



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Worldwide Iran protests planned

International protests demanding the release of 10 Iranian Jews convicted of spying for Israel are planned for Monday.

The demonstrations are scheduled to take place throughout major cities in North America, as well as in England, France, Israel, Russia and perhaps Germany, according to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

### China sale in jeopardy

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he does not want the planned sale to China of an advanced airborne radar system to become "an obstacle in our relations with the United States."

His comment came amid growing indications that the controversial deal will be called off.

### Mossad trial opens in Switzerland

The trial of an Israeli agent involved in a bungled Mossad operation opened Monday in Lausanne, Switzerland.

The agent, who is charged with espionage, was among five Mossad operatives who were caught red-handed in February 1998 while attempting to bug an apartment near the Swiss capital of Bern. [Page 3]

### Yeshiva bill passes first test

Israel's Knesset gave preliminary approval to a bill on drafting yeshiva students.

The bill would allow the students to be exempt from military service until age 23, when they would decide whether to continue their studies or join the military for a shortened tour of service.

### Tensions flare in Gaza

Israeli and Palestinian troops confronted one another over construction at a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian officials claimed that Jewish settlers in the Alei Sinai settlement expanded the perimeter fence. In response to the incident, Israel denied Palestinian trucks entry from Gaza into Israel.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Wednesday, July 5.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Strategists ponder whether actions against Iran will ultimately backfire

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — As the international community condemns the prison sentences given 10 Iranian Jews, a growing chorus of Jewish politicians and activists is demanding that Iran somehow be punished.

The devoutly religious Jews were convicted Saturday for allegedly spying for Israel. Their sentences ranged from four to 13 years in prison.

But the demands for punishment raise several troubling questions:

- Would the use of sanctions — and the suffering they would cause the Iranian people — actually deliver a victory to the Iranian hard-liners, who seemed to orchestrate the entire trial precisely to damage the mild detente developing between Iranian reformers and the West?

- Should American efforts to warm relations with strategically important Iran be derailed over the fate of 10 Iranian Jews?

- Would the further isolation of Iran only worsen the situation of the remaining 25,000 Jews in Iran — plus Iranian society in general?

"It's a very delicate balance, and not a black-and-white situation," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"But if there are no consequences for Iran, you're saying it's OK."

In the wake of Saturday's verdicts, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook has already postponed a planned trip to Iran.

Now, Israel and American Jewish groups are pressing Germany to cancel a visit by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, who was to arrive in Berlin next week.

Jewish lawmakers in Washington are also talking about a resolution that would criticize the verdict and urge Iran to free the Jewish prisoners. There have also been discussions about other steps that would curtail American trade with Iran.

But the potential unintended consequences of such steps should dominate any sanctions-related debate, say Iran-watchers and emigres in North America.

They suggest that in Iran, where fundamentalists still control the key levers of power — including the judiciary, military, police and, most importantly, the state-controlled television and radio — the hard-liners would frame any sanction, however small, in their typical "the-world-is-against-us" propaganda.

Sanctions could also weaken the position of Iranian reformers.

Though they recently won a majority in the Iranian legislature, the reformers are still embattled. In recent months, for example, 19 reformist newspapers have been shut down.

Sanctions could make their Western-friendly rhetoric more unpopular.

More relevant to American Jewry, blame could easily trickle down and exacerbate an already-tense climate for Iran's Jews.

The hard-liners "have used this trial to present these Jews as aggressors and spies, and that all Jews have hostile tendencies toward Iran," said Pedram Moallemian, a non-Jewish Iranian emigre who is director of a Toronto-based human rights group, the Canadian Iranian Center for Liberty and Equality.

"Some sort of backlash or sanction would prove their point that Iranian Jews are working with the enemy. And if there were, say, no milk for babies, Iranians looking to blame someone might find the easiest target to be the Jew on the street."

With that in mind, Jewish lobbyists know they must tread a fine line.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Report: PLO to back declaration

The PLO's mini-parliament will back Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's plan to declare a state this year, but will not set a date for the announcement, a PLO official told Reuters on Monday. The statement came as the Palestinian Central Council met in the Gaza Strip to discuss the issue.

### Abdullah: Bashar wants peace

Peace between Syria and Israel is possible, Jordan's King Abdullah said in an interview published in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot. Abdullah said Syrian leader Bashar Assad has a "determined desire" to promote the peace process.

Meanwhile, Syria's foreign minister asked the United Nations to become involved in efforts to revive Israeli-Syrian peace talks, diplomats said.

### Likud divided over Netanyahu

Israel's Likud Party is divided over whether to allow former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to return as head of the party.

Knesset member Michael Eitan called on Netanyahu to keep his promise to take a break from politics.

Meanwhile, prosecutors are expected to decide soon whether to bring criminal charges, including breach of trust and fraud, against Netanyahu.

### Israel, India sign pact

Israel and India agreed to form a commission to combat terrorism.

The agreement was signed at a meeting Sunday between Foreign Minister David Levy and his visiting Indian counterpart, Jaswant Singh.

### Israel names new Russian envoy

Israel's Foreign Ministry named Natan Miron, currently the Jewish state's ambassador to Austria, to serve as ambassador to Russia. The post has been unfilled for the past 11 months.



## Daily News Bulletin

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Major American Jewish Organizations, which has been at the forefront of efforts to free the Iranian Jewish suspects, says it boils down to "how do we maximize the gains and minimize the losses.

"Every decision you make, you have to think what are the ramifications and try to consider it as if you were in the shoes on the other side," Hoenlein said. "Sometimes, words have different meanings for them than they do for us."

The potential to further imperil Iranian Jewry, he said, "is a consideration we have to take into account. I'm not dismissing it. But you have to reward good behavior and punish bad behavior."

Regardless of the stance of American Jewry, the United States and the European Union sound as if they will try to balance their own reflex to react strongly to the verdict with their desire to engage Iran and draw it into the community of democratic, human rights-respecting nations. Since the 1997 election of Khatami, Washington has taken small, mostly symbolic steps toward easing sanctions, some of which have been in place since soon after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The United States wants improved relations with Iran in an effort to gain leverage with a state that has sponsored terrorism and undermined the Middle East peace process.

Of course, Iran also has enormous oil resources and is located near oil reserves in the Caucasus. American oil firms are reportedly champing at the bit to compete with the French companies that have already made inroads with Tehran. The trial of the Iranian Jews, however, has set back efforts to seek rapprochement with Tehran.

With American Jewish leaders and Israel publicizing the case, American officials were unable to simply ignore it.

President Clinton has been quoted as calling the case "an irritant" — which observers said reflected his displeasure at having his options vis-a-vis Iran hamstrung by the case.

In April, even as she announced the easing of import sanctions against Iranian luxury goods like caviar, pistachios and Persian carpets, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said the impending trial would be a "barometer for U.S.-Iranian relations."

Among the problems facing U.S. Jewish leaders is the question of how much of a difference Jewish lobbying will make on policy-makers in Washington and abroad.

Of late, the track record is not too good.

Clinton, in a June 22 letter to Hoenlein, assured him that "I will remain actively engaged in this matter, and will continue to make every effort on their behalf until we see justice done." Still, the U.S. easing of sanctions in April took place despite some Jewish opposition. In June, several European members of the World Bank approved — despite opposition from the United States — a \$231 million loan to Iran for water distribution projects.

Also in June, Albright announced that the United States would no longer brand certain regimes, including Iran, as "rogue states" but by a toned-down and euphemistic term — "countries of concern." Hoenlein said that with the verdict in, Jewish leaders will now begin "Phase Two" of the campaign on behalf of the Iranian prisoners.

While the pressure earlier was on the Iranian judiciary, now they'll cast the spotlight on Khatami, the reformist.

"We know about the internal opposition and the problems, but now is the time for Khatami to act and undo this injustice," Hoenlein said.

"We aren't looking to embarrass him, or to create circumstances that will make it even more difficult for him to make moves. But this is a test case for him. He has to show whether he really is interested in reform."

Yet this, too, may only backfire for the West and potentially undermine whatever reform efforts are underway, says Moallemian, the human rights activist.

"Even if there were support for such a thing, it would be used against the moderates to weaken them," he said. "The propaganda machine is not" in the reformers' "hands. Any expectations of them taking such action would be unrealistic to say the least."

Moallemian also cautioned against any sanctions. Instead, he said, frustration with Iran ought to be channeled into support for the opposition.

"I understand the need for immediate vengeance and to inflict pain is something we've all felt at times," Moallemian said.

"But sometimes, it's more important to sit back and reflect on the bigger picture of what may be the impact of any action we might take." □

## JEWISH WORLD

### British bomber sentenced to life

A British nail bomber who decorated his bedroom with Nazi paraphernalia was given six consecutive life sentences for murder. Last spring David Copeland planted three nail-filled bombs in largely gay, black and Bangladeshi areas of London.

His bombs wounded more than 100 and killed three, including a pregnant woman. Copeland, a 24-year-old engineer who considers Hitler a hero, told the court he wanted to start a "racial war."

### Memorial in Latvia defaced

Vandals painted swastikas on the main Jewish memorial in the Latvian capital of Riga. Monday's incident took place one day before the country commemorates Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

The monument stands at the site of a synagogue that the Nazis torched in 1941, burning alive dozens of Jews who had sought shelter inside.

### Nazi trial halted in Lithuania

A Lithuanian court indefinitely halted the country's first Nazi-era war crimes trial. The judge cited the poor health of 93-year-old Aleksandras Lileikis.

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

### Balkan tolerance urged

Some 40 European Muslim, Catholic and Jewish leaders called upon residents of the Balkans to build tolerant societies.

"We, who live in the Balkans, have to learn how to learn from the mistakes of the past," said Mustaf Ceric, the chief mufti of Bosnia Hercegovina. The meeting took place in Budapest.

### Lawmakers call for Kalejs action

Some Australian politicians are pressing the government to prevent the flight of a man alleged to have been a Nazi collaborator in Latvia.

The calls come amid reports that Latvian prosecutors will visit Moscow in an attempt to find additional evidence against Konrad Kalejs. A member of the Nazi-allied Arajs Kommando unit, Kalejs was ordered out of Britain last year.

### Tower of Yiddish art dies at 81

Joseph Mlotek, a Yiddish educator, folklorist and writer, died Sunday at the age of 81. A longtime director of the Workmen's Circle Yiddish school system, he published several collections of Yiddish songs.

Mlotek was born in Poland, where he was active in the Bund and other Jewish labor and socialist organizations. He spent World War II in Shanghai and moved to the United States in 1949.

## Swiss court tries Mossad agent for botched wiretapping scheme

By Fredy Rom

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (JTA) — Switzerland's highest court is forcing Israel's Mossad to relive one of its most embarrassing episodes.

On Monday, the Federal Court began trying an agent with Israel's foreign intelligence service for his role in a botched wiretap attempt.

The defendant gave the court a pseudonym, Isaac Bental, out of concerns for his safety.

Bental was one of five Mossad operatives caught red-handed in February 1998 while attempting to bug an apartment near the Swiss capital of Bern. The apartment belonged to a businessman with suspected links to the Islamic fundamentalist group Hezbollah.

Local police released the other four agents after briefly detaining them.

The operation came on the heels of another botched Mossad operation — an attempt to assassinate Hamas political leader Khaled Mashaal in Jordan in September 1997.

When the bugging attempt was made public, Israeli officials posted nearly \$1 million in bail for Bental and issued a public apology to Switzerland. Bental returned to Israel in April 1998 on condition he return for the trial.

Some observers say the affair came at a welcome time for the Swiss government, which was then coming under heavy pressure from Jewish groups for its financial dealings with Nazi Germany. In 1998, one Swiss diplomat said the Bern government "should cook the Mossad case at the highest possible level."

Such sentiments could explain why Switzerland's highest court is handling the case, which would normally fall within the purview of a regional court.

Bental, who has admitted to his role in the incident, faces charges that include espionage and carrying out illegal acts for a foreign state.

The espionage charge carries a jail sentence of up to four years.

Bental arrived in Switzerland on Monday. Israeli and Swiss lawyers, and representatives of the Israeli Embassy, accompanied him when he entered the court just minutes before the trial began.

While the court allowed Bental to use an assumed name, it did not make special provisions to prevent people from seeing his face. Indeed, the court allowed photographers and a television crew to take pictures of the agent.

Hans Wipraechtiger, the president of the Federal Court, told JTA, "It is very possible that the agent will be allowed to return to Israel at the end of the trial."

Legal experts have suggested that, given the diplomatic sensitivities of the case, Bental will get a one-year suspended sentence.

The trial was slated to last only several days. □

## South African Jews move in together

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — The three leading Jewish organizations in South Africa are reacting to declining demographics and financial strains by creating a joint umbrella group.

The decision signed last week by the leaders of the three major South African Jewish organizations — the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the South African Zionist Federation and the Israel United Appeal-United Communal Fund — comes as South Africa's Jewish community, which numbered about 130,000 at its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, now ranges between 80,000 and 90,000.

Beyachad's offices will be in a predominantly Jewish suburb, close to a number of synagogues and kosher shops.

Each organization will retain its autonomy, while Beyachad will control the administration, marketing and accounting departments.

The formal launch of Beyachad is scheduled for September. □

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Unlikely left-right consensus protests 'crime' on Temple Mount**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It was a rare phenomenon in Israeli public life.

Leading Israeli personalities, from writer Amos Oz on the left to former Defense Minister Moshe Arens on the right, were among those signing an ad published in local papers protesting the "intolerable archaeological crime" perpetrated by Muslim officials on Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

The ad, which was also signed by 75 legislators from across the political spectrum, attacked massive construction work conducted by the Wakf, or Islamic religious authority, aimed at expanding their places of worship on the Mount.

The petition urged Prime Minister Ehud Barak to take immediate action to stop the Wakf from continuing the work.

For his part, Barak refused to take such a step.

In recent months, thousands of tons of gravel were removed from the construction site, including a considerable number of archaeological artifacts, the ad charged. It also said the work was being conducted with no supervision from archaeologists.

"I signed the petition as an archaeologist, not as a politician," Professor Trude Dotan of the Hebrew University told JTA. "You don't dig in such a sensitive site with bulldozers."

The controversy erupted just as Israel was trying to persuade the Palestinian Authority to conclude a final peace agreement that would defer what is perhaps the most sensitive issue confronting them — Jerusalem — for future negotiations.

The ad was just the latest chapter in the ongoing controversy over Jerusalem and who would exert control over its very heart — the Temple Mount.

For the past two years, Islamic officials, supported by volunteers and money from Israeli Arabs, have been engaged in huge construction works on the Mount. Among their goals was the construction of a third mosque to join the Al-Aksa and Dome of the Rock mosques already at the site.

Israeli officials did not interfere.

A.B. Yehoshua, one of Israel's foremost writers, said he is not concerned that his having signed the newspaper ad may help right-wingers in their campaign against Israel's making any concessions regarding Jerusalem.

"Palestinians should be concerned not to harm archaeological assets no less than Jews," Yehoshua told JTA. "I followed my conscience. In my view, sovereignty in the Old City of Jerusalem should be multireligious, and the Palestinians should have their share. But one cannot always justify the Arabs."

Not all archaeologists agree that the digging has caused damage. Veteran archaeologist Meir Ben-Dov, a leading expert on digs around the Temple Mount, downplayed the importance of the artifacts that were removed from the site.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert is firmly on the other side of the debate. According to Olmert, a supply line of construction material should be cut off at the Lion's Gate, the eastern entrance point to the Old City. This, he reasons, would spare the need to enter the Temple Mount itself to put an end to the work.

"No one suggests that we storm into the Temple Mount

compound with bayonets," said Olmert, but "cautious, intelligent" action should be taken "in order for us to regain control of the Temple Mount."

Barak is in a bind. When the fate of a U.S.-hosted peace summit aimed at reaching a final Israeli-Palestinian peace deal is touch and go, a potential flare-up over Jerusalem is about the last thing he needs. Following high-level consultations last week, Barak gave Muslim officials approval to continue with tiling work on the mount, as long as no archaeological damage is done.

The prime minister rejected a recommendation by Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein and the Israel Antiquities Authority to halt or limit the work.

He also vetoed Olmert's recommendation to prevent the entry of heavy machinery, trucks and tractors to the Temple Mount. Just the same, Barak directed Israeli officials to maintain "reasonable supervision" of the traffic entering and leaving the compound.

"We will do everything to maintain the status quo, but not to change it — not in our favor and not in anyone else's favor," said Danny Yatom, Barak's senior security adviser.

The "status quo" principle won unexpected support last week, when Sephardi Chief Rabbi Elyahu Bakshi-Doron sent letters to Muslim and Christian clergymen, stating for the first time by Israel's highest rabbinical authority that the status quo on the Temple Mount should be preserved, because any change "could desecrate the sanctity of the site and lead to bloodshed."

The letters infuriated the extreme right.

"Even if you are a chief rabbi," said Itamar Ben-Gvir, a former activist in the now-banned Kach movement, "you cannot decide that the House of God will be under Palestinian administration. This is definitely crossing a red line. This is a black day."

Indeed, Barak is also concerned that right-wing extremists, agitated by the Wakf's construction work may try to break into the site or take other action to protest the damage they claim is being done to sacred Jewish antiquities at the site, where the First and Second Temples stood.

The Arab presence in Jerusalem dates back to 638, when a Muslim army conquered the city.

According to Muslim tradition, Omar Ibn al-Khattab, the second Khalif of Islam, accompanied by hundreds of Muslims, entered the Temple Mount, where, according to Moslem tradition, the Prophet Mohammad ascended to heaven.

Omar immediately ordered a major cleanup of the site and erected a huge timber mosque for 3,000 worshipers. This eventually became the Al-Aksa Mosque. Now, the Islamic authorities are determined not to allow any Israeli intervention.

In his Friday sermon, Sheik Akrameh Sabri, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, said Islamic officials would not ask permission from anyone to carry on with work on the site.

"We have never asked for permits, and we do not intend to do so today," said the mufti, who is the highest Islamic official in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, Sheik Najah Bakirat of the Islamic Movement, a leading Israeli Arab political party, insisted this week that the construction has caused no damage.

"I can assure you that during the construction work we have found no Jewish" artifacts, he said.

He also maintained that there was "no proof" that was the site of the Jewish temples. "I suggest that the Jews look for the Temple somewhere else," he said. □