladimir Putin's ongoing crackdown on Jewish media tycoons.

But for the 50 Jewish activists, teachers, public figures and historians who gathered at the Swedish Embassy in Moscow, the discussions hosted by Lena Hjalms-Vallen were part of a struggle to educate a Russian populace that is mainly ignorant about the Nazi genocide of the Jews.

The Russian city of Smolensk, for example, "is very anti-Semitic," said Mikhail Steklov, a history professor there. "Neo-Nazi groups are quite active, there are lots of inscriptions like 'Jews, Get Out of Russia' in public places and absolutely no resistance and no public awareness of the fascist danger. When I asked students which of them can explain what the Holocaust is, only 5 percent out of 200 understood the word."

The Soviet government is partially responsible for the ignorance. Under the Communists, the Holocaust was universalized, and those killed during the Holocaust were commemorated only under the rubric of "victims of crimes against humanity."

High-ranking Russian officials have vowed to erase this ignorance. Deputy Minister of Education Vladimir Kondakov said at the conference that his ministry is preparing a national education program on the Holocaust.

Programs of this kind have already been introduced in Sweden, where 1 million copies of the book, "And Tell That to Your Children," are being distributed as part of a state-supported Holocaust-education project.

In Russia, which has a population of 150 million, only 20,000 copies of the book have been printed.

Education specialists say Russians generally don't see the value of teaching the Holocaust. Tatyana Arsentyeva, who teaches at a Moscow high school, says students and their parents opposed her plans to introduce a Holocaust course.

"They say they don't understand why their kids should study that," she said. "They say they don't need it. I can't see how we can use books like the Swedish one right now. Our Swedish colleagues simply underestimate the level of anti-Semitism and of unwillingness to tackle these problems in Russia." □



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JEWISH WORLD

U.S. says slave payments delayed

U.S. and German negotiators failed to reach a deal on legal issues surrounding a German fund to pay some \$5 billion to Nazi-era slave laborers.

The failure prompted the lead U.S. negotiator, Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, to predict that payments from the fund would not begin until next year.

New York hosts Israel events

The two candidates running for a U.S. Senate seat in New York participated in the 36th annual Salute to Israel Parade along Fifth Avenue.

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Rep. Rick Lazio (R-N.Y.) see the Jewish vote as crucial to an election victory.

At a separate event held in Central Park, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was among those appearing at the seventh annual Israel Day Concert.

Liaison moves to Gore campaign

The White House liaison to the Jewish community is leaving her position in the coming days to work for the presidential campaign of Vice President Al Gore.

The Clinton administration is seeking a replacement for Deborah Mohile, who has served as liaison since 1997.

Queen to open Shoah memorial

Britain's first permanent memorial to the Holocaust is scheduled to open Tuesday, when it will be inaugurated by Queen Elizabeth II.

The exhibit, which includes Holocaust-era artifacts as well as a deportation rail car and a model of a death camp, is housed in a \$25.5 million extension of London's Imperial War Museum.

'Mein Kampf' publisher charged

A publisher who issued the first unabridged Czech translation of Hitler's "Mein Kampf" without explanatory notes was charged by Czech police with promoting Nazism. Michal Zitko, of the publishing house Otakar II, faces up to eight years in prison if convicted.

Zitko published the book in March after saying that he wanted Czechs to be aware of an important historical document.

Scholar to lead Swiss Jews

Alfred Donath was elected the new leader of Swiss Jewry. A professor and vice president of the University of Geneva, Donath replaces Rolf Bloch as president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Switzerland.

Donath said he will put the fight against anti-Semitism at the top of his agenda.

Women say no violence at Wall service is a good sign

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The women who gathered at the Western Wall this week are taking it as a good sign that they were able to hold a prayer service without any major incident.

Members of the group Women of the Wall say they are optimistic that the government will carry out a recent High Court of Justice ruling that allows them to pray as they see fit at the Western Wall.

And aside from some name-calling and attempted egg-throwing from those who believe that women should not be allowed to hold formal prayer services at Judaism's holiest site, the service went ahead without the physical confrontation that had been feared.

Wrapped in tallitot and tefillin, an estimated 200 women turned out for the service, according to a group member.

Some worshipers at the site shouted at the group, and Israeli police detained four fervently Orthodox men who police said planned to throw eggs.

The women's service was given heavy police protection out of concern for possible clashes with fervently Orthodox worshipers, who were angered when the high court recognized the right of Women of the Wall last month to hold women's prayer services at the Wall.

The landmark ruling capped an 11-year legal battle by the women's group.

Sunday's service celebrated Rosh Chodesh, the new month on the Hebrew calendar. In recent years, the women's group moved their monthly services to a site near the Wall.

Group member Anat Hoffman said Sunday's turnout greatly encouraged her.

"I felt strengthened in many ways," Hoffman said. "Five times more women than usual arrived."

Hoffman said police worked effectively to maintain order.

"The police for 11 years told the high court they could not protect us and that it was a situation the police cannot deal with," she said.

"We think the police can now tell the government they can protect us."

In its ruling, the high court gave the government six months to come up with the necessary arrangements to enable the women's group to pray at the Wall, which is also known as the Kotel.

Fervently Orthodox legislators have initiated bills to bypass the court ruling. One bill would sentence women to seven years in jail for reading from the Torah, blowing the shofar or wearing a tallit at the Western Wall.

That bill, sponsored by the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc, passed the first of three required votes in the Knesset last week.

The other, introduced by Shas, declares that one must behave at the Wall and surrounding plaza as if in a synagogue.

This bill 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.

It passed by a vote of 29-25.

"We are very anxious about this legislation," Hoffman said. "It is a serious stain on the Israeli law books."

Legislation in the Knesset must pass three readings before it becomes law.

While some religious lawmakers are taking the legislative route to bypass the court ruling altogether, others are seeking compromise.

Israel Radio reported that legislator Nahum Langental, a member of the National Religious Party, has proposed allowing the Women of the Wall to hold their services at Robinson's Arch.

The arch is at the southern end of the Western Wall.

The Conservative movement recently agreed to a compromise under which it will hold services at the arch. □

Settlers warn Barak he could be killed for giving land away

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has increased security for its prime minister after Jewish settlers warned that Ehud Barak risks assassination if he plans to give more land to the Palestinians.

Government officials warned settlers not to encourage the same kind of atmosphere that preceded the 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, when the former prime minister was vilified by right-wing nationalists.

Shlomo Riklin, a leader of the Second Generation group of young settlers, warned that Barak's "days could be numbered" if he uproots Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The group has set up outposts on West Bank hilltops to try to prevent land transfers to the Palestinians.

According to reports Sunday, some extremists in the settler community are talking about finding rabbis who would issue edicts supporting Barak's assassination.

Barak said at Sunday's Cabinet meeting that while he respects the settlers' movement, no attack could stop the peace process.

Levy called on religious figures "to be careful in your remarks because you are spiritual leaders. Declarations which are dangerous could, God forbid, bring upon us another blow we cannot bear," Levy said.

He made the comment at a meeting with Jewish settler leaders, who were quick to denounce any incitement to violence.

"We will not support any development that will lead, God forbid, to any incitement to assassinate the prime minister or any other Israeli leaders," settler leader Pinchas Wallerstein told reporters in Jerusalem.

But, Wallerstein added, "We unfortunately face a very difficult battle."

The settler leaders had asked to meet with Levy to clarify recent speculation that Barak had agreed to hand over up to 95 percent of the West Bank to the Palestinians.

Barak has denied the speculation, but he did tell his party last week that he would consider it a "historic achievement" if a final deal resulted in 80 percent of the Jewish settler population remaining under Israeli sovereignty.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was scheduled to arrive in the Middle East on Monday to try to help advance Israeli-Palestinian talks.

She was expected to use her two-day visit to attempt to pave the way for a summit before the end of the month involving Barak, President Clinton and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

In recent weeks, Israel and the Palestinians have traded accusations of dragging out the negotiations.

A day before Albright was slated to arrive, Barak and Arafat sparred on the issue of Jerusalem.

Barak told the team negotiating a final peace deal with the Palestinians not to discuss the status of Jerusalem for now, according to a Cabinet statement.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat reacted by saying that Jerusalem will be the capital of a Palestinian state, adding that if Israelis don't like the idea, "They can go and drink the Dead Sea." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Prague Jewish cemetery dispute surfaces again with protest threat

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — Two organizations are warning of renewed demonstrations against construction of an office building above one of Europe's oldest Jewish cemeteries.

The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad and the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe have expressed concern over a compromise regarding the site.

The compromise, announced by the Czech government in March, involved preserving the site by encasing the remains of several hundred Jews in concrete. The remains of up to another 160 Jews, which had been removed from the cemetery for anthropological research, were also to be returned as soon as possible.

The compromise ended months of speculation over the fate of the burial site, which was unearthed two years ago during construction of an office building being built by a Czech insurance company, Ceska pojistovna.

The agreement followed heavy pressure from Orthodox Jewish groups from the United States and Europe, whose protests over the fate of the cemetery included demonstrations March 1 outside the Czech embassies in London and Brussels.

In a letter to the insurance company, the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe criticized the fact that the removed remains had not yet been returned.

The group also claimed that the insurance company still intends "to violate the sacred ground by digging below the level of the graves, in total violation of Jewish law and tradition and against the assurance we received from the Czech government."

"We are again being driven to a position where it seems that public protests at Czech embassies and affiliated offices of Ceska pojistovna around the world seem to be the only avenue open to us," the group added.

Rabbi Edgar Gluck, of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, expressed similar concerns in a recent letter to the insurance company.

Both the government and the insurance company appear unfazed by the protest threats.

Czech Culture Minister Pavel Dostal has said that even strong protests would not force the Czech government to change its decision to incorporate the cemetery into the construction site. "No one will tell us what we can do and what not. I know the contents of these ultimatum letters but nothing has changed in the government's position," he was quoted as saying in the Czech press.

Ceska pojistovna spokesman Michal Urban said his company is acting according to the decision announced by the government in March and that "everything is going to plan."

"Some of the requests of representatives of foreign Jewish communities are outside the boundaries of that agreement," he added.

Czech Jewish leaders appear to be standing by the March agreement. Prague Jewish leader Jiri Danicek said, "We agree with the decision reached in March. All sides were happy with it."

He said there was no reason at the moment for foreign Jewish groups to demonstrate. □