



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israel urged to halt sale

Members of the U.S. House Appropriations Committee voted to urge Israel to cancel its planned sale of an airborne radar system to China. During discussions of the foreign aid bill, Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.) said he will no longer support aid to Israel if the sale proceeds.

Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.) said again he intends to bring an amendment to the bill that would cut \$250 million from early disbursement of Israel's foreign aid once the bill reaches the House floor.

### La. district won't air prayers

Christian prayers will no longer be broadcast over public school intercoms in a Louisiana district after a U.S. district court approved a settlement between the school board and two civil liberties groups.

The organizations that had sued the Ouachita Parish School Board, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana, called the action a victory for religious freedom.

### Albright explores 3-way summit

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat plans to tell visiting U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright that he can make no new concessions to Israel, according to an adviser.

Arafat has repeatedly said there is no point to a summit with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and President Clinton.

### Reform Jews pray at Wall

There were no protests or disturbances when a group of Reform Jews, led by a female cantor, prayed Tuesday at the Western Wall. [Page 1]

### O.U. to probe abuse complaints

The Orthodox Union is creating an independent commission to investigate how the organization handled complaints that a professional in its youth group had sexually harassed and molested teen-agers.

The commission is also charged with recommending safeguards to prevent future incidents. Rabbi Baruch Lanner resigned from the O.U. after the New York Jewish Week published an article in which numerous people said Lanner had harassed or molested them when they were teens.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Faint readings of pluralism detected in reaction to Israel synagogue arson

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Perhaps it was the image of classic anti-Semitism, conjured up by reports of flames raging through a synagogue here, that sparked some sympathetic Orthodox responses to the latest attack on liberal Judaism in Israel.

Or maybe it was just a realization that someone had taken things too far.

Whatever the reason, the arson at the Ya'ar Ramot Conservative congregation Saturday at least momentarily set off a subtle shift in tone from some players in the debate over religious pluralism in Israel.

There are still plenty of doubts as to whether Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau's strong condemnation will mark a turning point in relations between the warring religious streams in Israel. The Conservative and Reform movements, with strong support from many American Jews, have long been seeking official recognition in Israel for their institutions.

While it still remained unclear who set the fire, police hinted they suspect that fervently Orthodox Jews, motivated by ideology, were responsible. Conservative and Reform leaders are still waiting for stronger criticism from additional Orthodox political and religious leaders. But some of the liberal leaders admitted that the incident generated unprecedented sympathy from some Orthodox rabbis.

"We are encouraged by some responses," said Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of the Masorti, or Conservative, movement in Israel. "But we are still waiting for the Orthodox political and religious leadership to speak out. I believe that in the yeshiva grass roots there are people who are rethinking the situation and are embarrassed — but they are waiting for their leaders and rabbis to speak out."

Vandals hurled gasoline-soaked flaming rags into the synagogue Saturday night, setting ablaze sections of the main sanctuary and destroying several chairs and prayer books. Nobody was injured, and the synagogue's three Torah scrolls were unharmed.

Bandel said he was extremely moved by gestures that flowed in after news of the fire spread. He pointed out that one haredi, or fervently Orthodox, student from the Mir yeshiva called the Conservative movement anonymously to express his "shock and disgust" at the torching.

Several modern Orthodox Jews and rabbis attended a gathering of 200 people at the Ya'ar Ramot synagogue Monday, under the banner: "Let's Put Out the Fire."

However, many of them were long-standing supporters of pluralism, and liberal leaders are not letting down their guard. They are worried that the silence of haredi leaders will be seen as a tacit endorsement of the act, and that the public condemnations were full of ambiguities.

For example, Hamodia, a popular haredi newspaper, ran an editorial on the day after the torching titled, "Worthy of Condemnation. But ..."

It clearly condemned the arson in a "sweeping way, without reservations or conditions." But the editorial went on to strongly imply — as did other stories published in the haredi press — that the arson may have been carried out by Conservative sympathizers who wanted to "besmirch the religious public in Israel."

Furthermore, the Hamodia editorial argued that the public outcry and media spotlight on the torching contrasted with the silence that occurred when Orthodox institutions have been attacked. Bandel said some messages were problematic because they condemned the arson as if simply a criminal attack. "This is not just vandalism,"

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Iran excluded because of trial

Iran was excluded from a conference on democracy because of its trial of 13 Jews accused of spying for Israel, a source at the conference told *The New York Times*. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was among those attending the meeting, which brought together officials of some 100 nations in Warsaw.

### Cleric attacks film screening

The top Islamic cleric in Jerusalem lashed out at the Jewish Agency for Israel for projecting pro-Israeli films on the wall of the Al-Aksa Mosque. Ikrima Sabri, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, said the outdoor screening Monday night insulted Muslims.

The Jewish Agency was quoted by Reuters as saying it had not intended to offend anyone.

### Knesset rejects new elections

Israel's Knesset voted down a bill calling for early elections.

The fervently Orthodox Shas Party, which launched a coalition crisis when it voted against the government of Prime Minister Ehud Barak in a similar bill earlier this month, sided with the government this time.

### Palestinian militants rebuff offer

Officials from the Palestinian Authority said they urged Islamic militants to join them in trying to make Jerusalem the capital of a future Palestinian state.

But both Hamas and Islamic Jihad officials rejected the overture, the officials told Reuters, adding that the militants said the Palestinian Authority would first have to break off all contact with Israel.

### Syrian Parliament backs Bashar

Syria's Parliament unanimously backed Bashar Assad to succeed his father as the nation's president. He is expected to run unopposed when a countrywide election is held July 10.

said Bandel. "This is a hate crime." Yet the gist of the haredi message has been picked up in the Orthodox street.

Ya'akov, a 50-year-old haredi yeshiva student who declined to provide his last name, echoed the Hamodia editorial by saying that in the study halls of Orthodox seminaries nobody believed the fire had been set by an Orthodox person.

"Whoever did this should be locked up for life," he said. "Even if one religious punk did such a thing, that does not mean we should all be blamed."

Ya'akov spoke Tuesday as he left morning prayers at the Western Wall, while nearby, a gathering of several dozen Reform leaders from around the world congregated for morning prayers.

Cordoned off by a double ring of police barricades, Reform rabbis insisted they had come just to pray.

However, with nearly as many police standing by as worshipers, and a pack of journalists and photographers on hand as well, the rabbis knew there was more to the service than met the eye.

There have been frequent demonstrations by haredim against mixed-gender prayer services at the wall.

In May, the High Court of Justice recognized the right of women to hold prayer services at the wall.

The landmark ruling capped an 11-year legal battle by a women's group, Women of the Wall.

Unlike previous occasions, there were no protests or disturbances when the group of Reform Jews, led by a female cantor, prayed Tuesday at the Western Wall.

Referring to Rabbi Lau's condemnation, Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Reform movement's ARZA World Union, said it would take "more than one reaction" to create a real change in atmosphere between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox streams.

Later that day, as the Knesset convened to discuss scheduling an emergency meeting on the synagogue torching, any hopes that a new spirit of dialogue might emerge from the ashes of the synagogue fire were quickly dashed.

Though haredi politicians participated and issued general condemnations, the session quickly turned into a shouting match.

Legislator Meir Porush, of the haredi United Torah Judaism bloc, accused the Conservative movement of being responsible for the blaze.

This charge led Naomi Hazan of the secular Meretz Party to charge Porush with making "anti-Semitic statements" by blaming the victim for the crime.

Porush then called Hazan an anti-Semite.

The Knesset eventually decided to schedule a discussion on the torching — a move that will keep the issue on the agenda in the days to come.

Despite the nasty exchange in the Knesset, there were nonetheless behind-the-scenes signs of a subtle change in attitude.

In a telephone interview with JTA, legislator Yair Peretz, chairman of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, issued a strong condemnation and even a rare call for dialogue.

Although he at first worded his condemnation in general terms against "all acts of violence and hooliganism," when pressed for a more specific response, he added, "It is a doubly severe crime to desecrate a sanctuary of Israel."

While Peretz also said he could not believe an Orthodox Jew had committed the crime, he added that if indeed a haredi Jew was found guilty, "He should be taken out of klal Yisrael," or the Jewish community.

Still, there are serious reasons to doubt whether comments made this week will have any impact on the violent atmosphere. On Monday night, just two days after the arson attack, a "messianic synagogue" in downtown Jerusalem was vandalized. Its Torah scroll was stolen and bottles of gasoline were found at the site.

While Conservative leaders reject the theology of Jews who profess Christian beliefs, they said that Israel, as a democracy, must protect the rights of all people.

"I have no reason to think that the arson will change anything," said Rabbi Andrew Sacks, director of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly in Israel. "As long as there is no punishment meted out, then what incentive is there for an individual not to do this?"



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Goussinsky expects more woes

A Russian Jewish tycoon expects the Kremlin to take further steps against him and against other Russian Jews who criticize President Vladimir Putin.

Freed several days after he was jailed earlier this month, Vladimir Goussinsky made the prediction in a letter to the World Jewish Congress. Goussinsky owns Russia's only independent television station and is the leader of the Russian Jewish Congress.

### Papal plan criticized

Italian Jews criticized Pope John Paul II's plan to beatify Pope Pius IX later this year. At a symposium held in Rome, Jewish officials accused the 19th-century pope of arranging the baptism of Jewish children.

"It is a fact that the name of Pius IX is associated among Jews with the sad memory of Jewish children baptized against the will of their parents," Jewish community president Amos Luzzato said Tuesday.

### Report: Nazi doctor too ill for trial

A retired Austrian neurologist accused of Nazi war crimes is too ill to stand trial, according to a psychiatric report commissioned by the prosecution in Vienna. Heinrich Gross, 84, was charged last year with complicity in the murder of nine children at a Vienna clinic during World War II. In March, the judge stopped the trial just 20 minutes after it began when a psychiatrist testified that Gross is suffering from dementia.

### Recess in Lileikis case

A Lithuanian court called a five-day recess in a Nazi-era war crimes trial. Aleksandras Lileikis, 93, watched the trial last week from his sick bed via a video link, but the court adjourned when doctors said he was suffering from high blood pressure.

Lileikis is accused of handing over at least 75 Jews to Nazi death squads while he served with the Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian security police.

### Germany wants Net hate rules

There must be global rules against hate speech on the Internet and stronger self-regulation by Internet companies to combat racism and xenophobia, according to Germany's justice minister.

"What is forbidden offline must be forbidden online," Herta Daeubler-Gmelin told a conference in Berlin on hate speech on the Web.

### Israeli politician dies at 79

Avraham Shapira, a leading politician in Israel's fervently Orthodox community, died of complications from diabetes Monday at the age of 79. Shapira, who immigrated to Israel in 1949, became a prominent figure in the fervently Orthodox Agudat Yisrael Party and in 1981 was elected to the Knesset.

## Documents reveal Allies knew of Nazi plans for Jews of Rome

By Brian Seidman

NEW YORK (JTA) — World War II documents released this week indicate Britain and the United States knew ahead of time that Germany planned to exterminate Rome's Jews.

They also reveal candid conversations among German prisoners of war, including graphic descriptions of how Jews were executed during the war.

According to records, British intelligence knew in late 1943 of German plans to deport Roman Jews to the Auschwitz death camp in Poland, and shared this information with United States.

Neither country took steps to warn the Germans or inform the Italians.

"I understand that the British were trying to protect the secrecy of their code-breaking operations," said Richard Breitman, a professor of history at American University in Washington.

But Breitman said the British had other methods of leaking the information, and had used these methods in the past.

The Nazi War Criminal Records Interagency Working Group released 400,000 pages of documents to comply with the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act of 1998. The documents, culled from records of the Office of Strategic Services, a forerunner to the CIA, constitute the largest document release by the working group so far.

Among these documents are secret tape recordings by the British of frank conversations between captured German prisoners.

Often, German POWs gave "minimized" accounts of their actions during the Holocaust to Allied investigators to avoid prosecution, said Eli Rosenbaum, director of the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, which hunts Nazis, and a representative with the working group.

"How was it done?" asked one prisoner, concerning executions in a town in Latvia.

"[The Jews] faced the trench and then 20 Latvians came up behind and simply fired once through the back of their heads," answered the second prisoner.

"There was a sort of step in the trench, so that they stood rather lower than the Latvians, who stood up on the edge and simply shot them through the head, and they fell down forward into the trench. After that came 20 men," and then "someone gave the command and the 20 fell into the trench like ninepins."

Later, the second prisoner expressed his disgust at the executions. "We draw our drinking water from deep springs; we're getting nothing but corpse water there."

The records, said the historians, show a range of attitudes about the Holocaust among German soldiers.

"Anybody looking to find supporting evidence for the view that some German soldiers as well as the SS were involved in or knowledgeable about the Holocaust will find plenty of supporting evidence," Breitman said. "But they will also find evidence of people who were opposed to the Holocaust, and some who knew little about the Nazi atrocities in and outside of the extermination camps."

Tullia Zevi, former president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, said revelations like those contained in the documents may end up clarifying many "blurred" aspects of the war and attitudes to the Shoah.

"A lot is known about news that reached the Vatican and reached the Allies about the genocide," she said. "But what we know less is the reaction of the recipients. How was this news received? Was there even a blink of moral indignation? Did they intend to protest?"

The documents are now available to researchers at the National Archives in College Park, Md.

"If there is anyone left on this planet who harbors a suspicion that perhaps Holocaust survivors have exaggerated the grotesqueries inflicted by the Nazis on their victims, that suspicion will be put to rest by reading this transcript," said Rosenbaum at a news conference Monday announcing the release of the documents. □

(JTA correspondent Ruth Gruber in Rome contributed to this report.)

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Israel enters decisive moment in history with a house divided**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After years of talking about it and preparing for it, a divided and unprepared Israel this week faced what may at last be the decisive phase of the peace process.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright flew into the Middle East on Tuesday to determine whether the time is ripe for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to attend a Camp David-like summit with President Clinton.

But even before her arrival, key members of Ehud Barak's battered coalition said they would not attend such a meeting even if the premier asked them to join him.

Indeed, Interior Minister Natan Sharansky said Monday that "on the basis of the present, narrow government and on the basis of the present method of negotiating" with the Palestinians, he would pull out of the government the moment Barak decided to go to Washington.

On the other side of the negotiating table, Palestinian officials from Yasser Arafat on down hardened their positions on the eve of Albright's visit.

While they affirmed that the coming days and weeks are "critical" for the peace process, they accused Israel of inflexibility while they themselves insisted on recovering virtually all of the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem.

Hours before Albright arrived Tuesday, Arafat made it clear that he would make no new concessions in the talks aimed at reaching a final peace accord. The preceding day, he repeatedly said there is no point to holding the summit now.

There was even tougher rhetoric from Arafat on Sunday, when he warned of a possible new intifada, or Palestinian uprising, and asserted he would soon unilaterally declare an independent Palestinian state.

But there were also signs of cooperation before Albright's visit. There was a meeting Sunday night over dinner and drinks that brought Arafat and his top aides together with Barak's main negotiators, Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami and lawyer Gilad Sher.

Reinforcing the possibility that there is more cooperation than meets the eye, Ben-Ami spent time Monday briefing Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual leader of the Shas Party, on the state of the talks with the Palestinians.

For the most part, however, this was a week of discordance.

Sharansky was foremost among Barak's ministers sounding dissonant notes, but there were others.

Sharansky called over the weekend for a national unity government, with the opposition Likud joining the Labor-led coalition.

This government, he argues, enjoying wide popular support, would be able to set "red lines" beyond which Israel would not go in the final-status talks with the Palestinians.

Yitzhak Levy, the leader of the National Religious Party, another coalition partner, echoed Sharansky's resignation threat.

Along with other ministers, some from Barak's own party, Levy complained that Barak and his negotiators were keeping the Cabinet in the dark about the progress of the talks.

Foreign Minister David Levy was among the disgruntled Cabinet members. This week, he upbraided "certain ministers" for adopting negotiating positions that leave Israel, in his view, "denuded of all our assets."

Barak is trying to patch things up with Levy, to keep the NRP and Sharansky on board for as long as possible — and at the same time to pursue the negotiations with a new sense of urgency, as the sand in Clinton's White House hourglass inexorably runs out.

Key Cabinet doves, among them Yossi Beilin of Labor and Amnon Shahak of the Center Party, publicly urged Barak this week to press ahead toward the summit, despite the growing unrest within his government.

The gulf between rhetoric and reality is particularly wide now, as the leaders of the two sides strive to keep their final concessions under wraps pending the possible make-or-break summit.

For public consumption, Arafat speaks of the Palestinians' inalienable right of return to homes they left during the 1948 War of Independence and the incontrovertible status of eastern Jerusalem as the Palestinians' capital.

For public consumption, too, Barak's office downplays the validity of reports purporting to detail the state of the negotiations, and of the shape of the evolving permanent status agreement.

According to these reports:

- Barak is offering more than 90 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the Palestinians;

- He is proposing that Israel annex large Jewish settlement blocs, which would incorporate some 150,000 Jewish settlers in more than 100 settlements, while ceding 50 far-flung settlements whose 50,000 to 60,000 inhabitants would have to choose between returning to Israel and living under Palestinian rule;

- He is prepared to cede sovereignty over the Jordan Valley to the Palestinians, but with provisions for a small army presence at key points, to be beefed up instantly if any threat should arise from across the Jordan River;

- He is prepared to consider recognizing in principle the Palestinian right of return, but severely limiting it in practice;

- The Palestinian state, which Israel would recognize, would be a demilitarized state under the terms of the peace treaty.

- Barak is prepared to see a Palestinian flag flying over the Temple Mount and to recognize a Palestinian capital in "Al-Quds," the Arabic name for Jerusalem. Al-Quds would include such suburbs as Azariya and Abu Dis;

- The Palestinians would recognize western Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The parts of eastern Jerusalem annexed by Israel in 1967 would remain in dispute for the time being, the subject of further negotiations. This would not prevent the two sides, together with Clinton, from proclaiming the end of the century-long conflict between the Jews and the Palestinian Arabs.

Clinton aspires to be able to make such a declaration as his presidency nears its end.

Barak also has this aspiration, calculating that however perilous his present political circumstances, a historic declaration of this kind would garner sweeping support in a referendum.

Arafat, elderly and unwell, dearly wants to lead his people to independence and peace before passing on the mantle he has worn for more than three decades.

If Albright sees the prospects as fair, or even only moderate for having a meaningful summit, Clinton, with little to lose and much to gain, will issue the invitations. □