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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Verdict on 'Iran 13' blasted

The United States, Israel, Britain and France criticized Iran after 10 Iranian Jews were convicted of spying for Israel and sentenced to prison terms of four to 13 years. Iranian officials in turn attacked Western criticism of the verdicts, saying it was a violation of its national sovereignty.

The judge, who also acted as investigator, prosecutor and jury, acquitted three other Jews charged with espionage. Their defense lawyer is vowing to appeal. [Pages 1,3]

Barak: Summit uncertain

President Clinton has not yet decided whether to hold a summit with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak told his Cabinet. His comments came after he and Clinton spoke by telephone over the weekend to discuss the peace process.

Israel, China discuss radar sale

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak telephoned the president of China on Sunday, according to China's Xinhua news agency.

The report did not indicate whether Barak and Jiang Zemin discussed Israel's planned sale to Beijing of an advanced airborne warning system, which has drawn intense criticism from the United States.

An Israeli minister said Israel should cancel the sale. Haim Ramon, who often speaks for Barak, said Israel must decide in favor of relations with the United States rather than ties with China.

Meanwhile, the United States plans to ask Israel to cancel the sale to India of the same airborne warning system that the Jewish state has planned to sell to China, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported Sunday. India's foreign minister is visiting Israel, the highest-level official from that country ever to visit the Jewish state.

UJC helps torched synagogue

The umbrella organization for North American Jewish federations is donating \$20,000 to a Conservative synagogue in Jerusalem that was set afire on June 24.

Ya'ar Ramot, a congregation that many suspect was targeted by fervently Orthodox Jews, will receive funds from the United Jewish Communities to cover repairs and install a security system.

Guilty verdicts threaten all Iranian Jews, many warn

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — American Jewish politicians and activists say the conviction of 10 of 13 Iranian Jews accused of spying for Israel places Iranian Jewry under greater threat than at any other time in its 2,700-year history.

The worse-than-expected sentences also mean that Iran's hard-liners may succeed in rolling back the minor steps made by reformers in thawing relations with the West, experts say.

The 10 guilty verdicts handed down Saturday produced sentences ranging from four to 13 years in prison. Three Jews, including a 17-year-old student, were found innocent. Activists compared the outcome with the anti-Semitic blood libels of the 19th century and the Stalinist show trials of the 20th century.

The United States, Israel, Britain and France criticized Iran after the sentences were issued. President Clinton called on Iran to "overturn these unjust sentences."

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak told his Cabinet on Sunday that he would call on the international community to press Iran to free the 10.

For their part, Iranian officials attacked Western criticism of the verdicts, saying it was a violation of its national sovereignty. Some Iranian officials said the verdicts were too soft and might not deter others from spying against the Islamic Republic.

Anguished and irate, Jewish leaders vowed Sunday to redouble their efforts to secure the Jews' freedom. At the same time, they said they will pressure Washington and its European allies to make Iran "pay a price" for the sentencing of 10 men whom they continue to assert are guilty only of being Jews.

"In fact, it was Iran that was found guilty of gross violations of human rights and rejecting the rule of law," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, at a small street demonstration in New York on Sunday.

In his verdict, the judge reportedly noted that all 10 men were guilty of contact with Israel, devotion to the Jewish state and study of the Torah.

Several of the 10 were religious leaders in the southern city of Shiraz. The others were their adherents. The religious leaders received the harshest sentences.

The verdict could be appealed, said the chief lawyer for the 10, which could lead to reduced sentences or even clemency from Iran's religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. However, there were also reports the Jews may be punished with fines and lashes — a common penalty for guilt.

"This is an absolute disgrace and a shame," said U.S. Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.). "The U.S. Congress will not sit idly by. Iran must pay a price for this. Iran will pay a price for this."

Engel said he and others would sponsor a resolution denouncing Iran and the verdict. There is also talk of tightening sanctions against Iran that were recently eased, and blocking Iranian officials from visiting the West. Jewish leaders are also organizing additional, perhaps larger street protests in the United States.

How these verdicts and heightened international pressure will affect the approximately 25,000 Jews in Iran — already down from 100,000 at the time of the 1979 Islamic Revolution — remains to be seen.

No Iranian official was quoted as offering any reassuring words to the rest of the Jewish community.

That only adds to the "panic and fear" pervading the community, and any Iranian

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel says Lebanon in violation

Israel complained to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan that Lebanon has not complied with its duties under Security Council Resolution 425.

Israel charged that Lebanon has not dispatched army troops to the areas from which Israeli troops recently withdrew and that it has violated the border between the two nations.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army denied reports from news agencies that its soldiers fired shots into the air and drove across the Lebanese border this week.

A Lebanese newspaper photographer told Reuters that Israeli troops fired over his head, seized his camera and warned him not to return, but the army said that its soldiers only asked the man to stop taking pictures.

Arafat: I'll declare state this year

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat told the so-called mini-Parliament of the PLO that he intends to declare a state this year.

Arafat also told the Palestinian Central Council, which began a two-day session in the Gaza Strip on Sunday, that peace talks with Israel were in crisis.

Israel's rights record improves

Israel's human rights record improved during the past year, according to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.

The group cited several recent Supreme Court rulings.

Rabbis oppose women in combat

Some rabbis in Israel are reportedly mobilizing to prevent the integration of women into army combat positions.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that the rabbis believe the move could harm the sensibilities of religious male soldiers and perhaps raise questions about their continued military service.

Jew who is outwardly religious may be vulnerable to similar accusations and punishment, say Americans in touch with them.

Not surprisingly, Jewish emigration from Iran has leapt since the trial began in April, American Jewish and Israeli officials told JTA. It may rise further now that hopes for clemency for the 10 have been dashed.

If there is any positive to be drawn from the verdict, observers say, it's that the rallying of international public opinion prior to the verdict likely spared the Iranian Jews the death sentence. Since 1979, 17 other Iranian Jews accused of spying have been executed, most recently in 1997 and 1998.

The difference, say American Jewish advocates for the "Iran 13," is that the earlier arrests were virtually kept secret. The families reportedly heard about the executions only after the fact. There are crucial similarities, however.

Then, as now, the charges were trumped up, say observers, with the Jews used as pawns in the political battles of the Iranian leadership.

U.S. Jewish leaders said they became convinced of the Iran 13's innocence after conducting their own investigation and consulting with the CIA, FBI and the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence agency.

In piecing together the genesis of the case, American Jewish officials say it originated innocently enough as a conflict within Iranian Jewry, between the community leadership in Tehran — which is said to go to great lengths not to offend the Islamic authorities — and an increasingly active, fervently Orthodox faction in Shiraz.

It wasn't long before Iranian hard-liners seized on the dispute to undermine the Western outreach of their reformist rivals.

The Jews were arrested in January and March 1999. Their imprisonment, and the subsequent threats of death, was a calculated move to provoke the West, say observers.

Though Iran's Baha'i minority are far more persecuted, their plight generates little emotional response, nor do their brethren outside Iran approach the global influence of the Jewish Diaspora.

During the trial itself, the courtroom was closed to the public and foreign observers, and the judge also assumed the role of prosecutor. According to Western law, that would be considered a clear conflict of interest.

Hard evidence was not provided, say American observers, a violation of Iranian law. The verdicts were therefore based on the "confessions," say Iranian authorities, which raises more questions about their validity since four of the Jews recently recanted their statements in second appearances before the judge.

On Sunday, Iran's judiciary described the Jews' espionage activity as part of a 20-year conspiracy against the Islamic regime — yet was unable to provide any evidence to support its claims.

Moreover, if the Jews were indeed guilty, many questions remain unanswered: How would Jews who were mostly simple shopkeepers, clerks or teachers have had access to military sites and other sensitive information? Why would the Mossad, one of the most respected intelligence agencies in the world, hire Jews who live under a microscope? And why would the Mossad not have simply gotten such data from satellites?

Nevertheless, the verdict may have been a compromise of sorts.

To the Iranian public, judiciary officials can maintain that they did indeed root out a spy ring. To the outside world, they can point to the "leniency" and "fairness" they have demonstrated — by their standards — in that some Jews were acquitted and no one will be executed. But now the focus may turn to President Mohammed Khatami. As the leading reformer, Western governments have pinned their hopes on him.

Yet, his silence during the trial suggests many possibilities. Analysts say it may indicate how deeply anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist sentiment runs through Iranian society, and therefore how politically unpopular it would be to speak out on behalf of those accused of collaborating with the "Zionist regime." Moreover, it suggests either how impotent Khatami may be to challenge the fundamentalists' hold on power, or perhaps Khatami's own complicity, and that he is not nearly as "moderate" as advertised.

"Iran does not deserve to be treated as a moderate nation," U.S. Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) said at the New York demonstration Sunday. "This leopard has not changed its spots." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Gene law fails in Senate

A measure that included workplace and insurance protections against the misuse of genetic information failed in the Senate by a 58-40 vote, though senators promised to hold hearings on the issue.

Jewish groups say they fear genetic discrimination because of genetic mutations linked to breast, ovarian and colon cancers among Ashkenazi Jews.

Germany likely to OK slave fund

Both houses of the German Parliament are expected to vote later this week on legislation that would enable the country to begin making payments to Holocaust-era slave and forced laborers.

All six parties in the Parliament are expected to overwhelmingly approve the bill authorizing a \$5.2 billion compensation fund for the laborers.

Lithuanian found unfit for trial

A medical commission in Lithuania found that a 92-year-old suspected war criminal is mentally unfit to stand trial.

A court in the Baltic state said it would convene Sept. 11 to rule on how to proceed with the trial of Kazys Gimzauskas, accused of handing over Jews to Nazi death squads during World War II.

Reconstructionists want camps

The smallest and youngest stream of Judaism plans to open its own summer camp and launch its own youth group in the coming year.

Jewish Reconstructionist Federation officials say the most popular camp choices for youth in Reconstructionist-affiliated homes are currently the Conservative movement's Ramah camps and the labor Zionist Habonim-Dror camps, but "neither one really fits the mold for our kids."

Newspaper scam hits S.F.

Using the name "National Jewish News" and a letterhead bearing a small Jewish star overlaid with a menorah, a con artist is sending phony invoices to companies in San Francisco.

According to the Jewish Bulletin of Northern California, San Francisco-based pharmaceutical distributor McKesson HBOC received an invoice from this phony newspaper.

During the past five years, similar scams have been tried in Los Angeles and Canada.

Walter Matthau dies at 79

Actor Walter Matthau, who got his start doing bit parts in New York's Yiddish theater, died Saturday at 79. Matthau, who was known for playing wisecracking, slovenly characters, was born into poverty to immigrant parents on New York's Lower East Side.

Verdict evokes tears and prayers from L.A.'s Iranian Jewish community

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Throughout Los Angeles, Iranian Jews stood nervously by their phones and radios at 1 a.m. Saturday to hear the sentences imposed on the 13 Jews charged with spying for Israel.

"My wife has been crying ever since," said Cyrus Javaherian some 15 hours later. His wife, Nezrim, is the sister of Nasser Levi Haim, who was sentenced to 11 years in prison. "We never expected that Nasser would get such a long sentence," said Javaherian. "He worked for a power company and taught Torah. That's what he did all his life. He only did good."

Haim was one of 10 suspects who received sentences ranging from four to 13 years. Three of the suspects were acquitted.

Within a couple of hours of the verdict, Sam Kermanian, secretary-general of the Iranian American Jewish Federation, had put together a two-hour broadcast beamed via a Farsi-language station in Los Angeles to Iran and Iranian communities in the Diaspora. It took Pooya Dayanim, George Haroonian and Frank Nikbaht even less time to draft and distribute a statement by the Council of Iranian American Jewish Organizations pledging a relentless struggle to free the prisoners and safeguard the remaining Jews of Iran.

At 10 a.m., many members of the 35,000-strong Iranian Jewish community in Los Angeles, by now exceeding the 25,000 Jews left in Iran itself, assembled in their synagogues in Los Angeles, Santa Monica and the San Fernando Valley.

At the Eretz Cultural Center in Reseda, Calif., Rabbi Nooralah Yazdi led 350 worshipers in prayers, invoking God's blessing for the redemption of the prisoners. He then asked the congregation to stand for a minute's silence.

In more than a dozen conversations with Iranian Jews, anger at the harsh prison sentences imposed on 10 of the Iran 13 far outweighed any sense of relief that they had been spared death sentences.

A 21-year-old student at the University of California at Los Angeles, who asked that his name be withheld because his parents still live in Iran, grew up in Shiraz. "I know the 13 who were arrested," he said. "They were my teachers and the friends with whom I played soccer. I know they did nothing wrong."

Avi Davidi, a doctoral student in political science at the University of Southern California, judged the validity of the charges brought against the Iran 13 by his own experiences.

"Back in 1982, my family tried to leave Iran by crossing the border into Pakistan," he said. "Before we could make it, we were arrested. When the police found out that we were Jews, they immediately accused us of being Zionist spies. My father, mother, brother and myself had to spend some time in jail."

Dr. Pejman Salimpour said he was disappointed but not surprised by the verdicts. "Over several millennia in Iran, whenever there was a problem, the Jews were scapegoated." He expressed little faith that the sentences would be reduced on appeal. "The only chance would be a massive reaction by Iran's main trading partners, such as Germany, France and Japan," he said.

Some of those interviewed predicted that the verdicts would trigger a final exodus of Iranian Jews, whose number once stood at 100,000. Others were skeptical, noting that most Jews still in Iran had neither the money nor skills to make it in a new country.

Kermanian and Dayanim, who had both been involved in backroom contacts with Iranian authorities since the Iran 13 were jailed 18 months ago, said they were taken aback by the lengths of the sentences.

"We were given to understand that except for Dani Tefileen," who got 13 years, "all others would receive no more than two to three years," said Dayanim.

The long battle to save the Iran 13 has had at least one positive byproduct, he said.

"We never expected that the U.S. Jewish community and its major organizations would work so hard on this cause. We have formed many friendships, which will help to integrate the Iranian Jewish community into the general Jewish community." □

Pope who kidnapped and baptized boy is no saint, Jewish leaders say

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Jewish protests are mounting against Vatican plans to beatify the 19th-century pope infamous for sanctioning the forced baptism and kidnap of a 7-year-old Jewish boy.

Pope Pius IX pursued virulently anti-Semitic policies, is scheduled to be beatified Sept. 3. Beatification is the last step before sainthood.

Since the Vatican announced plans for his beatification last fall, Jewish leaders have increasingly warned that the decision could have serious repercussions on Catholic-Jewish relations.

The latest protest was raised last week in Rome, during a daylong seminar on Pius IX and the Jews sponsored by the Union of Italian Jewish Communities.

"The era in which Jews keep silent is over," said Amos Luzzatto, the president of the union.

"We don't want to get into the process of beatification — that is the exclusive competence of the church," he said. "But it must be made clear that this decision will have consequences on our relations with the Vatican. The openly anti-Judaic attitudes of that pope have left a wound that is still open in our community."

In particular, he said, the kidnapping of 7-year-old Edgardo Mortara in 1858 was "a wound in the body and spirit of Italian Jews which has not scarred over."

Edgardo was seized from his home in Bologna by papal guards acting on the pope's orders, after a servant told a priest that she secretly baptized the boy when he was a baby.

Bologna at that time was under papal jurisdiction. Edgardo was brought to Rome, where he was virtually adopted by Pius IX and brought up as a Catholic.

The incident sparked a public outcry and a wave of international protests. Emperors Franz Joseph of Austria and Napoleon III of France urged the pope to give up the child, but he remained adamant. Mortara eventually became a priest and died in 1940.

Elena Mortara, a descendant of Edgardo, said she and other family members felt "damaged" by the affair.

In a letter earlier this year to Archbishop Jose Saraiva Martins, chairman of the church's Congregation for the Causes of Saints, B'nai B'rith International President Richard Heideman said the Mortara case "demonstrated a fundamental disrespect and disdain for Jews, for Jewish feelings, and indeed for basic, God-given human rights."

He said he hoped that "in the interest of Catholic-Jewish reconciliation — a process in which both sides have invested much — the Mortara case will carry weight when the beatification decision is made."

The Mortara case is only one reason Jews look askance at Pius IX's planned beatification.

In an article in *Shalom*, the magazine of the Rome Jewish Community, author Daniele Scalise described Pius IX as "anti-Semitic and violent."

Scalise wrote, "His policy toward Roman Jews was that of trickery, arrogance and cruelty."

Pius was a complex figure. Deeply conservative, he rejected papal reconciliation with progress, liberalism and modern civilization and championed the concept of papal infallibility.

He reigned from 1846 to 1878 and was the last pope to wield temporal power.

He saw the vast papal states of central Italy wrested from papal control during Italy's unification process, which brought full equality to Jews in Italy.

Rome, the last stronghold of papal power, fell to Italian freedom fighters in 1870. □

Jewish leaders praise court ruling to deny law license to supremacist

By Sid Singer
Zipple.com

CHICAGO (JTA) — Jewish leaders here are praising the U.S. Supreme Court's refusal to hear an appeal of a decision denying a law license to a white supremacist leader linked to last summer's shooting rampage in the Midwest.

Matthew Hale, the leader of the World Church of the Creator, passed the Illinois state bar exam, but was refused a license because state officials said he lacked "good moral character."

"Anything that limits Matt Hale's ability to earn income and to be validated in a profession as important as the law is important," said Jay Tcath, director of the Jewish Community Relations Council in Chicago.

"At the same time, he'll use this setback" to rally his "troops, portraying himself yet again as a martyr, as a victim of the system, which he believes is controlled by Jews."

Hale said his license is being denied because of his beliefs. The Anti-Defamation League originally agreed with him, saying denying him a license would set a dangerous precedent, but changed its position following the shooting spree.

Hale's Web site maintains that the "World Church of the Creator neither condones violence or unlawful activities nor do we promote or incite them."

But Hale glorified last summer's violence, said Richard Hirschhaut, Chicago regional director of the ADL.

"He doesn't condemn it. He's led an effort to portray Benjamin Smith as a martyr. He sold T-shirts glorifying what Smith did," said Hirschhaut.

The World Church of the Creator, according to its Web site, promotes the religion of the white race. It's "part and parcel of [the] religion to hate the Jews, blacks and other colored people," according to the site; "hate for your enemies comes natural and is inevitable."

Last July, Benjamin Nathaniel Smith, a church member and apparent Hale protegee, went on a shooting rampage in Illinois and Indiana, killing two and injuring more than 10 others before taking his own life.

The Illinois State Bar Association, a private association, turned Hale down on the grounds of poor moral character.

Hale had taken his appeal to the Illinois State Supreme Court last November, but the court also refused to hear the case.

Shortly after the bar association's recommendation against Hale, Smith drove through a densely Jewish neighborhood in Chicago at the beginning of Shabbat during the July 4 weekend and began a two-day shooting spree.

Smith eventually turned his gun on himself when police caught up with him. □