



# Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israeli-Palestinian talks resume

Israel and the Palestinians resumed high-level peace talks at a secret location in Jerusalem.

Tuesday's talks were held as settlers attacked Palestinian farms and homes in the Gaza Strip for a second straight day. Israeli President Moshe Katsav called on the settlers, who were retaliating for the slaying Sunday of a fellow settler, to act with restraint and let Israeli security forces handle the situation.

### Israeli campaign ads start to air

Israeli media began broadcasting ads on Tuesday for the Feb. 6 prime ministerial election. Each candidate receives a total of 120 minutes of advertising time in preassigned slots, that will air until a day before the election.

Campaign ads for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak branded opposition leader Ariel Sharon a warmonger, challenging Sharon's self-portrayal.

For his part, Sharon's campaign accused Barak of breaking the promises he made before he was elected in 1999.

### Holocaust panel issues results

The United States still owes reparations to Holocaust victims, according to a report issued by a commission appointed by President Clinton.

"The interests of Holocaust victims suffered" after World War II, according to Edgar Bronfman, chairman of the Presidential Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States.

The commission released the results of its two-year study on Tuesday. [Page 4]

### Israel still eyes deal with China

Israel is trying to find a compromise that will enable it to sell an airborne radar system to Beijing, according to the director general of the Foreign Ministry.

When a solution is found, it will be presented to the United States, Alon Liel said Tuesday.

In July, Prime Minister Ehud Barak canceled the sale of the Phalcon system to China after coming under intense pressure from U.S. officials.

The officials had expressed concern that the system would enhance China's threatening position against Taiwan and could be used to track U.S. aircraft in case of a military conflict.

## Ashcroft says his religious beliefs won't affect attorney general duties

By Sharon Samber and Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In a confirmation hearing that focused attention on the role of religion in public life, Attorney General-nominee John Ashcroft said Tuesday he would resign if he faced an insoluble conflict between the law and his religious beliefs.

"I don't believe it is appropriate to have a test based on religion for a job," Ashcroft said in response to a question from Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah). "My faith heritage compels me to enforce the law and abide by the law."

Ashcroft, who came before the Senate Judiciary Committee for hearings on his nomination to President-elect George W. Bush's Cabinet, pledged to serve as the "attorney general of all the people."

Ashcroft was criticized this week for comments he made at a Christian fundamentalist university in 1999. On Tuesday, he told the Senate committee: "I well understand that the role of attorney general is to enforce the law as it is, not as I would have it."

The committee will vote on whether to recommend Ashcroft's nomination to the full Senate, which then makes the final determination.

Ashcroft's comments came after a series of partisan opening remarks, in which Republicans emphasized Ashcroft's career in Missouri politics and Democrats questioned his ability to separate his religious views from the duties of his prospective office.

"I have every confidence, based on his distinguished record, that as attorney general, he will vigorously work to enforce the law whether or not the law happens to be consistent with his personal views," said Hatch, the ranking Republican on the committee.

But Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) countered in his opening statement: "When you have been such a zealous and impassioned advocate for so long, how do you just turn it off?"

Ashcroft's religious views and conservative ideology concern some Jewish organizations, and his 1999 speech at Bob Jones University made groups uncomfortable about the ways his religious beliefs might affect policy.

"Because we have understood that our source is eternal, America has been different," Ashcroft said at the South Carolina school. "We have no king but Jesus.

"If America is to be great in the future, it will be if we understand that our source is not civic and temporal, but our source is godly and eternal," he said.

Those remarks caused some Jewish organizations to oppose the appointment of the former Missouri governor and state attorney general for the Justice Department's top spot.

The Anti-Defamation League called on Ashcroft to "assure the American people that his personal religious beliefs will not dictate how he will carry out his duties." Other organizations, including the National Council of Jewish Women and Jewish Women International, oppose Ashcroft for his stands on affirmative action, gun control, civil rights and abortion.

But Ashcroft has found some allies in the Jewish community. The Republican Jewish Coalition will air television ads this week highlighting Ashcroft's career in public service. Matt Brooks, RJC's executive director, said Ashcroft's critics are engaging in "character assassination."

Agudath Israel of America said Ashcroft, who has been criticized for his ties to the

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israel criticizes Mitchell panel

A team associated with the U.S.-led Mitchell Committee probing the outbreak of violence in the territories recently visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem without prior coordination with Israel, contrary to an agreement reached between the sides.

Israel's Foreign Ministry criticized the move, saying it could make the findings of the committee unacceptable to Israel. The team was escorted by the Palestinian Authority-appointed director of the Wakf, or Islamic religious trust.

### Israeli workers threaten strike

Israel's Histadrut labor federation is threatening to strike Wednesday unless the government meets its wage demands. Histadrut officials are threatening to shut down airports, ports, railways and other government-owned facilities.

### Seven Palestinian seek amnesty

Seven Palestinians have turned themselves in since the Palestinian Authority offered amnesty to collaborators with Israel, the Palestinian justice minister said Tuesday.

### Council members back Clinton

Six members of Jerusalem's City Council back President Clinton's proposal to make Jerusalem the capital of both Israel and a Palestinian state, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. The council members expressed their support for the plan in a letter to Clinton.

### Lebanese bounces into Israel

A Lebanese man told police he bounced his way over the border into Israel using a trampoline, according to Israeli media reports.

The man, who said he came seeking work, is cooperating with Israeli authorities. He was arrested in Netanya, a coastal city north of Tel Aviv.



## Daily News Bulletin

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Christian Right and his alleged lack of support for civil rights laws, respects all people regardless of race or religion. When Ashcroft refers to "Jesus," it's akin to a Jew using the word "God," explained Rabbi Avi Shafran, the fervently Orthodox group's director of public affairs.

People have long been aware of Ashcroft's beliefs, Shafran said, but no one should be disqualified for a job just because he's a religious Christian.

Some organizations are concerned that in running the Justice Department, Ashcroft would adhere more to his religious teachings than to the law. "In the United States, it is the Constitution that serves as the basis for laws and national life, not one faith tradition," Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, said in a statement.

Lynn called Ashcroft's Bob Jones speech "an insult to religious minorities."

Bush spokesman Ari Fleischer said both Ashcroft and vice-presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman have addressed the importance of faith in the lives of individual Americans.

Lieberman was criticized by organizations like the ADL for referring to God in campaign speeches when he was running for vice president last year.

Hatch said Tuesday that many left-wing groups have not been as supportive of Ashcroft's religious beliefs — he is a member of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God — as they were of Lieberman's. Both Hatch and Ashcroft noted their support for Lieberman's expressions of faith.

But there is a difference between Lieberman's comments and Ashcroft's, according to Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. Lieberman's comments on faith must be viewed in the context of his career, where he has practiced religious pluralism and promoted religious liberty, Pelavin said.

A year before his Bob Jones University address, Ashcroft distanced himself from the themes of the religious right in a speech to the Detroit Economic Club. "We must embrace the power of faith, but we must never confuse politics and piety," he said. "For me, may I say that it is against my religion to impose my religion."

Ashcroft is far outside the mainstream on abortion, gun control and civil rights, according to Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

Ashcroft is also known as an architect of charitable choice, which allows religious institutions to bid for government social service contracts. Many Jewish groups oppose charitable choice on the grounds of church-state separation. □

## Berlin rabbi who tries to help is assaulted

ROME (JTA) — Berlin Rabbi Walter Rothschild says he has no plans to leave Germany or change his routine following an anti-Semitic attack against him earlier this month.

The incident took place at about 10 p.m. on Jan. 10 as Rothschild, the British rabbi of a Reform congregation in Berlin, was returning from teaching a course. When three "Middle Eastern-looking" youths began hassling the driver of a subway train, Rothschild stepped in.

For his trouble, he was punched in the face, had his glasses broken and required stitches. "One of the lads asked if I was a Jew, and when I said I was, he responded, 'I hate all Jews.'"

One youth grabbed Rothschild's hat, while another punched him in the eye.

"On the one hand, it was clear that I was identified as a Jew, so" the incident "was anti-Semitic," Rothschild said. "On the other hand, I strongly suspect that at least two of the three youths were as shocked and scared as I was that the situation developed the way it did, so quickly.

"It wasn't 'racial' in the way that attacks on Chinese or Afghan or Ghanaian asylum seekers are."

The youths, he said, "were not skinheads, were not neo-Nazis." His attackers "were three teen-agers possibly slightly drunk, certainly out of bed too late at night, excitable — too much testosterone and not enough common sense."

Rothschild said police had apprehended the three youths. He also said he had met one of them and had accepted his apology. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Wolfowitz tapped at defense

Paul Wolfowitz was named deputy secretary of defense by President-elect George W. Bush.

Wolfowitz, a Jew, was undersecretary of defense in the administration of Bush's father and is currently dean of the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

Wolfowitz was an adviser to the Bush campaign and had been a leading candidate for secretary of defense.

### Donations sought after quake

Jewish groups established mailboxes to accept donations for victims of Saturday's earthquake in El Salvador. Donations can be made to: El Salvador Relief, c/o American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 711 Third Ave., New York, N.Y., 10017, or by visiting [www.jdc.org](http://www.jdc.org).

Or to: American Jewish World Service, 989 Sixth Ave., 10th Fl., New York, N.Y. 10018, or at [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org). Or to: B'nai B'rith Disaster Relief Fund, 1640 Rhode Island Ave., NW, Washington, D.C., 20036, or to [www.bnaibrith.org](http://www.bnaibrith.org).

### Mideast envoy to join think tank

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross will join a Washington think tank after President Clinton leaves office Jan. 20.

Ross' first major project at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy will be chronicling his experiences attempting to build Israeli-Palestinian peace during the past 15 years, dating back to his first appointment to a government post by President Reagan.

### Wallenberg probe to continue

Russia said it would continue to help Sweden research what happened to Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg.

Stockholm vowed to press on with its investigation even after a joint Swedish-Russian panel filed a report last Friday on the fate of Wallenberg, who saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust.

That report, submitted after a 10-year probe, left much of the mystery surrounding Wallenberg unsolved.

### No agreement in Austrian talks

Groups representing Holocaust victims failed to reach a deal with the Austrian government during the latest round of negotiations in Washington.

The U.S. point man for Holocaust negotiations, Stuart Eizenstat, is mediating the talks, which focus on compensating Jews whose property was confiscated in World War II.

## After a difficult, yearlong battle, Hadassah clears key hurdle at U.N.

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — It has been almost a decade since the United Nations rescinded its notorious "Zionism is Racism" resolution, but some Jewish groups are still fighting that lingering sentiment.

On Tuesday, a committee of the influential U.N. Economic and Social Council finally recommended that Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, be elevated to "consultative" status.

ECOSOC's final verdict, which is expected to be positive, is slated for June at its general meeting in Geneva.

Three times during the past year, several Arab countries and the Palestinian Authority had frustrated Hadassah's efforts to attain such status, attacking the 89-year-old humanitarian organization as inherently political due to the "Zionist" in its name.

The Palestinian representative and others delayed a vote by demanding that Hadassah answer such questions as whether its Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center in Jerusalem was actually a "settlement."

But in recent months, a number of high-profile political figures — including Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee — had joined several influential Jewish groups in pressuring ECOSOC to embrace Hadassah.

The ECOSOC committee approved Hadassah's application 9-5. The United States, Turkey, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Germany and Romania approved Hadassah's application. Sudan, Algeria, Cuba, Lebanon and Pakistan voted against, while three members abstained.

"Our record speaks for itself," Bonnie Lipton, Hadassah's national president, told JTA after the meeting.

"Although it was pointed out that the 'Zionism is Racism' resolution was rescinded, there was still a strong feeling that this is so, that we are a political organization, not a humanitarian organization. But we know we have a lot to offer to make the world a better place, and a healthier place," she said.

"The irony," Lipton said, "is that our hospital treats both Israelis and Palestinians, and after terrorist attacks, we treat perpetrators and victims alike."

With its enhanced status, Hadassah will be able to participate in international policy deliberations, conferences and campaigns, and will lend its expertise in medical research and treatment, refugee relief, immigrant absorption and the rescue of children from war-torn countries, said Amy Goldstein, Hadassah's director of Israel, Zionist and international affairs.

The committee decision was a "hard-fought battle," as "friends came out of the woodwork for us," Goldstein said.

She also noted the efforts of Israel's ambassador to the U.N., Yehuda Lancry; U.S. Reps. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) and Peter King (R-N.Y.); and Jewish groups like the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee.

For the past year, Goldstein said, Hadassah's national membership has felt as if it were "reliving the nightmare of the 'Zionism is Racism' resolution."

It just so happened that the biannual meeting of Hadassah's national board coincided with Tuesday's committee verdict.

When the ECOSOC verdict was announced to the 200-member board, it was greeted with "a resounding cheer," Goldstein said. □

## Jewish women documented in cyberspace

NEW YORK (JTA) — A new Internet archive allows people to search for documents related to the history of Jewish women.

The documents, located at [www.jwa.org/archive](http://www.jwa.org/archive), contain material on 250 noteworthy Jewish women. □

## U.S. tried to return Shoah assets, but made some errors, report says

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The U.S. government made some “extraordinary efforts” to return the property of Holocaust victims after World War II, but made mistakes that hurt restitution efforts, a presidential commission said Tuesday.

In a 250-page report, the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States noted that U.S. government officials did not distinguish between assets belonging to victims of Nazi persecution and those that did not, and that victims’ assets were returned to countries and organizations rather than to individuals.

As a result, some Holocaust victims or their heirs never received their assets.

“Whether it was the need to rebuild shattered European economies, restore democracy to Germany, wage the Cold War or pay Americans for damages suffered during the war, the interests of individual Holocaust victims suffered,” said Edgar Bronfman, the chair of the commission.

The commission did not have the power to hear individual claims, but it did make arrangements with various institutions — such as banks and museums — that may result in the return of some assets.

The commission, which reported its findings to President Clinton on Tuesday, recommended that a foundation continue the work of examining the fate of assets taken from victims of the Holocaust that came into the possession of the U.S. government.

Such an institution, funded by both federal and private money, would search for and identify assets and continue research, said Ken Klothen, the commission’s executive director.

Klothen acknowledged a number of errors that the U.S. government made, including inadvertently depositing victims’ assets into a U.S. war claims fund and trusting German and Austrian officials — some of whom took part in the Nazi regime — to be in charge of restitution efforts.

Some claimants failed to recover their assets because the bureaucratic procedures were too complicated or because they could not meet tight deadlines, the report said.

The report could answer charges by European nations that the United States should not be pressing other countries to act on restitution efforts before addressing its own responsibilities.

A number of European countries have started historical commissions and Holocaust education projects.

Jewish organizations were pleased with the report.

“Our government had the guts to say what happened and how we behaved,” said Roman Kent, chairman of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors.

Kent, a commission member, said there was no way the U.S. armed forces could have comprehended the magnitude of the Nazi plunder when they first encountered the looted goods at the end of the war. As for handing assets back to countries instead of individuals, Kent said the United States was naive to think that European governments would do the right thing.

With this report the United States shows that it can confront its past history, said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

“For survivors, moral restitution is important,” Steinberg said. “They want recognition of their losses and suffering.”

The commission researched three main areas: gold, art and cultural property, and other economic assets. It also reviewed research conducted by others on assets that have been in the possession of private organizations, individuals or government organizations.

The commission, established in 1998, included members of Congress, U.S. government officials, the chair of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and eight private U.S. citizens.

The commission was able to reach agreements with the museum community to make provenance information on artwork available to the public.

The commission also reached agreements with New York banks, which agreed to review their records to identify Holocaust-era assets and report their findings, and with the Library of Congress, which will identify books and other publications looted by the Nazis and make them accessible to scholars and online. □

## Neo-Nazi activities on the Net a focus of German-Czech seminar

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — The growth of neo-Nazi activities in Europe has come under the spotlight here.

German experts recently visited Prague for a seminar involving Czech government ministries and Jewish representatives.

Tomas Kraus, executive director of the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities, praised the seminar, “Against Right-Wing Extremism in Europe.”

“There are of course professional contacts between the German and Czech authorities who are dealing with this issue, but this was the first time that they were prepared to share information with non-governmental organizations,” he said.

Topics included how extremists use the Internet as a propaganda tool.

Czech media recently reported that Czech extremists were using U.S.-based servers to operate their Web sites after being shut down at home.

Kraus spoke of the importance of vigilance.

“We are not in the worst situation in this country,” he said. “The Czech Republic, with its rare incidents, is not in as bad a situation as Germany or some European countries where intolerance and attacks are more frequent. But we cannot underestimate the dangers.”

But during the past decade, Czech neo-Nazis have been responsible for several highly publicized murders of Roma, or Gypsies.

Last month’s event was organized by the Prague office of a German public affairs institute, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

The foundation’s director, Heidulf Schmidt, told JTA that he came up with the idea for the seminar after watching a German documentary last May that claimed German neo-Nazis had found new room for their activities in the Czech Republic.

“I was shocked when I saw that documentary, so I thought it would be good to arrange for people from different ministries in the Czech Republic to get together and talk about the problem of neo-Nazism here,” he said. □