



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 78, No. 117

Thursday, June 22, 2000

83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Barak appears to save gov't

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's chances of saving his government improved after three ministers from the secular Meretz Party decided to resign.

Officials from the fervently Orthodox Shas Party said they would remain in Barak's coalition after the Meretz resignations become official.

Though the party will no longer be part of the Cabinet, Meretz plans to continue to support Barak in Knesset votes.

Bill would help terrorist victims

A U.S. House committee passed a bill that would allow families of American victims of terrorism to recover frozen assets of countries designated as state sponsors of terrorism.

The bill passed by the Judiciary Committee would limit a waiver that President Clinton had previously imposed on collecting these funds.

Clinton cited U.S. national security interests when he invoked the waiver.

Envoy heads to Middle East

U.S. envoy Dennis Ross is returning to the Middle East to determine if it is possible to hold a three-way summit to hammer out an outline of a final peace accord.

Ross' visit comes ahead of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's planned trip to the region next week.

Meanwhile, Israel proposed July 5 as the date for the summit.

Barak's office said the prime minister believes that talks among the two sides' negotiators are not advancing and that the three leaders must make the critical decisions.

Cuts could hurt elderly

Proposed cuts in U.S. government funding could harm the elderly and other vulnerable populations in the Jewish community, Jewish organizations said Wednesday.

The U.S. Senate is considering a 66 percent cutback in social services grant money that would hurt programs like Meals on Wheels, adoption and day care, said leaders from the United Jewish Communities and the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

The Bronfmans sell stake in whiskey, and Jews have cause to raise a glass

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — The name Bronfman means "whiskey man" in Yiddish.

But the Bronfman family — whose members have given millions of dollars to Jewish causes in their native Canada and around the world — is severing its generations-long connection to whiskey and spirits.

And this may give them even more cash to spend on Jewish causes.

Edgar Bronfman Sr. and his brother, Charles, are among a handful of mega-philanthropists in the Jewish world, and they have each given millions to established Jewish organizations and their own Jewish ventures.

The Bronfmans this week sold their multibillion-dollar business, Joseph E. Seagram and Sons, to Vivendi, a French media company. The whiskey company was bought by Edgar and Charles' father, Samuel, in 1928.

Neither Edgar nor Charles agreed to be interviewed, citing advice of their attorneys.

But observers of their philanthropic habits predict that the sale of the family's stake in Seagram — valued at \$6.8 billion, according to The New York Times — can only be good news for the family's Jewish communal beneficiaries.

"It will give them more financial resources," said David Mersky, a senior lecturer in Jewish philanthropy at Brandeis University's Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service, who described the Bronfman philanthropy as "legendary."

"Would that there were 34 more people like them to give like they do," he added.

"They not only give a lot, but creatively and in a way that encourages others to do likewise. They've been responsible for bringing other mega-donors to the table, and they're outstanding leaders in addition to being great philanthropists."

According to Jonathan Sarna, Braun professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University, the sale may leave more of the assets ending up in the hands of the Jewishly committed elder Bronfmans than if the money had remained tied up in the business.

"Suddenly, the senior Bronfmans will be able to cash out while they're still alive," said Sarna, adding that "had things gone differently, presumably all that stock would have made its way down to the third generation, and it's not clear that generation has concern for Jewish causes."

Perhaps more important than its impact on the Bronfmans' finances, the sale of the company may give them additional time to devote to philanthropic causes, suggested Jeremy Burton, associate executive director of the Jewish Funders Network, of which both Charles and Edgar are members.

"If in fact they are no longer going to be in the day-to-day management of the business, we may see a period where they are giving even more of their time to their philanthropic passions and leadership," said Burton.

Edgar, 71, is the president of the World Jewish Congress, where he led the battle to reclaim dormant Holocaust-era Swiss bank accounts for survivors and their heirs. He is also chair of the board of governors of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life and most recently joined with two other philanthropists to form an organization promoting synagogue transformation and renewal.

Charles, 68, is chair of the newly formed federation umbrella organization, United Jewish Communities, and founded Birthright Israel together with hedge fund manager-turned-philanthropist Michael Steinhardt. Birthright this year began sending young

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak welcomes aid decision

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak welcomed a U.S. House subcommittee's decision not to cut aid to Israel to protest its planned sale of an advanced airborne warning system to China.

Barak added that he remained sensitive to U.S. concerns regarding the sale. U.S. officials have protested the planned sale, saying it could upset the strategic balance between China and Taiwan, and potentially endanger American interests.

Barak: Lebanon issue over soon

Lebanon's claims of Israeli border violations will soon be resolved, Prime Minister Ehud Barak said. He made the comment after holding talks about the situation in Lebanon with visiting U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Soldiers to get riot gear

Israel's army plans to issue riot-control gear to soldiers guarding Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

A military source confirmed reports that the army would soon distribute tear-gas canisters and rubber-coated metal bullets to troops protecting the 145 Jewish settlements.

Last week, Israel's army chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, warned that the army might deploy helicopters and tanks to quell possible clashes if Israeli and Palestinian negotiators fail to forge a final peace accord by a September deadline.

Intel chooses Ireland over Israel

Computer chip manufacturer Intel chose to build a \$2 billion plant in Ireland, rejecting other potential sites, including Kiryat Gat in Israel.

Israeli media said one of the factors in Intel's decision to reject the Israeli site was a recent tax reform recommendation that would reduce tax benefits to foreign investors.



Daily News Bulletin

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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.
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Jewish adults on free 10-day trips to Israel. So far 8,000 participants have taken advantage of the trips, and the program recently snagged more than \$200 million in commitments from additional philanthropists, the Israeli government and the UJC.

Charles was also one of the founders of the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, a foundation providing seed money to new Jewish day schools.

The third Bronfman generation, including Edgar Bronfman Jr., who ran Seagram for the past six years during which time he added Universal Studios and Geffen Records to the company's portfolio, has been far less visible in Jewish philanthropic circles than the older Bronfmans.

According to the Times, Edgar Jr. has also been criticized for uneven management of the company, with stock prices of Seagram doubling while other media companies' shares more than tripled.

Jack Wertheimer, who is provost of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary and has written on Jewish philanthropic trends, said the Bronfman brothers have been particularly notable in their Jewish giving because of their focus on "here-and-now projects — identifying what are some of the most pressing areas of Jewish need" as opposed to long-term endowments.

Wertheimer also said the two are distinctive in their "willingness to work in partnership with other large funders."

Sarna noted that the Bronfman brothers are also unique in that the two have both donated through foundation giving and have "elected to operate within existing institutions of the Jewish community, like the World Jewish Congress and United Jewish Communities."

"That's different from, say, a Leslie Wexner and others who've operated chiefly through their own foundations and exerted influence in that direction," he said, referring to the retail clothing magnate who has created a Jewish leadership training program and funded scholarships for graduate students in Jewish studies, rabbinical schools and schools of Jewish communal service.

Sam Bronfman, who died in 1971, was also known for his Jewish philanthropy. The child of Russian Jewish immigrants, the Bronfman patriarch was a longtime president of the Canadian Jewish Congress and active in the Jewish federation world, said his biographer, Michael Marrus. "Was he a learned or sophisticated Jewish leader? Absolutely not," said Marrus, dean of the University of Toronto's graduate school. "But he set new standards for Jewish philanthropy. The pressure to give until it hurts — that had Sam's stamp on it." □

Book: Canada has little to hide; critics say one Nazi was too many

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — Canada accepted thousands of ex-Nazis in the years following World War II only because the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe prevented it from screening out potential war criminals, according to a new book.

But Jewish groups and scholars say Howard Margolian's "Unauthorized Entry: The Truth about Nazi War Criminals in Canada, 1946-1956" whitewashes history.

"There was no official tolerance for war criminals," Margolian says, adding that Canada need not be ashamed of its record and that the admission of thousands of Nazis into Canada in the postwar era was "regrettable but unavoidable."

Margolian asserts that his book "debunks the myths and fallacies first set out by a royal commission and later repeated as mantra by war crimes advocacy groups."

According to the Montreal-born author, Canada admitted roughly 2,000 former Nazi war criminals into Canada after the war.

Numerous historians and Jewish communal officials, including Leo Adler, director of the Canadian branch of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, set the figure at about 4,000.

"The real scandal of the Nazi war-criminal issue is not so much that we let them in, but that for 50 years we refused to get them out," said historian Irving Abella, noting that Canada has extradited only one and deported only two of the thousands of Nazis who came there after 1945. □

JEWISH WORLD

Goussinsky takes to the airwaves

Callers to a talk show in Russia expressed mixed feelings about the recent arrest of a Jewish leader on charges of embezzlement.

One caller to Tuesday's show said Vladimir Goussinsky had been released after three days because of the power of the "Jewish lobby," according to The New York Times.

But another caller told Goussinsky, who appeared on the show broadcast live on his NTV network, "Don't give in, and keep up the struggle."

Award fuels German controversy

Controversy is brewing in Germany over an award given to a historian who argues that Hitler's anti-Semitism had a "rational core." Ernst Nolte, the historian given the Konrad Adenauer Prize earlier this month, said at the awards ceremony that anti-Semitism made sense because of Hitler's dislike of Bolshevism, which had wide Jewish support.

The prize, named after a postwar West German chancellor, is given to works that "contribute to a better future."

Charges made in Calif. race

A Republican congressman from California criticized his Democratic challenger in the upcoming election for attending a forum with a controversial Muslim leader.

Last year, the Muslim leader, Salam Al-Marayati, was prevented from serving on a national commission on terrorism after some Jewish groups objected to his comments on terrorism.

An adviser to the Jewish challenger, Adam Schiff, called the accusation preposterous.

Marayati said the congressman, Rep. James Rogan, had attended several events with him during the past five years.

Britain to waive fees for survivors

British banks agreed to waive transaction charges for Holocaust survivors who are living in Britain and receiving compensation from Germany.

Jewish groups said a few thousand people were likely to benefit from Tuesday's announcement.

Court rules for Auschwitz doctor

A French court dismissed criminal charges against a former German doctor at the Auschwitz death camp.

The court ruled that 89-year-old Hans Munch is too old to be tried for inciting racial hatred.

Several organizations representing the French Resistance and Holocaust survivors filed suit against Munch for an interview he gave last October in which, among other things, he praised the working conditions at Auschwitz.

Skeptical at first, Greek Jews agree to help search for Nazi loot

By Jean Cohen

ATHENS (JTA) — A man with a story dating back to the war years is prompting a search for buried treasure allegedly looted from Greek Jews by the Nazis.

The man, who wishes to remain anonymous, visited the offices of the Salonica Jewish community in 1999, and told them that he knew of an area off the Greek coast where an SS officer named Max Merten, one of the top Nazi officials in Greece during the war, had buried cash, jewelry, religious artifacts and other valuables before the mass deportation of Greek Jews in 1944.

The Jewish official, skeptical of the story, referred him to the leader of the Central Jewish Board of Greece, Moses Costantinis.

The man repeated the story to Costantinis, explaining that he knew Merten because the two were in jail together in 1958. Merten had been imprisoned after a Holocaust survivor identified him during one of his trips back to Greece to search for the treasure.

In March 1959, Merten was tried and sentenced to 25 years in prison, but then-Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis freed him after eight months and sent him back to Germany. At first, Costantinis didn't believe the man. Since the end of World War II, many rumors about hidden Jewish loot have surfaced in Greece, but nothing has ever been found. But the man persevered, and Costantinis eventually relented.

"Although the story sounded very strange and implausible, I thought that if there was one in a million chance to be true and I said no, all that money that belongs to the Greek Jewish community would never reach its rightful owners. I would have committed a moral crime," Costantinis said.

The man asked Costantinis for \$1.6 million to finance the operation, but the Jewish leader refused. In February, an agreement was reached: The man would finance the salvage operation and get exclusive film rights.

In accordance with Greek law, the government would receive 50 percent of the treasure, which some have estimated could be worth \$2.4 billion.

The Greek Jewish community, which helped obtain the necessary permits, and the man would each get 25 percent.

The operation is likely to begin in mid-July. □

Restoration work launched on two synagogues in Hungary

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Hungary is restoring two synagogues, both of which have stood empty or were used for other purposes for decades.

Plans call for the buildings to be used for general cultural purposes. The Jewish character of the buildings will be maintained as memorials to Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust.

The synagogue in the town of Kunszentmarton, south of Budapest, will be used as a cultural center. The baroque synagogue in Mad, in northeastern Hungary, is expected to serve as a memorial, museum and educational center.

The Kunszentmarton synagogue functioned as a house of worship until 1964, when Hungary's official Jewish community organization sold it. It was then used as a furniture warehouse and subsequently left vacant.

Restoration work was initiated by municipal authorities at the end of the 1990s. Exterior work is now nearing completion and funding is being sought for further work.

The synagogue of Mad, erected in about 1795, is one of the oldest synagogues still standing in Hungary. The synagogue has stood empty since the town's Jewish community was deported to Auschwitz in 1944. In recent months, the Hungarian government pledged money to begin a full restoration of the synagogue. □

(The World Monuments Fund — www.worldmonuments.org — is collecting donations for the restorations.)

Construction near Czech cemetery becomes the focus of new protests

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — Prague's Jewish community is bracing itself for a fresh wave of protests by international Jewish groups determined to halt construction above one of Europe's oldest Jewish burial sites.

In a sign of the wide international attention the issue is getting, hundreds of Jewish protesters demonstrated outside the Czech Consulate in New York on Monday to demand that the burial site not be desecrated. The protest came as Jewish leaders in the Czech capital prepared to sign a binding agreement with the owners of the site setting out the terms under which the construction work will proceed.

The Czech insurance company Ceska pojistovna owned the 750-year-old site on Vladislavova Street. Since the cemetery was discovered several years ago, it has become the focus of attention of Orthodox groups dedicated to preserving Jewish heritage.

The issue first hit the international stage last year, when misinformation was relayed over the Internet that the burial site was Prague's famous Old Cemetery, which lies half a mile away.

The issue boiled over late last year when the Czech Ministry of Culture backed a plan that involved lowering the burial site by several feet and building offices over it.

In March, however, following meetings with local and international Jewish representatives and the insurance company, the Czech government announced that construction could proceed as long as the remains of several hundred Jews were left.

The plan also called for the return of an estimated 160 skeletons previously removed from the area for anthropological research.

The decision was endorsed, albeit reluctantly, by the local Jewish community, which felt that the deal was the best possible offer.

A new construction agreement is expected to be signed in the next few days, according to Ceska pojistovna.

The new measures were expected to allow Jewish representatives to monitor work as it progresses.

Tempers have at times flared, as international groups have campaigned to take the matter out of the hands of the Prague community. Only last week, Czech police fined a dozen "English-speaking" Jewish protesters for entering the construction site and refusing to leave.

Matters were made worse by the fact that the remains, which were removed from the site last year for research purposes, have yet to be returned as promised.

Ceska pojistovna maintains that "technical problems" relating to the condition of the burial area explains the delay. Company officials added that they should be able to rebury the remains by September.

The issue has also seen clashes between leading Jewish figures in the Czech Republic and Britain.

Earlier this month, Rabbi Abraham Pinter of the London-based Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe claimed that for historical and political reasons the Prague Jewish community is "not in a position to withstand any degree of local pressure" to settle the issue quickly.

"They also do not have the religious knowledge required to decide complex religious questions of this nature," he stated in a press release.

His comments provoked a sharp response from Tomas Kraus, executive director of the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities.

"How did you come to that conclusion?" Kraus wrote to Pinter. "Do you have any experience with us in that sense?"

Kraus also expressed concern that recent demonstrations in Prague and other cities might tarnish the image of the Prague Jewish community.

He voiced appreciation for the international support of the Orthodox community in saving the cemetery, but added: "We feel, however, that further public actions" are "counter-productive and useless. So far, the general public has been on our side. We can easily lose that support."

Leading Prague Jews have attempted to downplay the extent to which relations with foreign Jewish groups have deteriorated.

The chairman of Prague's Jewish community, Jiri Danicek, told JTA: "If someone has an opinion, they have a right to express it. It is not necessary for everyone to feel thrilled by our decisions.

"We are trying to find an answer which will reflect the interests of everybody. Our goal is to ensure that all cultural and religious rules are kept wherever it is possible."

Few believe that the protests will stop once the new agreement is published. But several U.S. officials expressed hope that the friction of recent weeks between Prague and the wider Jewish community, which has seen both sides accuse the other of failing to communicate, will not develop into a more serious rift.

"First and foremost, this should not evolve into a battle of Jew versus Jew," said Rabbi Marc Schneier of the North American Boards of Rabbis, who was involved in the early stages of negotiations among the Czech state, the insurance company and local Jewish leaders.

"The Jewish community in Prague have been wonderful advocates of the Jewish people worldwide. Having lived through the Holocaust and Communism and rebuilt Jewish life in the Czech Republic, it behooves us to recognize their authority. The community has earned the right to be the guardians of the cemetery."

Michael Lewan, chairman of the Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, said he was pleased that the issue was reaching "some closure."

"This has been an unpleasant time for all parties concerned," he added. "I am particularly concerned for the Jewish community in Prague, who have found themselves in a difficult situation with others, particularly with members of the international Jewish community."

Lewan also said he was concerned with certain aspects of the agreement, notably the way it allows construction work underneath the grave site and the length of time it has taken to return remains to the site.

But, he added, "As things stand, it would ultimately be my intention to support the decision of the local Jewish community."

The U.S. Embassy in Prague, which has drawn praise from all parties for its role as a mediator throughout the affair, refused to comment on the protests that have dogged the issue over the past few months.

"Our position hasn't changed," said spokeswoman Victoria Middleton. "We welcomed the compromise agreement in March and hope for the most appropriate implementation of that." □