



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Assad's death prompts caution

Israel's government is reacting with caution to Saturday's death of Syrian President Hafez Assad. Prime Minister Ehud Barak's office said the government had acted in the past to achieve peace with Syria and would continue with any leader in Damascus.

One political analyst said Bashar Assad, Hafez's son and Syria's presumed next leader, may have a more open attitude toward the Jewish state, but would not stray from his father's hard-line demand that Israel return all of the Golan Heights. [Page 1]

### Israelis fly to D.C. for talks

An Israeli delegation headed by Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami was due to leave for Washington to take part in intensive negotiations with the Palestinians. The sides agreed to hold discussions near Washington after U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's shuttle mission to the region last week.

### 'Iran 13' verdict could be delayed

The imminent verdict regarding the 13 Iranian Jews being tried for spying for Israel could be delayed, according to a defense lawyer. Esmail Naseri's comments came as a senior Iranian judicial official was quoted as saying that expressions of support for the 13 could hurt their case.

At the same time, the American Jewish Committee is calling on the U.S. House of Representatives to reject a measure that would further ease sanctions against Iran.

Meanwhile, an Iranian American Jewish group criticized comments made by four anti-Zionist rabbis who are visiting Iran regarding the 13 Iranian Jews being tried for spying for Israel.

The Iranian American Jewish Federation said in a statement that the Neturei Karta rabbis, who have said that the 13 were tricked by Israel, made no efforts to see the 13, or see files or probe into any facts of the case.

### Slave labor case to be pursued

U.S. lawyers are scheduled to pursue their class-action lawsuits on behalf of World War II-era slave laborers in a U.S. court on Thursday.

The move comes as an agreement to finalize a \$5 billion compensation package agreed to by Germany and German companies has been delayed.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Peace talks die with Assad until son gets grip on power

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Peace talks between Israel and Syria, already halted, will probably be put into a deep freeze, most Israeli analysts agreed this week following the death of Syrian President Hafez Assad.

"In the near future, one cannot speak of any peace process," said Eyal Sisser, head of the Syrian desk at the Dayan Research Center at Tel Aviv University.

However, Sisser added that in the long run, Assad's death will contribute to the peace process because "a new leader will be committed to change."

Syria's new leader apparently will be Bashar Assad.

On Sunday, Syria's ruling Ba'ath Party nominated Bashar to succeed his father as president.

The Syrian Parliament will meet June 25 to approve the nomination.

Bashar, 34, was not in line for Syria's presidency until six years ago. He was an ophthalmologist practicing in London in 1994 when his older brother, Basil, was killed in an auto accident.

Assad summoned Bashar back to Damascus and began grooming him as his chosen successor.

"In the past six years, Bashar has managed to do what others take 16 years," said Sisser.

"He has turned from an ophthalmologist into a division commander in the special forces of the Republican Guard."

In the past two years, Bashar was responsible for the Lebanon portfolio in the Syrian government.

In his first media interview last year, he echoed his father's line when he bitterly criticized Arab states that have signed "unilateral peace deals" with Israel.

He told a Lebanese daily that Syria was using Hezbollah fighters as bargaining chips to pressure Israel into withdrawing from southern Lebanon.

Analysts say Bashar is unlikely to stray from the hard line his father set in negotiations with Israel.

Hafez Assad had demanded a total Israeli pullback from the Golan Heights to the June 4, 1967, lines.

Knesset member Yuval Steinitz of the Likud Party called Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak irresponsible "when he virtually pleaded with Assad to take the Golan Heights, even though he had known that his days were numbered."

But others say that for the past two years, Israel strove to reach an agreement with Assad precisely for that reason.

Israeli intelligence believed that it would be easier for Assad's successor to implement a peace agreement signed by Assad than to negotiate on his own, said Ze'ev Schiff, military analyst for the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

However, despite Israel's willingness to make concessions, politicians and intellectuals on both the right and left agree that Assad bore the responsibility for the futile peace talks with Israel.

"We Israelis have no reason to shed tears over the death of Hafez Assad," said Nahum Barnea.

"The man who missed all the trains and had jeopardized all peace tracks in his stubbornness and his hesitations has ended his role in the history of the Middle East,"

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Barak postpones pink slips

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak postponed his threat to call for the resignation of all ministers who voted for early elections last week.

Barak is trying to give negotiators from his One Israel bloc and the Shas faction time to work out a compromise that would enable the fervently Orthodox party to remain in his governing coalition.

### Law keeps prisoners in custody

Israel's Cabinet unanimously endorsed legislation to detain "illegal fighters" who had engaged in hostile activities against the Jewish state.

The initiative is aimed at providing legal justification for Israel's continued detention of Lebanese Shi'ite prisoners in the hope of obtaining information about captured Israeli air navigator Ron Arad.

### Reports: Icon smuggler arrested

Russian police reportedly detained an Israeli man who attempted to smuggle 100 Greek Orthodox religious icons on a flight from Moscow to Tel Aviv.

Customs officers were stunned by what they called the "impudence" of the smuggler, who packed the icons in simple cardboard boxes.

Two years ago, the same person was detained for smuggling icons and Russian military decorations. He was subsequently released.

### Israel bids for Ukraine contract

Russia, France, Israel and Germany are the four main contenders for a bid to modernize Ukraine's Soviet-produced MIG-29 and SU-25, said Alexander Kuzmuk, Ukraine's minister of defense.

### Novel set in Tel Aviv wins prize

Linda Grant, a columnist with Britain's Guardian newspaper, won the Orange Prize for fiction for "When I lived in Modern Times," a novel set in Tel Aviv as Israel was being created.



## Daily News Bulletin

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said Barnea, a leading columnist with the newspaper Yediot Achronot.

But Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's former ambassador to the United States, a leading expert on Syria and former head of the Israeli negotiating team in talks with Syria, did give Assad some credit for having "rehabilitated in recent years the idea of peace with Israel."

However, added Rabinovich, "Assad had set a price and terms which everyone would find difficult to match."

Regional Development Minister Shimon Peres, also a former prime minister, said he believes Assad wanted to make peace, but failed to make the necessary compromise.

"The Golan was actually handed over to him, but he wanted the Sea of Galilee as well, and that was his very grave mistake."

But was it a mistake or a calculated maneuver?

Three months ago, Assad met President Clinton in Geneva for what had turned out to be his last opportunity to strike a deal with Israel.

"History will tell whether the failure of the Geneva meeting with Clinton was all due to Assad's insistence on the last meter of the Sea of Galilee, or whether it was also a result of both mental and physical fatigue," said Oded Granot, Arab Affairs correspondent for the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv.

Granot speculated that Assad had prioritized the smooth transition of power to his son over peace with Israel.

That could have been the background for this past year's crackdown on potential opponents to Bashar under the guise of "eradicating corruption."

Many wonder, however, whether Bashar has the stomach to continue his father's tradition of brutally eliminating the competition.

During his four years of medical studies in London, Bashar became familiar with Western democracy. This, experts agreed, would undoubtedly mold Bashar's style of government.

Bashar, like King Abdullah of Jordan, is thought of as part of a new generation of Arab rulers — more Western-oriented than their predecessors.

Bashar's best-known contribution to a potential new spirit in Damascus was introducing the Internet to Syria — although its use is still very limited and under strict control of the state.

"Prospects for an initial success are good, but Bashar's success in establishing a stable regime and coping with rivals and challenges is still doubtful," said Rabinovich.

Sisser of Tel Aviv University wonders how long Bashar, who is described as mild-mannered, shy and intellectual, will survive as president.

"Can a country like Syria be ruled by a person who does not spread terror, and will Bashar eventually learn to spread terror?" Sisser asked.

Sisser counted among Bashar's potential opponents veteran senior officers and politicians such as Deputy President Abdel-Halim Khaddam and former head of intelligence Ali Douba, who may declare himself a candidate for the presidency.

Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh said an important test for Bashar will be the now-quiet former battlegrounds of southern Lebanon.

"We have one immediate test," Sneh said. "How will the Syrians behave in Lebanon? Will they give Hezbollah freedom of action, or will they restrain them?"

Sisser believes that a new leadership in Damascus is unlikely to launch military action against Israel.

"In the near future, the army will be busy in the process of stabilizing the country, and it will be engaged in internal activities." □

## U.S.: '60 Minutes' source an imposter

NEW YORK (JTA) — A man who told the U.S. television show "60 Minutes" that he could prove Iran was responsible for the 1988 Pan Am Flight 103 bombing that killed 270 people is an imposter, according to CIA and FBI sources quoted in The Washington Post.

The man, who claimed he was a former Iranian intelligence officer, "lacks basic knowledge of Iran's intelligence apparatus" and "has been lying about lots of stuff," according to one senior U.S. official. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Calif. law on Shoah blocked

A U.S. judge blocked California state officials from enforcing a state law that calls on the state to revoke the business licenses of any insurance company that fails to submit a list of unpaid Holocaust-era claims. U.S. District Court Judge William Shubb issued the order last Friday until its constitutionality is decided.

### Hadassah lobbies Congress

A leading U.S. Jewish group called on the U.S. Congress to ratify an international law protecting the rights of women.

The call by Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, to pass the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women came last week as a U.N. conference on women was meeting in New York.

### Candles sparked deadly fire

Investigators said candles lit for the holiday of Shavuot helped to start a Brooklyn fire that killed the granddaughter and great-granddaughter of Rabbi Moses Teitelbaum, the leader of the Satmar Chasidic group.

"Everybody is walking with their heads down," said one resident of Williamsburg, where Sara Blima Halverstam and her 5-month-old daughter were killed last Friday.

### Group protests Palestinian honor

The Canadian Jewish Congress is protesting the University of Toronto's awarding an honorary degree to Palestinian academic Edward Said last week.

The opposition stems both from Said's allegedly fraudulent claim that his family was exiled from Jerusalem in 1948 and because of his steadfast opposition to the state of Israel. A spokeswoman for the university explained that Said was "honored as a political scholar, not for his political views."

### Russian murderer gets hard labor

A Russian court sentenced a man to 14 years of hard labor for murdering a visiting Israeli student.

Alexander Kosterov invited Nadir Torkman to his residence, killed him with an ax, dismembered the body, packed the parts in plastic bags and deposited them in different places in the city of Sevastopol.

### Bomb explodes in Cape Town

Two people were slightly injured when a car bomb exploded outside a cafe in a Jewish neighborhood in Cape Town. The Sea Point district has suffered from a rash of bombings in recent years, many of them blamed on Muslim extremists.

## Syrian dictator remained steadfast Israel foe, leaves unfinished legacy

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — After U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger negotiated the cease-fire that ended the 1973 Yom Kippur War, he tried to set up a regional peace conference.

But Kissinger found that Syrian President Hafez Assad had no intention of taking part in a meeting on a comprehensive settlement with Israel.

It was not to be the last time that the United States and Israel had their hopes raised and then dashed by Assad, who died Saturday at the age of 69. Assad's death leaves Israel and the Jewish world without its most elusive and implacable adversary, a dictator as respected for his political skills as he was opposed for his ideology.

It also marks the end of an era of secular Arab leaders whose careers were fueled by the military and financial support of the Soviet Union and shaped by the ideas of Arab nationalism and staunch anti-Zionism.

Indeed, one of Assad's first goals when he came to power in a bloodless coup in 1970 was to erase the memory of the Arab world's humiliating defeat to Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War. But Assad failed to achieve his aims in the 1973 war.

During the next quarter-century, as Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and King Hussein of Jordan reached agreements with Israel, Assad refused to do so.

As Assad tightly maintained his grip on power by running a police state, cracking down on dissidents and rivals for power with no concern for human rights, he also carved out a role as a major player in the Middle East, particularly in the areas of international terrorism and control over Lebanon.

After Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, Assad allied with the fundamentalist leaders of Iran in aiding international terrorists against Israel.

Syria, which is on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism, supported the Abu Nidal group. The group carried out a string of attacks in the 1980s, including attacks at El Al ticket counters in Rome and Vienna in 1985.

The Damascus-Tehran alliance also gave supplies and training to Hezbollah gunmen who fought to push Israel out of southern Lebanon.

Assad lived just long enough to see success on the southern Lebanon front.

Assad, who believed that the Arab world needed to boost its military capability if it was ever to have a chance against Israel, did not respond when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1978. In 1982, Israel again invaded its northern neighbor in an attempt to reduce Syrian influence and eliminate the Palestine Liberation Organization.

After Israel withdrew to a nine-mile security zone in southern Lebanon in 1985, Assad moved his troops in and again became the main power broker there.

In the early 1990s, Assad appeared to shift course. After years of repression against the Syrian Jewish community, he opened the doors to secret Jewish emigration as long as the emigres did not go to Israel.

In the operation engineered by the Jewish Agency for Israel, about 1,300 Jews left Syria. Now, fewer than 200 Jews remain.

At the same time, Assad allowed for his country's participation in the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, which marked the beginning of the current Middle East process.

Negotiations between Israel and Syria occurred during the reign of Yitzhak Rabin, with Israel allegedly agreeing to give up the Golan Heights in return for a full peace.

But those talks officially broke off in 1996.

As late as last year, when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Assad exchanged mutual words of praise for each other, prospects for peace between Israel and Syria appeared bright. The recent round of talks, however, yielded no results and Assad was criticized for sending his foreign minister to negotiate with Israel, rather than going himself.

With his death, Assad's legacy is unfinished.

He met Israel on the battlefield and more tentatively at the negotiating table. But he left the issue of peace for his son Bashar. □

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

**Director wants film to depict Jewish struggle for acceptance**

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Like the characters in his saga "Sunshine," director Istvan Szabo is descended from a highly assimilated Hungarian Jewish family.

"For five generations, my ancestors have been doctors and lawyers in Budapest," says Szabo, speaking by phone from the Hungarian capital.

Yet, despite the superficial parallels between the Sonnenschein — German for "Sunshine" — and the Szabo families, the three-hour movie about four generations in the life of a Hungarian Jewish family is not autobiographical, the director and screenwriter insists.

Each character in the film, which opened in New York and Los Angeles last Friday, represents a composite of five or six people whose lives or stories Szabo has encountered during his 62 years.

It might have been fascinating to delve deeper into the life of Szabo, recipient of 60 international awards and an Oscar for such penetrating movies as "Mephisto," "Colonel Redl" and "Hanssen." But Szabo would have none of it. After reluctantly acknowledging that he was hidden by nuns during the Holocaust, he declares firmly, "I am not happy talking about myself."

Discussing the film, though, is another matter. Although Ralph Fiennes, in the triple role of grandfather, father and grandson is the obvious star of the film, the key character, according to Szabo, is the family matriarch, Valerie.

Played by Jennifer Ehle as a young woman and by Rosemary Harris as an older one, Valerie lives through the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Nazi occupation and Communist rule — and remains true to herself.

"She is the most courageous person of all, the only one who remains faithful and never denies her origins," Szabo notes.

To understand the attitudes and changing fortunes of the Sonnenschein family, it is important to know about the role of Jews in Hungarian history.

"In 1848-49, when Hungarians revolted against the Austrian Hapsburg monarchy, 20,000 young Jews joined the revolution, and many of them were imprisoned after the Hapsburg victory," Szabo says. "So the Hungarian Jews were very nationalistic and felt that the 'invisible wall' that for instance separated German Jews from their gentile neighbors did not exist in Hungary."

To illustrate the point, Szabo points to the town of Kecskemet, about 45 miles from Budapest.

"There the main square is surrounded by seven different houses of worship, which were all built toward the end of the 19th century," Szabo recounts.

"There is a baroque Catholic church, a Christian Orthodox church, a Protestant church, an Evangelical middle school, a synagogue and another Catholic church. And in the middle of the square is a coffee shop for everybody."

Szabo says he always envisioned that the Sonnenschein men, over three generations, would be played by the same actor and he rejects the suggestion that this triple-casting might confuse viewers.

"By using the same face for grandfather, son and grandson, I wanted to show that the challenges of history, the Jewish struggle to be accepted by society, repeated itself in every generation," Szabo notes.

"However, I needed an actor who could create different characters, and I think that Fiennes has succeeded admirably."

Hungarians apparently agree. The film is a great success there, especially among the country's roughly 100,000 Jews.

In its first month, an unprecedented more than 100,000 people viewed this film in Budapest alone. Many Hungarian Jews see the film as a history of their own lives.

"We thank you for this film, now we understand better our own role throughout the history of Hungary and within the delicate web of its society," one local Jew told Szabo during a lively discussion of the film in the Budapest Jewish Community club.

Szabo answered, with a metaphor, a visiting Israeli's question about the lack of Zionist ideology in the film.

"Every apple has a different taste, depending on the geographical location, where it is grown. The taste of the apple is different from the taste of an apple grown in England or in Greece. I like the Hungarian apple more than the others," he said. "This is the realistic picture of Hungary's Jewry." □

(JTA correspondent Agnes Bohm in Budapest contributed to this report.)

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

**Story of Hungarian Jewry told through eyes of 4 generations**

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — "Sunshine" is a massive, sprawling film that spans 120 years in the lives and loves of four generations of a Hungarian Jewish family.

It is part history course, part lust among the bourgeoisie and an all-around lesson on the ultimate futility of Central European Jewry's attempt to shed its roots and assimilate.

The film starts around 1840, when orphaned 12-year-old Emanuel Sonnenschein — German for "Sunshine" — sets out for Budapest carrying as his only endowment the secret recipe for an herbal tonic bearing the family name.

Emanuel and his tonic lay the foundation for the family fortune. In the following 120 years covered by the film, his male descendants find success, convert to Catholicism and suffer under the Nazis and Communists.

The Sonnenschein men are matched by even stronger women, and there is a great deal of sexual liaisons and betrayals.

The length of the film — three hours — and cast are of near-epic proportions. The film focuses relentlessly on Ralph Fiennes, who portrays three generations of men: Ignatz, the judge; Adam, the fencer; and Ivan, the Communist interrogator.

Fiennes, who first came to international attention as the sadistic SS commandant Amon Goeth in "Schindler's List," here pictures assimilated Jews convincingly.

Nevertheless, having the same visage, with only minor alterations in facial hair styles, appear in three roles, confuses rather than unifies an already densely plotted and populated film.

Rosemary Harris stands out among the cast members as the matriarch who binds together the generations. □