



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 79, No. 49

Tuesday, March 13, 2001

84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel eases some blockades

Israel said it would ease its blockades on four West Bank cities. But while relaxing conditions in Tulkarm, Kalkilya, Bethlehem and Hebron, Israel said its blockade of Ramallah would continue in order to track down Palestinian militants planning to carry out bomb attacks in Jerusalem.

Some 1,500 Palestinians joined a protest Monday aimed at breaking the Ramallah blockade, and one protester was killed during subsequent clashes with Israeli troops.

Israel has said it imposed the blockades for security reasons, but the Palestinians complain the West Bank cities have become detention camps.

Sharon: I'll seek Pollard's release

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told CNN he will ask President Bush to release convicted spy Jonathan Pollard when the two leaders meet March 20 in Washington. Pollard was sentenced in 1987 to life in prison for spying for Israel.

Report: Faith-based plan delayed

The Bush administration plans to delay its faith-based initiative in the wake of criticism from religious conservatives, *The Washington Post* reported Monday.

The paper quoted Don Eberly, deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, as saying that the proposal to provide federal funds to religious groups providing social services "may need to be corrected in some areas."

Religious conservatives such as Pat Robertson and the Rev. Jerry Falwell are concerned that churches would be corrupted by government regulations or that objectionable sects would be rewarded.

Hillary Clinton cites Jewish texts

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) quoted Pirke Avot as she criticized President Bush's proposed tax cut, which she said would draw money away from education and health care.

"We must never borrow without paying back," Clinton said on Monday at a meeting of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington.

Clinton also vowed to ask U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell about Israel's exclusion from the International Red Cross when Powell testifies before the Senate Budget Committee on Wednesday.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Diaspora, liberal Jews wary of Shas role in new government

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The ink had hardly dried on the coalition agreements binding Israel's new national unity government together when Shas began flexing its muscles on religious issues.

Upon entering his new office, Eli Yishai, the political leader of Shas — the fervently Orthodox party now in control of several key ministries — made clear that he would move quickly to scrap any hint of civic reform instituted during the previous government.

"I will cancel any decision made that contravenes the status quo," said Yishai, Israel's new interior minister, referring to the set of informal agreements that have given the Orthodox control over marriages, divorces and burials in the Jewish state.

"The results of the election prove that the people of Israel do not want" a civic revolution, he said.

Last year, after Shas bolted from his coalition, former Prime Minister Ehud Barak announced he would launch a such a "revolution" to whittle down Orthodox control over many aspects of Israeli life. In fact, however, Barak was preoccupied with diplomatic issues and pursued his civic reform agenda half-heartedly.

Yishai said Shas will seek to cancel Israel's recognition of civil marriages in foreign consulates located on Israeli soil, one of the few changes made during the previous government's tenure.

Consular marriages are only relevant for a small number of people, but — by allowing Israelis with foreign passports to bypass the Chief Rabbinate and marry without traveling overseas — they represent a chink in the Orthodox monopoly on marriage in Israel.

It is still too early to say how much Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will allow fervently Orthodox parties to pursue an agenda that could exacerbate tensions between Israel and Diaspora Jewry at a time when many believe Palestinian violence requires concerted Israel-Diaspora cooperation.

Nevertheless, Yishai's remarks — quoted first in the Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot* and confirmed by an Interior Ministry spokesman — led some leaders of Judaism's liberal streams to wonder whether Israel's national unity government is indeed unifying for liberal world Jewry.

Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of Israel's Masorti, or Conservative, movement, warned the new government that it risks an uproar among non-Orthodox Diaspora Jews if it reverses recent moves toward pluralism. "Unity must not only be between the political parties inside Israel, but also the entire Jewish people, the majority of whom are members of the Reform and Conservative movements," Bandel said.

In the United States, Reform and Conservative leaders said they are dismayed by Shas' role in the new government, where the party will control five ministries: Interior, Religious Affairs, Health, Jerusalem Affairs, and Labor and Welfare.

However, the leaders also recognize that security matters are now a higher priority in Israel than domestic matters, and they need to support the government.

Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Reform movement's ARZA World Union, said he expects Shas to use its new posts to create "mischief" for Reform and Conservative Jews. But "the national issues always outweigh the parochial issues," Hirsch said. "The security of Israel is more important than any given sectorial issue."

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. envoy blasts Palestinians

U.S. efforts to broker an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord failed because the Palestinians were not "focused on making peace," according to the U.S. ambassador to Israel.

Speaking Sunday at an economic conference in Tel Aviv, Martin Indyk said the Palestinians saw the peace process as a way to end the Israeli presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but said he doesn't believe the Palestinians "were really looking for peaceful coexistence, which is what Israel's objective was in this process."

Israel nabs Hamas militant

Israel arrested a Hamas militant suspected of involvement in recent terrorist attacks in the Gaza Strip. Israel's investigation of Mohamad Ibrahim Ali Dirawi revealed that Hamas has begun to film its attacks and distribute the tapes for propaganda purposes.

Arab summit to focus on uprising

Arab foreign ministers met in Cairo to prepare for an Arab summit expected to focus on the Palestinian uprising.

The ministers of the 22-member Arab League, meeting Monday to discuss the agenda for the March 27-28 summit in Jordan, were also expected to discuss financial aid for the Palestinians and consider a resolution calling for Israeli officials to be tried for alleged war crimes.

Journalists may have given tip

Israel is investigating the possibility that Palestinian journalists working for foreign news agencies tipped off Palestinian gunmen about a visit last Friday by Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer to the Gaza Strip, the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* reported.

No one was hurt when a Palestinian sniper fired during Ben-Eliezer's visit.



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.

Conservative Judaism, said he understands the political dynamic that requires Shas' inclusion in the government. It may foster Sharon's "peace agenda," Epstein said, but it "will certainly hinder any domestic agenda."

Epstein said the Conservative movement will face a "real balancing act" to support Israel while continuing to push for pluralism.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said he does not expect any gains for the liberal movements under the new government, but hopes "that neither will there be any significant retreat."

"One would hope the more moderate elements of the government would say maybe we can't go forward, but we also can't go backward — that's a more optimistic scenario," Yoffie said.

Despite the potential setbacks, U.S. Reform leaders noted that they continue to invest heavily in developing their institutions in Israel.

Hirsch said a new Reform congregation has just been built in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ra'anana, and the World Union for Progressive Judaism dedicated a new \$15 million world headquarters in Jerusalem last October.

Under the Barak government, the liberal streams made some gains:

- an agreement was struck allowing non-Orthodox egalitarian prayer services at a section of Jerusalem's Western Wall known as Robinson's Arch;
- the Education Ministry provided government funding for some non-Orthodox education programs;
- Conservative and Reform delegates were appointed to religious councils, although Orthodox representatives subsequently boycotted the sessions.

In coming months, the Supreme Court is expected to issue a landmark ruling determining whether the state will recognize non-Orthodox conversions performed in Israel. Non-Orthodox leaders fear that if the high court rules in favor of the liberal streams, the government will seek to pass a law circumventing the ruling.

Jonathan Rosenblum, director of the Israel office of Am Echad, a fervently Orthodox advocacy group, said he does not expect the new government to reverse its decision on Robinson's Arch, though it may try to backtrack on consular marriages.

"Sharon's first concern is going to be national unity within Israel, and I suspect that means most elements of a civic or secular revolution are not going to be high priority," Rosenblum said. "My expectation is that Sharon is not going to move much one way or another on the current religious status quo, since a move in either direction will be very divisive."

Rosenblum also said Shas probably will focus more on securing funding for its schools and social institutions than on broader religious issues.

Despite the fears for Israeli pluralism, one member of the new government says he will push for compromise on such issues.

Rabbi Michael Melchior, Barak's liberal Orthodox minister of Israeli society and world Jewish communities, will cover the same territory as deputy minister of foreign affairs for Sharon.

Melchior told JTA that retaining the Diaspora portfolio was an "absolute precondition" for his decision to take the job.

"I hope the new administration will see as one of its prime targets to strengthen the relationship with world Jewry, and obviously you cannot do that by creating new conflicts and wars," Melchior said. Melchior also said Sharon has told him that one priority is building a strong relationship with Diaspora Jewry and its leaders. To that end, Melchior hopes he will be able "to try and solve these issues quietly."

Ultimately, much will depend on Sharon's determination to confront Shas on religious issues — as well as on Diaspora Jewry's will to pursue pluralism issues when Israel so needs to close ranks to deal with the Palestinian conflict.

According to David Clayman, director of the Israel office of the American Jewish Congress, Shas actually may have less power than is currently perceived, since it is wary of overplaying its hand and bringing down the government.

Even if Shas does pursue a controversial religious agenda, Clayman said, Diaspora Jews now will be much too focused on Israel's security and "are not going to be thinking about the religious issues too much.

"For a lot of American Jews, except for the professional Jews," religious issues are "becoming old stuff," Clayman said. □

(JTA staff writer Julie Wiener in New York contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

Powell to meet Arabs, Jews

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell plans to meet with Arab American leaders Tuesday to discuss U.S. policy toward Israel, the Palestinian territories and Iraq.

Powell will meet with Jewish leaders Wednesday to discuss similar issues, State Department sources said.

Chechen kidnapper arrested

A Chechen warlord believed to be involved in kidnappings that targeted Jews was arrested last week in Azerbaijan.

Russian security agents, helped by Azerbaijani police, arrested Ruslan Akhmadov, as well as a second warlord, Badruddin Murtazaev.

Canadian group to get new leader

Toronto lawyer Keith Landy is expected to be named president of the Canadian Jewish Congress at the group's national plenary May 6-7 in Toronto.

Landy, the only candidate in the nominations process, will succeed Moshe Ronen. Landy recently served as chair of the congress' Ontario Region.

Groups to run N.Y. funeral home

Several New York Jewish philanthropists and organizations, including the UJA-Federation of Greater New York, plan to run a funeral home they recently purchased on Manhattan's Upper West Side as a nonprofit venture.

Plaza Memorial Funeral Chapel will be one of the only Jewish community-run funeral homes in the United States.

Probation in German shul attack

A German court sentenced a Palestinian to 18 months of probation last week for an October attack on a synagogue in Dusseldorf that was motivated by hatred toward Israel.

Prosecutors had asked for a 22-month prison sentence for Belal Thiab, but the probation was expected because Thiab had no prior record. During his trial, Thiab expressed regret for his actions.

Aryan area to be rights center

An Internet millionaire said a former white supremacist compound in Idaho he purchased will serve as an education and conference center for human rights. Greg Carr, the founder and former chairman of the Internet service Prodigy, said he had considered burning down the Aryan Nations compound, but then decided to turn it into a human rights center. In a related development, residents of Boise, Idaho, have raised nearly \$1 million to build an Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial.

Kosher eaters in Britain less affected by foot-and-mouth

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — As far as foot-and-mouth disease is concerned, it's good to be Jewish.

Since the outbreak of the disease last month, Jews who keep kosher have faced fewer serious meat shortages than the rest of the British community.

In order to contain the highly contagious livestock virus, British authorities have imposed severe restrictions on the movement of animals. The regulations mean that animals cannot be taken from farm to slaughterhouse, and many stores have seen their stocks of meat disappear.

Kosher slaughter ground to a halt for several days at the end of February, the executive director of the London Board of Shechita, Michael Kester, told JTA.

"For about five days, some of the smaller stores were without meat," he said, but larger stores keep 10 to 12 days' worth of meat in stock.

The problems affected the country's entire meat industry, not just kosher butchers. But the economics of kosher slaughter worked in Jews' favor as the crisis continued.

Most kosher slaughterhouses are small, Kester said, so it makes financial sense for them to keep running even when only small numbers of animals are available for slaughter.

And because most kosher slaughterhouses are family-run operations located near the farms that supply them, they are less affected by restrictions on the movement of animals. "For a change, we're ahead of the game," Kester said.

Foot-and-mouth is essentially harmless to humans, but can be fatal to cloven-hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep, pigs and goats.

Under the current restrictions, animals and the vehicles that transport them must be licensed to travel, and police have been stopping drivers to check their papers.

Farming experts say the fact that animals travel long distances from farm to slaughterhouse is partially responsible for the rapid spread of the disease in Britain.

Within two weeks of the first discovery of foot-and-mouth disease — or hoof-and-mouth disease, as it is known in the United States — cases have been reported on 96 farms widely spread across the United Kingdom.

Kester estimates that about 60 percent of Britain's roughly 300,000 Jews keep kosher. Those numbers rise during Passover, he said, perhaps because families host guests who keep more strictly kosher.

Although there is currently a shortage of kosher meat, supplies should be back to normal in time for Passover, which begins on the evening of April 7, Kester said.

The London Board of Shechita has investigated the possibility of importing kosher meat from Ireland or France if regulations are tightened further, but Kester said he does not think things will go that far. He also said that there has been a notable increase in poultry sales since the outbreak of the disease, as people switch from beef to chicken.

Chickens cannot catch the disease.

Europe is taking the spread of foot-and-mouth disease very seriously.

The European Union has banned livestock markets in order to prevent animals from different locations from coming into contact with each other. British travelers to the Continent have been ordered to disinfect shoes and car tires. □

Israeli scientists toast white wine

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Some white wine may be as effective in reducing clogged arteries as red wine, according to Israeli researchers.

Scientists at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa created a kosher dessert white wine that contains as many healthful anti-oxidants as red wine.

The increased anti-oxidants were created by putting white grape skins in contact with alcohol during the production process.

In a related study, the Technion team found that Israeli wine contained more anti-oxidants than French wine because of Israel's more intense sunlight. □

Poll: North Americans in Israel mostly satisfied with transition

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Approximately three-quarters of all recent North American emigrants to Israel consider their absorption successful, according to a survey produced by the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The survey by JAFI, the institution responsible for aliyah — or Jewish immigration to Israel — was released late last month at its Board of Governors meeting in Jerusalem.

It was prompted by diminishing numbers of American and Canadian Jews making aliyah over the past five years.

In a random survey of 441 North Americans who had lived in Israel for anywhere from six months to two years, 25 percent said their absorption had been “very successful,” while 49 percent felt it was “successful.” Ten percent described their experience as “not so successful,” 2 percent said “not at all successful,” and 14 percent felt it was too early to tell.

More important, according to the authors, of those enjoying successful absorptions, 61 percent would recommend aliyah to friends and family still living in the United States or Canada. Eight percent said they would recommend delaying aliyah, 5 percent would recommend they stay put, while one-quarter said they would offer no advice on the subject.

Among those recommending aliyah, Zionist ideology was the dominant issue for 52 percent of the respondents; personal fulfillment, 50 percent; and successful absorption into Israel, 45 percent.

The olim, or immigrants, who were interviewed were generally young (59 percent were 18 to 34 years old), mostly women (57 percent) and highly educated. Half were married.

The vast majority had been to Israel prior to aliyah, with some Jewish education.

The survey, however, did not draw conclusions on how olim could enjoy a more successful absorption.

The survey cited no margin of error. □

Holocaust Museum to examine Croat concentration camp records

By Vlasta Kovac

ZAGREB, Croatia (JTA) — Documents from Croatia’s most notorious concentration camp, kept in a private home for eight years by a museum curator, are slated to be examined later this month in Washington.

The artifacts from 19 trunks, now being stored at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, will be examined in the presence of Croatian Embassy officials and the director of the Jasenovac museum, Mate Rupic, according to sources in Croatia.

During the past decade, the artifacts, a product of World War II-atrocities, have become enmeshed in the Balkan conflict.

When the war in Yugoslavia started in 1991 and the Yugoslav army entered the museum at Jasenovac, Simo Brdar, a Bosnian Serb who was assistant director of the Jasenovac museum, took the archives to his home in what is now the Serb-run portion of Bosnia.

Brdar kept the trunks in his home until September 1999, showing them occasionally to foreign news crews. The trunks contain 2,500 books, 10,000 pages of documents and more than 6,000 letters, photos and postcards, according to Rupic.

During World War II, an estimated tens of thousands of people were tortured and killed at Jasenovac, known as the “Auschwitz of the Balkans.”

Unlike most camps, Jasenovac was run not by Germans but by local Croatian fascists.

The great majority killed were Serbs, but victims also included Jews, Gypsies and anti-fascist Croats.

The search for the camp’s history is triggering Balkan passions that have horrified the world.

The former president of the Zagreb Jewish community, Slavko Goldstein, said he supports Brdar’s efforts, “but the way he did it, and how he kept them, gives way to various doubts. The big question is whether some of the material has already been taken away, selected, hidden and given to somebody else for some purpose,” Goldstein said.

Melita Schvob, a Holocaust survivor who directs Zagreb’s new Documentation Center for the Research of the Holocaust, told JTA: “These artifacts have been taken away from Croatia, and they should be brought back here” to Jasenovac.

Croatia’s Culture Ministry said that under an agreement with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the material will be returned to Croatia by the end of October.

For its part, the U.S. Holocaust museum considers itself the “temporary guardian” of the materials and is currently discussing their future with both Croatian and Bosnian Serb officials, according to Arthur Berger, the chief spokesman for the museum.

A high-ranking Bosnian Serb politician, Zivko Radisic, told a Serbian newspaper that it was “a criminal act” to allow the documents to be taken away to Washington. □

Australian extremist politician, Holocaust denier forming alliance

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — An Australian extremist is welcoming the support of the country’s most prominent Holocaust denier.

Pauline Hanson, who sat for a term in Parliament as the sole representative of the One Nation Party, was invited to speak at the South Australian Press Club after her party gained representation in two local Parliaments in recent elections.

Hanson’s 45-minute address was punctuated by applause and shouts of encouragement from Fredrick Toben, who served a prison term in Germany for Holocaust denial and whose distribution of anti-Semitic material on the Internet has been declared unlawful in Australia.

During the question-and-answer session, Hanson said, “Toben is probably like a lot of other Australians in that he is supporting me here today, and I thank him.”

A prominent member of South Australia’s Jewish community told JTA that Toben actively campaigned for One Nation during the 1999 federal election, although Toben told reporters at the press club speech that he does not have a party preference.

Hanson lost her Parliament seat in the last national election and has since suffered a series of setbacks.

For his part, Toben will face Australia’s Federal Court later this year, having defied orders from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to remove anti-Semitic material from his Web site and to publicly apologize to the Jewish community for offending them. □