



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 79, No. 13

Friday, January 19, 2001

84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

French banks to pay survivors

France and the United States agreed to settle claims against banks that froze Jewish accounts during the Nazi occupation.

Under the agreement reached Thursday, French banks will create two funds — one totaling \$22.5 million, the other an unlimited escrow account — to compensate claimants.

As a result, U.S. lawyers agreed to drop their lawsuits against any U.S. banks whose French branches froze wartime accounts.

Arafat backs marathon talks

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat said he is ready to open marathon peace talks with Israel. Arafat's comment Thursday came after he and Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami discussed the idea at a meeting a day earlier in Cairo.

After that meeting, Ben-Ami said he still hopes a peace deal can be forged before the Israeli election for prime minister on Feb. 6.

Meanwhile, most Israeli ministers reportedly also back the idea of marathon talks.

Sharon details peace plan

Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon agrees to the establishment of a Palestinian state, but on less land than the Palestinians want, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The newspaper on Thursday published details of a plan drawn up by Sharon, the front-runner to become Israel's next prime minister in Feb. 6 elections. Under the plan, he would seek to keep all Jewish settlements in place.

Under the plan, Jerusalem would remain under Israeli sovereignty. Palestinian officials immediately rejected every aspect of the plan.

Retrial call irks Hungary's Jews

Hungarian Jewish leaders protested a call by a far-right party to retry the case of the nation's executed wartime prime minister.

The leaders said they were "deeply shocked" after the Hungarian Justice and Life Party questioned the sentence imposed on Laszlo Bardossy.

Executed in 1946 for war crimes, Bardossy was partly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

A diverse crowd of mission-goers shows solidarity with Jewish state

By Julie Wiener

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Joshua Kaplan's family and friends thought he was crazy to go to Israel.

But Kaplan, 35, of Long Beach, Calif., felt he needed to "do something symbolic" on behalf of Israel.

Rather than join the Israeli army or immigrate to Israel, as previous generations of idealistic Zionists have done, Kaplan answered the call that Israel issued to American Jews following the outbreak of Palestinian violence in late September: He signed up for a five-day "solidarity" mission.

Sharing a bus with people from such places as Orange County, Calif., Seattle, Wash., and Tucson, Ariz., Kaplan was one of 900 American Jews visiting the Jewish state last week.

Since late November, Jewish federations and their umbrella group, the United Jewish Communities, have organized almost weekly missions. The missions seek to bolster Israel's tourism industry, show Israelis they are not alone and train American Jews to advocate for Israel, both among their acquaintances and to the media.

Last week saw the largest contingent to come on solidarity missions, almost half the total of those who have traveled to Israel since the missions began.

Participants hailed from more than 13 U.S. communities, with Boston — which offered \$500 tickets for people under 35 — boasting the largest representation.

Like Kaplan, most participants said they came out of a desire to do something on Israel's behalf. Many complained that the U.S. media are biased against Israel.

Some, like Ken Weinberg, executive director of Seattle's Jewish Family Service, said they wanted to demonstrate that Israel is as important as the domestic concerns of U.S. Jews.

"It's important to make a statement to my local Jewish community that when I'm out raising money for JFS, I'm not doing it at the expense of Israel," he said.

Others said they were curious to learn more about the political situation.

Some acknowledged that a large part of the draw was simply that they love visiting Israel, and with all-inclusive tickets generally under \$1,000 — because they are subsidized by the UJC — the trips were something of a bargain.

If last week's mission was representative, this wave of missions has attracted a fairly diverse group of Jews who are younger and less involved in their federations than typical participants.

"It's been a long time since I've seen this many Jews and not known many of them," Steven Edelstein, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Nashville & Middle Tennessee, said as he surveyed the crowd assembled at an air force base for a massive dinner.

"I think it means we got a good cross-section," Edelstein said. "For Israel to see this many people at one time is a tremendous shot in the arm."

Of course, the participants represent a tiny percentage of American Jews, who since the outbreak of violence have been at least as likely as Christians to cancel their travel plans to Israel.

However, UJC officials said they were pleased with turnout for the mission and described it as higher than anticipated.

From the first meal at an air force base between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, it was

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel may cut ties with panel

Israel is considering severing all ties with a U.S.-led committee probing the outbreak of violence in the territories, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. Israeli officials are angry that a team working for the Mitchell Committee visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem on Saturday without prior coordination with Israel, contrary to an agreement reached between the sides. The team was escorted by the Wakf, or Islamic religious trust.

Palestinians killed TV head

A Palestinian group claimed responsibility for killing the head of Palestinian Television. The Brigade of Al Aksa Martyrs said Thursday it killed Hisham Miki the previous day because Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat refused to remove him from his post despite allegations of corruption. Palestinian officials initially had blamed Israel for the slaying.

Militia leader calls for boycott

The leader of Palestinian militias in the West Bank called for a boycott of Israeli goods. "The Palestinians are the second largest export market for Israel after the United States," Marwan Barghouti said Thursday on Palestine Radio. Barghouti admitted that the boycott also would hurt the Palestinians because of the lower quality of Palestinian goods.

Israel reopens Gaza airport

Israel reopened the Palestinian international airport in the Gaza Strip. Israel has overall security responsibility at the airport, and closed it earlier this week after a Gaza settler was murdered.

Israeli police arrest informer

Israeli police arrested an Israeli accused of turning over Palestinian collaborators to the Palestinian Authority for \$1,250, according to the Jerusalem Post.

clear that last week's mission was not your typical sight-seeing trip.

Dinner was served buffet style in a large, unadorned hangar. Bathroom facilities were a long line of portable toilets.

Then the jet-lagged travelers, joined by hundreds of young Israeli soldiers, adjourned to another hangar for a rock concert.

There, beside an F-16 fighter plane, the crowd of American Jews and Israeli soldiers sang, danced and clambered onto the temporary stage with Shlomi Shabbat, an Israeli group that melds Western rock with Middle Eastern melodies.

The rest of the trip consisted of briefings with top Israeli government and military officials, as well as visits to Partnership 2000 regions.

Partnership 2000 is a program that links American federations with Israeli communities for shared projects and people-to-people exchanges.

"It's a blessing that you're coming here," said Mor Valik, 28, a member of Israel's air force who attended the Jan. 9 dinner and concert.

Bar Lev-Ran, 26, one of her colleagues and a fellow resident of Tel Aviv, agreed: It's "excellent that people from outside Israel come to Israel to show they identify with us. They support us and they know all the things that show on the news aren't right."

Asked whether a solidarity mission was merely a small gesture on the part of American Jews, Sharona Mazalian, an army spokeswoman at the dinner, said, "Maybe they just come for a few days and won't do anything else.

"But it will be in their thoughts, and their attitudes will be different. By talking with other people, they can change people's feelings about Israel."

For Michal Avrami, 19, a soldier from Netanya, the solidarity mission was a good excuse for getting the night off and attending a free concert.

But she said she also enjoyed the attention from American Jews.

"We don't get a lot of support, and when they come they give us a lot of support and say they're proud of us," she said.

If Joshua Kaplan's bus was representative of the larger group, the missions drew a politically diverse crew, not all of whom supported Israel's policies.

On the way to visit the group's Partnership 2000 city, Kiryat Malachi, members of Kaplan's bus argued heatedly.

When the group stopped to look at the Gaza-Israel border near the Erez Crossing, Rabbi Jonathan Lubarsky-Singer of Seattle railed bitterly about the presence of two orange-roofed Jewish settlements — Aleh Sinai and Nitzanit — just over the Gaza line, calling them "an unnecessary, in-your-face" provocation to Palestinians.

Back on the bus, as the group passed a joint Israeli-Palestinian industrial center, another mission participant, Samuel Wechsler of Los Angeles, yelled out, "There is no peace process! All it is is a giveaway process!"

As the scenery turned to orange orchards, a moshav and then the sleepy town of Kiryat Malachi, Wechsler and Joseph Voss, of Seattle, argued about the merits of the peace process. Once largely a Sephardi development town, Kiryat Malachi now has a large number of Ethiopian immigrants and a sizeable Orthodox, mainly Chabad Lubavitch, community.

It is an economic mix, with shabby low-income housing projects blocks away from modern, orange-roofed villas.

As the group shuffled from lunch to the local community center to various social service agencies, other participants were less certain where they stood politically and said they hoped the trip would give them a better understanding of the issues.

The trip, said Michele Walot, has "been an important influence, but I still don't think everything Israel does is right."

Walot, of Orange County, Calif., was walking with the group to the Kiryat Malachi community center, where they were scheduled to pack goody bags for local soldiers and chat with local teen-agers.

The teens enthusiastically welcomed the visitors.

"Israel is in a hard situation, and it makes us relaxed and happy to know we're not alone," said Vicky Halfon, 15.

Orit Yasu, 17, whose parents emigrated from Ethiopia, said the mission "cheers our soul."

"We are in a very bad situation, so a little joy helps," she added. □



Daily News Bulletin

Shoshana S. Cardin, *President*

Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*

Lisa Hostein, *Editor*

Michael S. Arnold, *Managing Editor*

Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

JEWISH WORLD

Russia to give Wallenberg papers

Russia is slated to give Sweden documents on Friday concerning Moscow's recent clearing of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg on spy charges.

The move comes after a joint Russian-Swedish panel was unable to agree on the fate of Wallenberg, who saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews during World War II and then disappeared after he was arrested by Soviet agents in 1945.

In a related development, a monument to Wallenberg was unveiled in the courtyard of a Moscow library.

Rabbi: No Jewish quake victims

No member of the Jewish community in El Salvador was hurt in Saturday's earthquake, according to a local rabbi.

"The earthquake found us in the synagogue, with all the children in activity," Rabbi Gustavo Kraselnik wrote the World Jewish Congress. "But we were lucky to be able to get to the garden quickly. Thanks to all those who sent us evidence of affection and solidarity, which help us to overcome these difficult moments."

France plans Brunner trial

An accused Nazi criminal will be tried in absentia in a Paris court for allegedly deporting hundreds of Jewish children to Auschwitz. The trial of Alois Brunner will begin March 2, judicial officials said Thursday. Brunner is believed to have lived for years in Syria, but his current whereabouts are unknown, and it is unclear whether he is even still alive.

Change suggested in organ giving

The office of Britain's Orthodox chief rabbi suggested a change to the way organ donations are approved.

At a special conference on organ removal, an adviser to Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks proposed that authorization forms recommend that relatives of people who have died consult a religious adviser before making a decision about donating their organs. Many Orthodox authorities object to organ donation and autopsies on religious grounds.

JDC's Evelyn Peters dies at 77

Evelyn Peters, who worked to build Jewish life on three continents, died Wednesday at the age of 77. In 1956, Peters began working for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Iran.

Peters, who was nicknamed the "Lady of the Joint," later worked in Germany and Morocco before she was appointed JDC country director for Tunisia in 1974. She later headed the organization's operations in Algeria and India.

Austrian survivors' settlement means money, pensions, doctors

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — After last-minute negotiating, Austria, the United States and Jewish groups signed an agreement under which Austria will pay millions of dollars to Holocaust survivors.

Until the 11th hour it looked as if the deal might collapse, as Austrian officials and the country's Jewish community couldn't quite reach agreement on terms.

But late Wednesday, Austria agreed to pay \$210 million, plus approximately \$20 million in interest, to cover victims' property claims and unpaid insurance policies. The government also will pay an estimated \$100 million in social welfare benefits to Austrian Jews.

The talks were prodded along by Jewish groups' insistence that a settlement must be made quickly because of the survivors' advanced age.

Another motivating factor was concern about what might happen under a new U.S. administration that has not identified Holocaust restitution as a priority, and which will lose the stewardship of Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, President Clinton's point man on Holocaust issues.

There is no way of knowing how the incoming Bush administration will deal with restitution efforts, said Israel Singer, who was involved in the negotiations.

Singer, the secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress, said it will take months just to coordinate efforts with the new administration.

The social welfare package, which includes pensions and nursing care, was a major concern for Jewish groups. The agreement will give lifetime pensions to all Austrian Jewish survivors, including about 10,000 living in the United States.

"It's the best that can be done under the circumstances," said Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Claims Conference, which represents world Jewry in negotiations for compensation and restitution.

The Claims Conference won a streamlined process for dispensing a \$150 million payment finalized in October, which covers household property and apartment and small business leases. That accord gives \$7,000 to each of an estimated 21,000 Jews.

After negotiations in December, Austria had promised a \$150 million settlement for the insurance and property claims, but Jewish groups called that inadequate. Wednesday's deal ups the ante significantly.

In May, months after a similar settlement by Germany, Austria agreed to pay \$395 million to roughly 150,000 former slave and forced laborers. Wednesday's agreement, which also includes millions for a land deal with the Hakoah Sports Club, brings to \$900 million the total Austria has promised in the last year for its role in Holocaust-era dealings.

The \$210 million will go into the General Settlement Fund, with money from both the public and private sectors, and acknowledges the importance of paying compensation immediately. An arbitration panel will be established to review claims of government property that once was owned by the Austrian Jewish community or by individuals.

The comprehensive agreement is intended to bring "legal peace" to Austria, which has been under pressure by the United States to resolve the restitution issues. But the processing of claims will be very complex, said Hannah Lessing, a Jewish official at Austria's National Fund for Victims of National Socialism, the body disbursing the claims payment.

In the joint statement issued by all the parties, Austria admitted its "moral responsibility" and said it is "facing up to the light and dark sides of its past and to the deeds of all Austrians, good and evil."

"No amount of money can undo the tremendous suffering and losses that have been inflicted on our Jewish citizens," said Austrian Ambassador Ernst Sucharipa at the signing ceremony.

That acknowledgment, said Attorney E. Randol Schoenberg, who represents over 100 clients seeking restitution, "means more to them than the money." □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israelis will miss Clinton, but may not notice changes*By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The only T-shirts on the streets of Tel Aviv that provoke smiles from almost everyone these days say “Clinton Lashilton” — Hebrew for “Clinton as our leader.”

The facile Hebrew rhyme — appearing above a smiling representation of the U.S. president, who is counting his final hours in the White House — elicits reactions far different from the ennui or downright disillusionment that so many Israelis feel toward the two candidates running for prime minister in the Feb. 6 election.

An opinion poll cited by the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* suggested Clinton would win 28 percent of the votes if he could run next month.

While everyone knows that he can't, there is nonetheless the widespread feeling that if the outgoing U.S. president could run, he would probably trounce incumbent Ehud Barak and challenger Ariel Sharon.

Aside from elements on the far right — who feel Clinton would blithely sacrifice vital Israeli interests if it advanced his legacy as a peacemaker — Clinton is widely seen here as the president best disposed toward the Jewish state, with the possible exception of President Truman.

Regardless of reservations about his recent peace plan, Israelis of most political stripes detect in Clinton a genuine and deep-held regard for Jews individually and for the Jewish people as a whole.

Perhaps, as a seasoned observer once said of former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson — another leader with a magic political touch who rose from humble origins — “He admires self-made people like himself, and likes to have them around him.”

Indeed, the proliferation of Jews in the Clinton administration — from the Cabinet through the Middle East peace team — has been so pronounced as to be almost an embarrassment for some Israelis.

At any rate, many Israelis, like the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, took to Clinton early on.

His behavior after the Rabin assassination, his heartfelt grief so simply expressed, elevated him in the national perception to “one of us.”

When he said “Shalom, chaver” at Rabin's funeral, it may have been merely an aide's flash of speechwriting genius. Nonetheless, there was no mistaking the sincerity of the president's mourning.

Now, as President-elect George W. Bush prepares to enter the White House — and perhaps because of the difficult period Israel is now going through — some Israelis worry that the change in American leadership will be traumatic for Israel.

As columnist Yoel Marcus wrote in the daily *Ha'aretz* this week, “In four more days, we will bid farewell to the friendliest, most involved, most caring, most well-meaning U.S. president Israel has ever had.

“But it is very doubtful that U.S. President-elect George W. Bush will continue where President Clinton left off. Bush doesn't have what Clinton had — the ‘warm feeling’ for Israel. His approach to the Jews is less enthusiastic, and the proof is that there

is not one Jew among the major appointments in his administration, with the exception of his spokesman, and the husband of the secretary of labor, who was forced to resign because she employed a woman who did not have immigration papers.

“Vice President-elect Richard Cheney and Bush's Secretary of State Colin Powell are not Jew-haters,” Marcus wrote, “but in their approach to our region they are guided by their heads rather than their hearts.”

Marcus and other Israeli observers have also pointed out that Bush and his team have close links to the U.S. oil industry, traditionally a hotbed of financial interests in, and sympathy for, the Arab world.

Some people here also recall the unsavory public fight that erupted between Bush's father and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir over Israel's request in the early 1990s for American loan guarantees to help pay for immigrant absorption.

The elder Bush and his first secretary of state, James Baker, made the granting of these guarantees contingent on a change in the Likud government's settlement policy.

Some Israeli political commentators believe Bush's actions helped tilt the 1992 election against the Likud and paved the way for Rabin's ascent to power.

Even some Israelis who were happy about that change in government were uncomfortable about the sparks flying between Jerusalem and Washington. As the younger Bush comes to power, other Israelis are less apprehensive.

They take a longer-term view of the unique American-Israeli relationship. Above all, they see it as characterized by steadiness and consistency, and they tend to discount both the fears expressed about new American administrations and the nostalgia expressed for outgoing ones.

The recent death of former U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers illustrates the cogency of this approach.

Rogers, who was secretary of state during President Nixon's first term, articulated Washington's early policy on the Israeli-Arab conflict just after the 1967 Six-Day War.

In what came to be known as the Rogers Plan, the United States essentially decided that Israel would have to cede the territory conquered in 1967 in return for a negotiated peace treaty.

This principle also applied to Jerusalem, hence the refusal of all subsequent U.S. administrations to recognize Israel's annexation of eastern Jerusalem after the 1967 war.

When that policy is compared to the peace plan that Clinton recently submitted to Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the similarities are arresting, the differences hard to detect.

Clinton's proposal to divide Jerusalem along the lines of its present demographic divisions matches U.S. policy followed by both Democratic and Republican administrations over the years.

Another example also shows the futility of pigeonholing U.S. administrations even before they are seated.

Veteran observers will recall the trepidation that engulfed the Israeli political community when President Reagan first named George Shultz as his secretary of state.

As a former president of Bechtel, the giant multinational with strong interests in Saudi Arabia, Shultz was described here as irredeemably pro-Arab and anti-Israel.

When he left office, not a single Israeli public figure refrained from praising him for his fairness, straightforwardness and sagacity. □