



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 78, No. 118

Friday, June 23, 2000

83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Shas withdraws resignation

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's government was saved from collapse when the fervently Orthodox Shas Party withdrew its resignation from the governing coalition.

While agreeing to remain in the government less than an hour before the resignation was to take effect, Shas officials made it clear that they would not automatically back Barak in the peace process.

J.J. Goldberg to edit Forward

The Forward newspaper has named J.J. Goldberg its new editor.

Goldberg is replacing Seth Lipsky, who was forced out last month after a long-standing ideological dispute with the paper's board.

Goldberg, a veteran journalist of Jewish affairs, is the author of "Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment."

Senate passes foreign aid bill

The U.S. Senate passed its annual foreign aid bill, which includes \$1.98 billion in military aid and \$840 million in economic aid to Israel.

The bill must now be approved by the House Appropriations Committee, where it may encounter strong opposition, as it did in a House subcommittee hearing earlier this week.

Some members of the House of Representatives oppose the aid package to Israel because of the Jewish state's planned sale of an advanced airborne radar system to China.

Report: Rabbi accused of abuse

A longtime youth group leader has been accused of sexually, physically and emotionally harassing and abusing scores of teens beginning in the early 1970s, according to the New York Jewish Week.

Many of the alleged victims of Rabbi Baruch Lanner, director of regions for the Orthodox movement's National Conference of Synagogue Youth, say their complaints to officials in the Orthodox Union were ignored.

Lanner refused to comment to inquiries from the Jewish Week.

An O.U. official said he had never heard specific allegations against Lanner, although he has heard rumors for many years.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Settlers grow more militant in 'battle' against land-for-peace

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After a period of relative quiet, settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are gearing up for what they describe as the "final battle for our home."

And as happened five years ago before the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the extremist fringe of the settler movement is making statements that can well be interpreted as threats on the premier's life.

The settler protests are growing as their fears increase that an agreement with the Palestinians is nearing — one that will require them to give up their homes when Israel relinquish additional land to the Palestinians and the final boundary lines are drawn.

Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami, who is leading the Israeli negotiating team, predicted this week that an agreement would be reached "within the next two weeks."

The settlers, for their part, do not want to wait until that happens.

In Jerusalem on Monday, thousands of Jewish settlers converged on the Knesset to protest any further territorial concessions and what they say are government plans to abandon settlements.

Many of the demonstrators were youths who were bused in after Jewish settlements declared a school strike as part of the protest.

"It's impossible for decisions of abandoning or uprooting families to be passed without an outcry," said Yehudit Tayar, a spokeswoman for the Yesha Council, which represents settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"It's only moral and right that our children, our elderly and us, come out" to protest.

Those opposed to a peace deal with the Palestinians this week distributed tens of thousands of CD-ROMs titled, "How Much Is Your Life Worth?"

The diskettes include graphics depicting the potential threat of a future Palestinian state to Israel's security, as well as accusations that Palestinians derive their propaganda from Nazi sources.

Militant rabbis are also weighing in.

As they did in 1995, they issued statements that giving up any portion of the Land of Israel is a betrayal of Jewish law.

After Palestinian violence erupted in the territories last month, settler groups set up a protest tent in front of Prime Minister Ehud Barak's residence in Jerusalem.

Since then, demonstrators have appeared in front of the premier's residence on a daily basis, and many seem to be in a competition for developing the most inflammatory rhetoric.

Benny Katzover, one of the more radical settler leaders, this week called Education Minister Yossi Sarid of the dovish Meretz Party "an executioner among executioners," because he is "ready to transfer tens of thousands of Jews to the enlightened regime of his excellency Yasser Arafat."

He was referring to the possibility that some West Bank settlements would become part of the self-rule areas.

Katzover also suggested that protesters not stick to the "law book" in their demonstrations.

Many recent statements recalled the atmosphere of incitement that preceded the Rabin assassination.

For example, Rabbi Daniel Shilo of Kedumim reiterated recently that "the transfer

MIDEAST FOCUS

Annan pledges to push Israel

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan pledged he would try to persuade Israel to accept Security Council resolutions calling on it to withdraw from all lands it has occupied since the 1967 Six-Day War.

Annan made the comment Thursday after meeting with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat in the West Bank town of Ramallah. Annan later traveled to Syria to discuss the peace process in the wake of Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon.

Rights group blasts Knesset vote

Israel would be legalizing a "war crime" if it enacts a proposed law to indefinitely jail two Muslim fundamentalist leaders from Lebanon, according to a New York-based human rights group.

Human Rights Watch said the planned legislation could also be used to imprison others for their political beliefs.

The group issued the comment after Israel's Knesset gave preliminary approval to a bill that would sanction the indefinite imprisonment of Sheik Abdel Karim Obeid and Mustafa Dirani.

Violence erupts in West Bank

Israeli soldiers fired rubber bullets to disperse Palestinians trying to tear down a fence at a Jewish settlement.

The army said it took the action to disperse the demonstrators after about 20 Palestinians went to the Bracha settlement near the West Bank city of Nablus to air their grievances about a land dispute.

NHL may pick Israeli

An immigrant to Israel from Kazakhstan could be the first Israeli ever picked in a National Hockey League draft.

Max Birbraer, whose family kept its Jewish identity secret when he was a child, is expected to be picked as high as the second round on Saturday.



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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of parts of Eretz Yisrael amounts to treason." Similarly, Shimon Riklin, leader of a group of young, militant settlers, recently warned: "If Barak evacuates settlements, he might be murdered."

Carmi Gillon, head of the Shin Bet domestic security service, recently warned against such statements, saying the possibility of their leading to violence should not be underestimated.

Gillon drew parallels to the 1982 activities in of the Jewish underground, which was uncovered just as it was about to blow up mosques on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Perhaps the biggest concern prompted by the heated rhetoric is that it will prompt another Yigal Amir, Rabin's assassin, to try to change the course of history.

Right-wing fanatics have been known to celebrate on Nov. 4, the anniversary of Rabin's murder, and threatening letters arrive regularly at the premier's office.

An anonymous letter that was recently sent to Moledet Knesset member Benny Elon, read, "To the best of my judgment, one should prepare a shelf plan to assassinate Ehud Barak. Just like the Oslo Accord process was slowed down after the annihilation of Yitzhak Rabin, one can prevent withdrawal in the Golan by annihilating Ehud Barak."

A recent poll commissioned by the Israeli daily Ma'ariv indicated that 46 percent of Israelis believe there is a real danger that another premier will be murdered.

Settler preparations for the "final battle" are strongest in the areas where radicalism is usually most pronounced — Hebron, Beit-El and Kedumim.

Significantly, anti-government activities are at a lower volume in areas like Gush Etzion and Ariel — areas that Israel has no intention of conceding.

Sources in the Shin Bet have stated time and again that ever since the murder of Rabin they have worked under the assumption that another political assassination is possible.

For their part, moderate settler leaders maintain that their camp will not be responsible for any violence. In their view, Barak is to be blamed for deliberately creating an atmosphere of civil unrest to generate public opinion against the settlers.

They add, however, that they will not add to this atmosphere.

Shlomo Filber, director general of the Yesha Council, said settlers should avoid illegal activities because this would only play into the hands of those wanting to make concessions to the Palestinians.

Similarly, Rabbi Zalman Melamed of Yesha's rabbinical council last week urged protesters not to use violence, either physical or verbal.

"Even if, God forbid, we will be shot at, we shall not return the fire. We will be ready to be hurt, but we shall not hurt." □

Goussinsky pressed to pay millions

MOSCOW (JTA) — A Russian Jewish mogul charged with embezzling \$10 million is being pressed by Russia's natural gas monopoly to repay a \$200 million debt.

Russian President Vladimir Putin recently said Gazprom should force Vladimir Goussinsky, the leader of the Russian Jewish Congress, to repay the loan made to his Media-Most company.

Some Jewish observers fear that repaying the debt could ruin Goussinsky and curb his support of Russian Jewish life. Even Goussinsky's critics agree that he made valuable contributions to the revival of Russian Jewish life by turning Jewish philanthropy into a respectable activity and demonstrating that the Jewish community in Russia can be self-supporting and financially independent.

Goussinsky, who has been under attack for several months, was jailed last week for three days.

Last month, Russia's government-owned television channel, ORT, accused Goussinsky of being controlled by the U.S. Congress and international Jewry.

ORT attacked Goussinsky for helping to bring Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to power because "it was in the interests of the American administration."

Earlier last month, the central offices of Media-Most in Moscow were searched and ransacked. □

JEWISH WORLD

NEWS ANALYSIS

Barak keeps coalition intact, but crisis leaves Israelis angry

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Ehud Barak managed to save his government, but he has been left bruised by his worst domestic crisis since taking office a year ago.

Though the fervently Orthodox Shas Party decided to remain in the government — which observers had predicted would happen — many Israelis were left angry at the political spectacle.

“With all the problems on the agenda, from water to peace agreements, the political establishment is acting as if it is entirely isolated from the feelings of the voters,” according to a commentary in Israel’s most widely read newspaper, *Yediot Achronot*.

Barak could face more problems from Shas as he tries to move ahead with Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

While the party agreed to remain in the government less than an hour before the resignation was to take effect Thursday, Shas officials made it clear that they would not automatically back Barak in the peace process.

The prime minister had been intent on keeping Shas, which holds 17 Knesset seats, in the coalition in order to ensure broad-based support for his peace policies.

Shas agreed to remain in the government after three ministers from the secular Meretz Party resigned a day earlier.

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

Meretz, which controls the Education Ministry, locked horns with Shas over funding for Shas’ financially troubled school network.

Before Meretz announced Wednesday that it would resign, voices from within Barak’s party admitted that if Shas resigned, the premier’s prospects for maintaining power would be bleak.

On Thursday, Barak issued an appeal for unity to meet the challenges facing the country.

“Friends, we cannot make peace with our neighbors without making peace first among ourselves,” Barak told members of his Labor Party. “We cannot move forward when every group is looking for ways to humiliate the other. We were elected by the people to lead, to give direction.”

In a speech strongly reminiscent of his election platform a year ago, the prime minister promised economic growth, lower tuition for college students and strong leadership.

“Israel wants change. It does not want to go back — and we will take her forward,” he said.

What remains to be seen is whether the governing coalition will be able to implement that change.

Since the government’s establishment, Shas and Meretz have been at odds, especially over Education Minister Yossi Sarid’s insistence that Shas’ religious school system accept government scrutiny as a condition for much-needed state funding.

Shas said it was not interested in kicking Meretz out of the government — and would not even oppose Sarid’s return to the ministry as long as responsibility for the Shas schools remains out of his hands.

Shas said it is prepared to be a full partner in the coalition if they agree on government funding of its school system.

If Shas agrees to back the premier on the peace process — and, based on comments from Shas officials, this now appears to be a big “if” — Barak will be able to pursue peace with broad legislative backing.

But the effort came at a cost to Barak: the loss of the Meretz, which the prime minister has called “our natural partner”; the estimated \$7 million he promised Shas for its school system; and a fair amount of criticism from the Israeli public over his handling of the crisis. □

Group applauds gene bill

The largest Jewish women’s organization in the United States is applauding legislators’ efforts to enact a law that would forbid discrimination in health insurance or employment based on genetic factors.

Leaders of Hadassah said their support for the bill is prompted by findings that some Ashkenazi Jewish women may be genetically predisposed to breast and ovarian cancer.

Tay-Sachs retest urged

Some 8,000 people who were screened for Tay-Sachs disease by several companies between 1992 and 1998 are being asked to contact the firms to determine if they need to be retested.

Three babies were born with the disease, which is more prevalent among Ashkenazi Jews than among the general population, after their parents were tested negative by Corning Clinical Laboratories, MetPath, MetWest or Quest Diagnostics.

Italian insurer to pay claims

Italy’s largest insurer agreed to pay \$150 million in Holocaust-era claims, according to the World Jewish Congress.

The group also said Assicurazioni Generali agreed to provide access to its archives and to publish the names of more than 20,000 Holocaust-era policies.

Shoah speaker shades truth

A Jewish group in Baltimore removed a Holocaust survivor from its list of speakers after experts said they found inaccuracies in her wartime accounts.

Deli Strummer, 78, has said she spent nine months in Auschwitz, but records suggest that if she was there, it was for no longer than eight days.

Strummer later acknowledged making “innocent errors,” but remained adamant about the truthfulness of her accounts.

Rabbi told to stay in jail

A New Jersey rabbi who could face the death penalty for allegedly contracting to murder his wife must remain in jail while awaiting his trial. A judge ruled that Rabbi Fred Neulander, charged in connection with the 1994 murder is more likely to flee now that a grand jury indicted him earlier this week.

Kohl remark sparks furor

A controversy erupted in Germany after former Chancellor Helmut Kohl compared his treatment by the governing party to the Nazi persecution of the Jews.

Other politicians lashed out at him after Kohl said that calls by a leading Social Democrat to boycott his fund-raising efforts resembled the Nazi-era boycott of Jewish shops.

Don't try to legislate against Holocaust denial, lawyers say

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — Passing a new law outlawing Holocaust denial is not the best way to combat the problem, says a panel of British lawyers.

The recommendation came about two months after British Holocaust denier David Irving lost a multimillion-dollar libel case against American historian Deborah Lipstadt in London.

Holocaust denial is “fanciful, inconsequential stuff,” said Anthony Julius, who chaired the panel of experts and led Lipstadt’s legal defense.

“The present risk that Holocaust deniers pose can best be dealt with by education,” he added.

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research delivered the report to British Home Secretary Jack Straw earlier this month — on the same day London’s Imperial War Museum opened a new permanent exhibition on the Holocaust.

Straw welcomed the report, calling it “very helpful” and promised to look carefully at its recommendations, which include a call for a “drive to raise public awareness of the Holocaust.”

The report, the result of 18 months of work, argues that outlawing Holocaust denial “could be seen as an illegitimate infringement on the right to freedom of expression.”

It also points to the problem of adequately defining Holocaust denial and observes that there is no evidence that legal prohibitions in countries that outlaw denial have had an impact on the problem.

“Notwithstanding the harms inflicted by hate speech, freedom of expression is a primary right in a democratic society and applies especially to speech that is offensive, disturbing or shocking,” the report says.

The report recognizes that Holocaust denial is “not offensive solely to Jews,” but “to all who are informed about the facts of the Holocaust,” and that “Holocaust denial has an implicit intent to engender hatred.”

But the authors of the report say Holocaust denial is not a significant problem in Britain, despite the publicity surrounding the Irving trial. On the contrary, “there may have been a slight decrease in the distribution of Holocaust-denial material in the United Kingdom in the 1990s,” according to the report.

British law prohibits inciting racial hatred, but “no one has been prosecuted specifically for producing or disseminating Holocaust-denial literature,” according to the report.

The report argues that “current legislation is inadequate for countering the harms caused by those who deny the Holocaust.”

But, the report continues, “The prosecution of cases under Holocaust-denial legislation would bring its own risks. The most obvious of these is probably the danger that cases would provide valuable publicity for the Holocaust deniers.”

The six lawyers who wrote the report solicited testimony from experts on Holocaust denial, freedom of speech and Jewish law, as well as from Holocaust survivors.

Holocaust denial is a crime in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain and Switzerland, as well as in Israel. □

(The report, Combating Holocaust Denial through Law in the United Kingdom, is available at http://www.jpr.org.uk/publications/reports/civil_society/No_3_2000/index.htm)

Are Iranian officials stalling in verdict of trial of ‘Iran 13’?

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — After a recent setback in the courtroom, Iranian judiciary officials now seem to be stalling for more time before rendering a verdict against the 13 Iranian Jews accused of spying for Israel, according to an American advocate.

On June 13, four of the Jews recanted their “confessions,” charging that officials had elicited the admissions through coercion. Moreover, one of the Muslims accused of aiding the Jews refused to corroborate the charge.

Last month, eight of the 13 Jews confessed, with a ninth claiming he gathered, but did not disseminate, information. It seems unlikely the other four will be granted an opportunity to recant their confessions. Now, the judge is reportedly conferring with a fellow judge on the admissibility of the original confessions.

However, it’s unclear whether the primary judge, who also acts as the prosecutor, is truly laboring over his verdict, or is carrying out a ruse to give the veneer of judicial consensus and that he has not judged alone, said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which has lobbied on behalf of the Jews.

“This is the game they play, to keep delaying it and delaying it,” said Hoenlein. “The reason this time may be because they are waiting for a political decision” on what verdict to render, “rather than a judicial decision.”

To keep up the pressure on Tehran, Hoenlein’s organization and the Simon Wiesenthal Center are circulating a petition in which they hope to collect 1 million signatures demanding the freedom of the “Iran 13.”

The petition is being circulated despite the recent warnings from Iranian judiciary spokesman Hussein Ali Amiri that, although the trial is free and fair, “continuation of voicing such uninformed and biased views of some officials, foreign media and Israeli government may carry as much weight as other evidence presented to the court.”

Regardless of the verdict, sometimes-noisy protests in the United States and international condemnation may generate some positive, albeit unintended, consequences within Iran.

In the Iranian parliament, known as the Majlis, reformists have introduced a number of proposals to amend the country’s press law. Among them is one that would allow foreign media and observers into court trials, according to Hoenlein, noting that the reformists did not specifically mention the trial of the Iranian Jews.

The policy of closed trials, say the legislators, has severely damaged the nation’s international image. □

Czech Jewish grave unveiled

PRAGUE (JTA) — The newly restored grave of a young Jew who was convicted of ritually murdering a Christian girl in a Czech village in 1899 was unveiled at a cemetery in Vienna.

Non-Jewish campaigners who believe Leopold Hilsner was falsely accused of the crime initiated the restoration. One of the campaigners said the initiative was designed to prompt Austria to rehabilitate Hilsner, who spent 19 years in prison before being pardoned by Austrian Emperor Charles I in 1918. □