



# Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### **Palestinian gunmen wound Israeli**

Palestinian gunmen shot and wounded a Jewish settler in a drive-by shooting near the West Bank town of Nablus.

Settler spokeswoman Yehudit Tayar said Gilad Zar was in serious condition after being wounded Sunday in the leg, arm and chest. Two Palestinian groups later claimed responsibility for the attack.

In the Gaza Strip, five grenades were thrown at Israeli soldiers stationed near the border with Egypt. The soldiers returned fire, but no injuries were reported. In another incident Sunday, Palestinian gunfire hit a synagogue in the settlement of Neveh Dekalim in the southern Gaza Strip.

### **Shoah-denial conference banned**

Lebanon banned a conference on "Revisionism and Zionism" that had been scheduled to open in Beirut later this week, because it was intended as a platform to deny the Holocaust.

Lebanon's decision last Friday follows appeals by Jewish organizations and Arab intellectuals to stop the conference, whose organizer was once sentenced to jail for Holocaust denial.

Conference organizers said Sunday they would meet in another country, but did not say where.

### **Palestinian urges wider protests**

The leader of Palestinian militias in the West Bank said efforts are under way to broaden the six-month-old Palestinian uprising by encouraging peaceful protests by ordinary people.

Marwan Barghouti said the aim is to encourage all sectors of Palestinian society, including women and children, to join the revolt against Israel. Barghouti stressed that the "peaceful" protests — which include stone-throwing — would supplement, not replace, Palestinian gunfire.

### **Russians nab alleged kidnapper**

Russian agents arrested a third Chechen man believed to have lead a gang that kidnapped dozens of people, including many Jews, between 1997 and 1999, according to Russian security sources.

The arrest of Saburali Dibirov came after similar actions taken earlier this month against two other Chechen warlords whose groups targeted Jewish hostages.

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### **Falash Mura crisis simmers as backers reject UJC report**

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — The expedited aliyah of Ethiopia's Falash Mura has encouraged more would-be immigrants to crowd into miserable shantytowns around the Israeli Embassy and Consulate there, according to a new report by the United Jewish Communities.

The report of a renewed flow of Falash Mura might seem to vindicate skeptics who warned that a seemingly endless number of Ethiopians eager to move to Israel would replace any allowed to emigrate.

But a leading advocate for the Falash Mura rejects the UJC report as inaccurate.

Even before its imminent release, the report is stoking a long-standing controversy over the Falash Mura, a community of roughly 26,000 whose ancestors converted from Judaism to Christianity.

Most of the Falash Mura say they have returned to Judaism.

The report is only the latest chapter in a complex saga that has sparked allegations of racism, double standards and foot-dragging on the part of Israeli authorities.

A year ago, Israel's then-prime minister, Ehud Barak, declared his intent to resolve the Falash Mura issue. Barak sent Interior Minister Natan Sharansky to Ethiopia last April to assess the situation and expedite the immigration application process.

Sharansky's visit spurred greater attention to the issue from the UJC, the umbrella group of North American Jewish federations.

New Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has reiterated Israel's desire to solve the humanitarian crisis by year's end.

Some 3,000 Falash Mura have emigrated to Israel since January 2000.

Up to 100 are making aliyah each week, a figure expected to hold steady through the end of 2001.

Yet the population around social service compounds set up at the Israeli Embassy in Addis Ababa and the Israeli Consulate in Gondar has not diminished accordingly, a recent UJC fact-finding mission found.

"No matter how many times you do the math, the numbers are not going down," said Caryn Rosen Adelman, a member of the UJC Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution Committee who led the four-member mission in February. "It looks very clearly that the numbers have remained the same," said Adelman, who is also the chairman of JTA's Board of Directors.

Driving the movement of Falash Mura from their remote villages to the compounds appears to be the fear — fueled by their advocates in the United States and Israel, critics say — that they will be left behind if they do not make aliyah quickly.

Also heightening their anxiety may be recent statements by Israeli officials, who have suggested that perhaps only one-third of the remaining 23,000 Falash Mura applicants will be accepted.

So far, 4,000 of the 23,000 have been accepted for aliyah, with few applicants rejected, according to the report.

One leading advocate claims that hints of a Falash Mura stampede to the compounds are not just inaccurate, but are intended to discourage American Jewish support for their emigration.

"I don't want to accuse any person or organization, but whoever says that people are flowing to the compounds is not telling the truth, and he knows that he's not telling the truth," said Avraham Neguise, director of the Jerusalem-based South Wing to Zion

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Sharon meets with U.S.-led panel

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon met with the U.S.-led Mitchell Committee probing the causes of the six-month conflict in the region.

Before the meeting, Sharon said he would tell the committee that his visit last September to the Temple Mount did not cause the violence, but only provided Palestinians with a pretext to launch an already well-planned campaign of violence.

In another development, Sharon denied reports that he called for an end to U.S. military aid to Egypt during talks with Bush administration officials in Washington last week. Sharon said the matter did not come up during the discussions.

### Cabinet minister to go on trial

An Israeli Cabinet minister is slated to stand trial in June for allegedly assaulting and threatening a minor. Avigdor Lieberman is suspected of striking the youth after his son claimed the youth fought with him.

### Husseini: Wipe Israel off map

The top Palestinian official in Jerusalem said he sometimes has to meet Israeli officials, but that he only engages in such contacts "in order to put an end to the relationship" between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Faisal Husseini, generally considered a moderate, also said during a March 21 speech in Beirut that the Palestinian Authority still has as its "strategic goal" the creation of a Palestinian state stretching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean.

### Arabs call for Israel boycott

Delegates from more than 70 Arab groups meeting in Amman said attendees at an Arab summit convening later this week in the Jordanian capital should launch a boycott of Israel.

The move would demonstrate Arab support for the Palestinians, the delegates said Sunday.

advocacy group. "This is all an excuse not to help these people."

Neguisse insists that only 10 families, totaling 30 people, have entered the compound communities in the past year, to be reunited with relatives already there.

But, he suggests, if opponents succeed in spreading the fear of a never-ending stream of people with questionable claims to Jewish ancestry — some warn of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian Christians scheming to enter Israel — the Israeli government and Diaspora Jewry can declare the situation hopeless and end their efforts.

In fact, Israeli officials say they now have been approached by other Ethiopian groups who claim Jewish ancestry and are eager to move to Israel, according to the report.

"This fact lends credence to the observation" that "there is no way of knowing the actual and potential numbers of persons who will seek to make aliyah," the report states.

Falash Mura advocates allege racism, saying that Russians with clear Jewish roots but little interest in Judaism are welcomed as Israeli citizens, along with their non-Jewish relatives.

In contrast, they say, Falash Mura — even those who have become religiously observant after returning to Judaism — are forced to leap through innumerable hoops.

Israeli officials and some analysts counter that nothing will ever satisfy the Falash Mura's advocates, whom they accuse of taking advantage of Israel's generous Law of Return and Law of Entry to improve the welfare of some of the world's poorest people.

At the same time, Israeli officials say they must draw a line somewhere, as Ethiopians — who generally have limited education and come from a culture far different than Israel's — are more costly to absorb than other immigrants.

The cost of absorbing Ethiopians is about \$100,000 per person, including grants for 90 percent of an immigrant family's mortgage payments, according to Mike Rosenberg, director general of the Jewish Agency for Israel's Immigration and Absorption Department.

More than 80,000 Ethiopians already live in Israel. Supporting them cost the government, Jewish Agency and American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee a combined \$200 million last year, Rosenberg said.

As a means of "corrective action" to facilitate the absorption of both current and future Ethiopian Israelis, the agency expects to launch a nine-year, \$660 million "National Aliyah Project" by the end of 2001, Rosenberg said. Funded in part by Diaspora Jewry, the project will focus on education and vocational training.

Meanwhile, the plight of the Falash Mura continues.

Aside from the 3,000 who have emigrated to Israel, roughly 18,000 Falash Mura are divided between the two compound communities run by the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry.

Another 5,000 remain in their villages.

For years, critics charge, Ethiopians in Israel and their advocates urged Falash Mura relatives to move to Gondar or Addis Ababa to catch the attention of Israeli authorities, though their living conditions in the city are far worse than in their native villages. The Addis and Gondar compounds strain to serve the Falash Mura, who live in shanties but come to the compounds for health care, food, work, Jewish instruction and other social services.

Early media reports told of dire health conditions in the shantytowns. The health situation generally has improved, according to the UJC report, but parties on all sides — including the Falash Mura leadership — recently agreed not to allow more people to come to the compounds.

Instead, the head of a family can travel to Addis or Gondar, fill out an immigration application and return home. Israeli officials also may travel to isolated villages to interview applicants.

Applications for the roughly 18,000 Falash Mura in the compound communities have been completed and are being reviewed by Israel's Interior Ministry.

Falash Mura advocates deny that they urge people to head for the compounds, but say they "wouldn't be surprised" if the village exodus is continuing.

"If it were me, I'd be anxious that I'd be left behind," said Lisa Schachner, the North American coordinator for South Wing to Zion. "The bottom line is, those who were persistent at the gates have made it to Israel. They know that those in the villages have not gotten there as quickly." □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### ADL criticizes slavery ad

The Anti-Defamation League denounced an ad campaign that ran in U.S. college newspapers written by a conservative author who argues against slavery reparations to African Americans.

Rather than fostering a debate on the subject, the ad "serves no purpose other than to foment racism and hate," ADL National Director Abraham Foxman wrote in a letter to The New York Times.

### Philip Roth novel wins 2nd honor

Philip Roth's latest novel won its second major Jewish book award of the year when it was named the 2000 winner of the Koret Jewish Book Awards. "The Human Stain" also won the Jewish Book Council's top prize in Jewish fiction earlier this year.

Among the other winners of the Koret awards, which come with a \$10,000 prize and are sponsored by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, is Cynthia Ozick, who won in the biography/autobiography and literary studies category for "Quarrel & Quandary: Essays." The awards will be presented April 23 in New York.

### Strip club could mar memorial

Jewish leaders in Baltimore are expressing concern over the possibility of a strip club opening a block away from the city's Holocaust memorial.

The leaders are worried that the club's opening might make the memorial susceptible to the same vagrancy, drug use and sexual activities that plagued the \$300,000 memorial before it was redesigned and flooded with bright lights in 1997, at a cost of \$250,000.

"If the city spends lots of money to restore the sanctity of the memorial, do you now create new problems to destroy that?" asked Arthur Abramson, executive director of the Baltimore Jewish Council.

### Belgium to get Nazi-looted papers

Belgium agreed to pay Russia \$90,000 for the return of some 20,000 Nazi-looted documents seized by the Soviet army in 1945. The archive includes some documents relating to prewar Belgian Jewish life, according to Russian sources.

### Florida philanthropist dies at 89

Adolph Levis, inventor of the Slim Jim snack treat and a leading philanthropist in South Florida's Jewish community, died March 20 at the age of 89 in Boca Raton, Fla.

Levis, who devised the dried meat snack in the 1940s, gave more than \$3.5 million to the Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County, including a \$2 million gift to help establish a Jewish community center there.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### Kremlin stirs up Jewish anger by naming Lubavitch rabbi to panel

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian Jewish leaders are speaking out against what is being seen as the Kremlin's most serious attempt yet to decide who represents the country's Jews.

When the Lubavitch movement's chief rabbi in Russia was named last week to a high-profile Kremlin advisory panel that includes leaders of all religions officially recognized by the Russian government, it might have seemed completely predictable.

After all, Rabbi Berel Lazar and the Lubavitch movement have been favored by the Russian government since President Vladimir Putin first became prime minister in 1999.

But Russian Jewish leaders are increasingly worried about the Kremlin's meddling in already-fractious Jewish affairs, including supporting Lazar at the expense of Russia's other chief rabbi, Adolph Shayevich, and the increasingly close ties between Jewish businessman — and Lubavitch backer — Lev Levayev and the Kremlin.

Lazar's elevation to the advisory body indicates that in the eyes of Russian authorities, he speaks for Russian Jewry.

"Jews are becoming the hostages of non-Jewish interests," said Roman Spector, a leader of the Va'ad, a secular Jewish organization.

What this latest development forebodes for Russia's 600,000 Jews is still unclear. But some observers worry that Russian Jewish life is becoming less stable as it becomes more tied to personal relationships between powerful Jews and the Kremlin.

"By replacing one Jewish leader with another, the Kremlin is deliberately provoking divisions within the Jewish community," Micah Naftalin, the national director of the Washington-based Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, said in a statement. "What gives the government the right to decide which of these chief rabbis is legitimate? They should both have a seat on that council, because they both represent important segments of the community."

The Kremlin's boosting of Lazar and its simultaneous attacks on Shayevich are intertwined with Kremlin attacks on Russian Jewish leader Vladimir Goussinsky, many observers say.

Goussinsky, whose Russian Jewish Congress is aligned with Shayevich, has been the subject of a yearlong Kremlin campaign on charges of fraud and embezzlement. Many say the campaign is Putin's angry response to the Russian Jewish tycoon's outspoken opposition to Russia's war in Chechnya.

The Kremlin appears to be winning the battle against Goussinsky. Most recently, Goussinsky, who is in Spain fighting possible extradition to Russia, resigned as president of the RJC, saying that his legal battle prevented him from carrying out his community duties.

Meanwhile, Lazar denied cooperating with the Kremlin to promote his group. He also said the government should not meddle in Jewish affairs.

Avrohom Berkowitz, the executive director of the Lubavitch Federation of Jewish Communities of the former Soviet Union, says the movement wants to see all Jewish groups collaborate on rebuilding Russian Jewry.

Lubavitch officials also say Shayevich should be removed because they represent a majority of Jewish communities in Russia — a claim that is difficult to prove.

"Shayevich was legally elected," says Zinovy Kogan, the leader of Reform Judaism in Russia and an ally of Shayevich. "We don't need state-planted rabbis, especially foreign-born and not good Russian-speakers."

The irony is that Shayevich, 63, was once a state-approved rabbi.

In the beginning of the 1980s, when Shayevich returned from Hungary and became chief rabbi of the Choral Synagogue, many Jewish activists suspected him of cooperating with the KGB.

But Shayevich only cooperated enough to avoid suspicion and never handed over lists — demanded by the KGB — of Jews married or circumcised at the synagogue, according to someone who worked at the synagogue in the 1980s.

Eventually, the low-key Shayevich became a consensus figure for the squabble-prone Russian Jewish movement — at least until Putin took office. □

## Czech actor takes on largest role: documenting vanished Jewish life

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — When Czech actor Achab Haidler isn't performing on stage, he can be found hacking his way through dense undergrowth deep in the countryside armed with a camera and tape recorder.

It's no wildlife expedition he's on, however.

Haidler's mission is to document in painstaking detail the Czech Republic's crumbling rural Jewish cemeteries before thousands of gravestones that bear the history of Czech Jewish life are lost forever.

Haidler and the rest of his small team are preparing an enormous Internet database that they hope will feature all the estimated 340 Jewish cemeteries sprinkled around the Czech regions of Moravia and Bohemia.

"This is a race against time," said the 42-year-old Haidler, who has documented 20 cemeteries since 1999. "Many gravestones have already been destroyed, and their epitaphs cannot be read any more."

Haidler's work has become more important because records for many Jewish communities across the country have been destroyed or lost over the centuries, making it impossible for people to trace their heritage.

Volunteer Robert Dvorak, who was drawn into the project after being captivated by the "unique atmosphere of Jewish cemeteries," also feels a sense of urgency.

"Although the condition of the cemeteries is quickly getting worse and worse, there is still a good chance to document most of the important historic information they can offer," he said. "It is necessary to complete everything now in spite of all the difficulties. Later on, it might be too late."

Part of the problem, Dvorak said, is that many gravestones either have been demolished by vandals or stolen by local residents to use as foundations for their homes.

Haidler and his team have based their agenda on the works of Jewish heritage expert Jiri Fiedler.

Fiedler's extensive research on cemeteries spawned a number of books.

Fiedler is delighted with the efforts of Haidler and his co-workers.

"What they are doing is extremely important," he said.

The actor is under no illusions about the enormity of his task, which is being funded under the auspices of the Keshet Project — set up by Haidler himself — and is backed by several Czech civic associations.

"It is a lifetime's work," Haidler said, because documenting nearly all the cemeteries requires extensive work because of their size or the poor condition of their gravestones.

On each visit, Haidler must interpret epigraphs, take dozens of photographs and make incredibly detailed descriptions of the cemetery layout.

A former Seventh-Day Adventist who plans to convert to Judaism, Haidler has to use a range of skills — including his extensive knowledge of Hebrew — to glean information from each cemetery.

"I often have to lie in the grass and trace the epitaphs with my finger to read what they say because they are so damaged. I try to

reconstruct what has been written in Hebrew, often in cryptogram form," he said.

Simply finding the tombstones can be a huge task. On a recent trip to an almost forgotten cemetery in western Bohemia, volunteers had to help Haidler remove thick undergrowth around dozens of graves.

The Keshet Project's official guidelines draw attention to the difficulties faced by Haidler and his handful of colleagues.

"Sometimes it is necessary to work with a machete. For research in many devastated cemeteries, cranes or jacks will be needed to lift the fallen gravestones," the handbook says.

Expected to cost up to \$400,000 over 10 to 15 years, the Keshet Project will involve careful comparison of the dates of burials, types of gravestones and styles of epigraphs in order to help trace the history of local Jewish communities.

"We can establish the dates of cemetery enlargement; periods of various epidemics; describe the gradual emigration from the rural Jewish communities; the influx of refugees from various regions during World War I and a number of other historical connections," the project's guidelines state.

"The whole contents of the epigraphs" — including Hebrew versions — "must be documented to derive this information," the guidelines continue.

For Haidler, the cemetery visits are much more than a hobby.

"At the moment, I mainly document the cemeteries, but my dream is that money will be found to repair and maintain as many as possible," he said.

"We have to try to keep old cemeteries, but we must act quickly because we are running out of time."

Haidler's work already has been recognized by a number of people who have been trying to trace their ancestral roots.

Alexander Woodle, an American writing on an Internet site run by the Bohemia-Moravia Special Interest Group, which details a number of cemeteries, described a visit with Haidler to a burial site in the Bohemian town of Ckyne.

"Achab Haidler is a national treasure," Woodle wrote. "He reads the inscriptions with his fingers as well as his eyes. The most moving moment for me was his reading of the Hebrew inscription of my great-great-grandfather's gravestone amidst the sound of falling raindrops."

The first documented Czech cemeteries should appear on a special Internet site in the summer.

The Web site should allow visitors to key in a family name and a specific area and retrieve all available information about the family within a matter of seconds.

Ultimately, however, the level of financial support will help determine whether the project will succeed.

So far the group has approached Czech authorities, foundations, individuals and Jewish communities for backing. □

## Germany drops Yahoo case

BERLIN (JTA) — German prosecutors have decided not to take legal action against Yahoo over online auctions of Hitler's "Mein Kampf."

The state prosecutor's office in Munich said March 22 the Internet portal could not be charged with incitement to racial hatred, because it is only the provider and not the person making the auction offer.

Distributing Hitler's manifesto is illegal in Germany. □