



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 79, No. 130

Friday, July 13, 2001

84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S. changes stance on rewards

The Bush administration has decided to offer reward money for information on Palestinian terrorists who have killed American citizens, officials of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations said. Until now, the government has refused to offer rewards on Palestinian murderers, though it does so for killers of Americans elsewhere in the world.

Conference Executive Vice Chairman Malcolm Hoenlein said administration officials notified him of the policy change this week, after months of lobbying. With the White House and State Department now on board, the Justice Department is working out the legalities of the move, Hoenlein said.

Palestinians wound 4 Israelis

Four Israelis, including a year-old infant, were wounded in two separate shooting attacks Thursday in the West Bank. In response, Israeli tanks shelled the Palestinian city of Nablus, killing a Palestinian policeman. [Page 4]

Israel cited for human trafficking

Israel and 22 other countries do not meet the minimum standards for combating traffic in sex slaves and forced laborers, according to a U.S. State Department report.

"It is incomprehensible that trafficking in human beings should be taking place in the 21st century," U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said at a news conference when he released the report Thursday. Ranked in the lowest grouping, Israel is a destination in trafficking from former Soviet states, Brazil, Turkey and South Africa. According to U.S. law, a country that does not comply with the minimum standards by 2003 will be subject to sanctions.

ZOA seeks envoy's recall

The Zionist Organization of America is urging the Bush administration to recall an envoy sent to mediate between Israel and the Palestinian Authority because of past comments he made justifying terrorist attacks by Hezbollah.

The ZOA cited a 1998 article in the Arab newspaper An-Nahar that quoted David Satterfield as saying that Hezbollah attacks were acts of "resistance" rather than terrorism.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Young leader of Czech Jews promises outreach, end to infighting

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — He's young, smart and ready to change the face of Czech Jewry.

Thirty-two-year-old Tomas Jelinek, who was recently elected chairman of the Prague Jewish Community — the most powerful Jewish post in the Czech Republic — is aiming to put an end to infighting and reach out to the wider Czech society.

He knows how difficult the job is going to be.

"You know, there are people in the Jewish community here who hate me simply because I was elected," he says with a wry smile.

It's no joke.

According to insiders, infighting has become almost a way of life in the 1,600-strong community, which makes up half of the country's official Jewish population under the auspices of the umbrella group, the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities.

Tensions between leaders of the federation and some of the largely non-Orthodox membership across the country had been escalating in the months before Jelinek's appointment.

Many rank-and-file members in Prague and in the country's nine other communities were becoming increasingly unhappy about the fact that their communities do not officially recognize liberal streams of Judaism.

They openly called for change. And change they got.

Jelinek, a confidant of President Vaclav Havel and an economic adviser in the presidential office, was swept into the chair in Prague last month on a populist tide of support.

It was an endorsement of his campaign platform, which among other things called for unity within a pluralistic community.

Jelinek, a former vice chairman of the Prague community, was well aware that he was addressing the concerns of a large majority of Prague's Jewish population.

In an opinion poll late last year, 75 percent of respondents called for the official community to open itself up to other branches of Judaism.

The federation recently stated that it intends to allow liberal branches to operate within the community by the end of the year.

Czech Jews before World War II "were not very Orthodox and quite assimilated," he says.

"The second point is that most of the Jews in the Czech Republic are secular. They view the liberal ways of Judaism as less strict, easier to understand and more user-friendly."

Jelinek discovered just how tough it was to get his message across to some of the old guard.

"Two days before the election, I asked a senior member of the community if he would support me. He told me that that was a difficult question because the chair was usually someone who had experienced the Holocaust or was 'a pious Jew,'" Jelinek says.

Jelinek represents the Czech Republic on the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims and is chairman of the board of the Czech Endowment Fund for Holocaust Victims.

He says he not only wants to foster Jewish unity, but would like to see the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Annan orders probe in video case

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan ordered an investigation into the handling of a U.N. video that may reveal who kidnapped three Israeli soldiers last October. U.N. officials acknowledge the tape indicates the kidnappers probably were disguised as U.N. peacekeepers when they seized the soldiers.

The United Nations said it would let both Israel and Lebanon look at a version of the video that obscures the guerrillas' faces, arguing that it did not want to jeopardize the security of its peacekeepers in Lebanon, but Israel rejected the offer.

Cause sought for water scare

Israel's Mekorot water company has not determined what caused the contamination of the water supply that prompted the Health Ministry to warn residents of central Israel against drinking tap water this week. The water has since returned to acceptable conditions, but Mekorot has asked the water commissioner to appoint a panel to investigate the incident.

Israel, Greek church squabble

The Greek Orthodox Church accused Israel of meddling after Israeli officials disqualified one-third of the candidates to be the church's next top clergyman in the Holy Land. In a letter signed by Israeli Justice Minister Meir Sheetrit, five candidates for election as the region's new Greek Orthodox patriarch were banned for alleged security reasons.

Israel says that as the sovereign power in Jerusalem, it has the right to disqualify candidates it does not regard as suitable.

Israeli tourists told to behave

Israel's tourism minister called on Israelis traveling abroad to behave appropriately. Israel already has enough troubles, Rehavam Ze'evi said.

He issued the call after an Israeli was ejected from a Greek hotel for rowdy behavior.

community reach out to Czech society as a whole to avoid being marginalized.

He has already issued a public appeal to the Czechs, asking them to condemn neo-Nazism, which has plagued the country since the fall of communism.

"It is so important that we have the support of the public here because activities like neo-Nazism must not be accepted," he says. "I want the Prague Jewish Community to be very much a part of the wider society, and I intend to let people know we are here."

Although Jelinek stresses the need to reach outside the community, he says he hasn't forgotten the importance of taking care of local Jews.

Having grown up under a Communist regime that discouraged all forms of religion, Jelinek says he became actively involved in Jewish life as soon as the Iron Curtain was lifted 12 years ago.

He first joined the Czechoslovak Union of Jewish Students and later became a member of the Prague Jewish Community.

In 1998, he and a friend, David Stecher, who was recently elected chairman of the Prague community's supervisory board, decided to "revive" the Jewish community here. They started their mission by staging the first Jewish Ball held in Prague in 60 years.

"I felt more needed to be done to make the community a welcoming place," Jelinek says.

"I would like to see the community have a more friendly, open and human face. There have been complaints that people who call in to the community for advice or help have been spoken to rudely by staff who don't even introduce themselves. It is so important for the community to be seen to be open and friendly."

In that quest, Jelinek has the support of Stecher, whose five-member elected supervisory board is responsible for handling complaints.

Jelinek also aims to make the community more attractive to middle-aged Jews who he believes have been neglected over the years.

"We cater for the young with a school here and provide support for the elderly, but there is nothing here for people between 35 and 55 years old," he says. "If we are able to activate them through social programs, we will be able to create a more vital community."

He estimates that there are hundreds of middle-aged Jews who have not participated in Jewish activities because there is little or nothing for them.

He hopes that by the end of his three-year term, he will have succeeded in enticing some of them to join the community.

While Jelinek and his colleagues work on improving the community's image, other changes are planned. The new chairman intends to ensure that the community makes the most of its assets, which include prime real estate in Prague and elsewhere in the country.

"I have the feeling that the Prague Jewish Community is the only Jewish community in the Czech Republic which has the potential to become self-sustainable financially," he says.

Jelinek may have set some tough goals, but he can expect support from a wide range of people. Even Karol Sidon, the Czech Republic's normally reserved chief rabbi, indicated that the young chairman has a bright future.

And Jelinek may find a helping hand in Havel, though he says he won't use his position to try to influence a man widely regarded by the Jewish community and beyond as the country's moral guardian.

"I am strictly separating my agenda with the president, which covers mainly economic issues, from my position as chairman," Jelinek says. "But for sure if there would be some serious issue affecting the Jewish community in the Czech Republic, it would feel natural to inform him about it." □

Cemetery attacks prompt call for crackdown

PRAGUE (JTA) — Leaders of Slovakia's Jewish community are calling for nationwide cooperation to crack down on attacks on Jewish cemeteries.

Their campaign comes as five rare tombstones were destroyed and six damaged at the Jewish cemetery in the town of Zvolen in western Slovakia, just two years after the site underwent a \$10,000 renovation. The attack follows two recent incidents in other towns in which almost 60 tombstones were damaged. □



Daily News Bulletin

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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.
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JEWISH WORLD

High court urged to eye vouchers

The Bush administration has signaled its strong interest in Cleveland's school voucher program by filing a brief urging the Supreme Court to hear the case and uphold state tuition subsidies as constitutional.

Policymakers need to know "whether such programs are a constitutionally permissible option for expanding education opportunity for children enrolled in failing public schools across America," the brief said.

U.S. Solicitor General Theodore Olson argued that the Cleveland program is constitutional because it neutrally distributes aid to students without regard to religion, and it is the parents, not the state, who decide whether to send their children to religious or nonreligious schools.

Farrakhan wants ban overturned

Lawyers for Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan went to court in London on Thursday in a bid to overturn a British government ban on his entering the country.

Farrakhan, who has tried to step back from anti-Semitic and racist comments he made in the past, has been excluded from Britain since 1986 on the basis of fears that he would stir up racial tensions if allowed into the country.

His lawyers' attempt to have the ban lifted comes just after Britain has suffered some of its worst race riots in decades.

ADL blasts Taiwan TV ad

The Anti-Defamation League criticized Taiwan's ruling party for using images of Hitler in a television commercial encouraging young people to engage in the political process.

In a letter to the chairman of the Democratic Progressive Party, the ADL said, "It should be obvious that Hitler is no role model, political or otherwise, for Taiwan's youth."

In a news report, one party official was quoted as saying that Hitler was chosen as a role model in the commercial "because he dared to speak his own mind."

Program for prospective rabbis

The Union for Traditional Judaism — an offshoot of the Conservative movement — is creating a one-year preparatory program for prospective rabbinical students of all denominations.

The program at the New Jersey-based Institute for Traditional Judaism will target potential candidates for rabbinic study who "are intellectually capable and religiously committed," but lack "text skills and experience," said Rabbi Ronald Price, the institute's dean.

Want to trace your genealogy? Try checking the police records

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — Jewish genealogy is no longer about collecting family names like stamps or butterflies, says Saul Issroff, co-chair of the 21st International Conference on Jewish Genealogy.

The conference, held this week in London, has been proving him right.

There have been the expected lectures on how to trace your ancestors, of course, but the program also includes sessions on everything from the Holocaust and restituted art to genetic diseases and Palestine under the British Mandate.

There are explorations of Jewish culture from Wales to China, speeches on Jews in the armies of the French Revolution, and truly ancient history: "Babylonian Jewry from Abraham to the Present Day" is perhaps the most ambitious lecture title.

The conference's massive syllabus requires 10 full pages to list the names of the sessions.

"It's a whole cultural event," says Sally Roter, who has spent the past two years helping to organize the conference.

With more than 160 speakers and close to 1,000 registrants, it's the largest event of its kind ever held in Europe, and rivals the largest held in the United States, the 1999 Jewish genealogy conference in New York.

The conference has a Web site, but much of the publicity went out via word of mouth, Roter says.

"We had people knocking at the door wanting to speak," she says.

An anthropologist friend of Issroff's phoned him out of the blue, the co-chair says, to say he wanted to speak at the conference.

That's how a session on the marriage of cousins in the Rothschild family found its way onto the program.

Not all of the speakers are Jewish, or even have direct Jewish connections. For example, Lt. Col. Colin Fairclough of the Salvation Army spoke about the charity's family tracing service. The conference also includes amateurs researching their own family histories and professionals meeting to exchange ideas.

Jordan Auslander, a genealogist from New York, spoke about a resource that few Jews think of when researching family history: criminal records.

"They give an enormous amount of information," he says.

Like many disenfranchised immigrants to the United States, Jews were indeed involved in criminal activity, he says.

One of the advantages of such records is that they are kept for many different reasons. For example, Russia's czarist secret police, the Cheka, kept records of people who showed up at meetings of the Socialist Bund, and of their relatives — an invaluable resource to genealogists.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 made many eastern European archives available for the first time, Roter says, and they have proven to be a gold mine.

Issroff went to Lithuania to do research in 1994 and discovered that the Historical State Archives of Vilna go back to at least 1520. Contrary to what had long been assumed, little had been destroyed by the Germans or Soviets in the 20th century.

A number of state archivists came to the London conference, including one from Belarus.

"That's a real coup for us because Belarus has been slow to open up," Roter says.

Judith Frazin, president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois, led an introductory workshop that involved much less exotic research.

Plowing her way through census records, city directories, birth and death certificates, wills, citizenship records, World War I draft records, and, ultimately, a Chicago graveyard, she tracked down the connection between her great-aunt and a trio of pawnbrokers who lived in the early 20th century.

"You have to be very plodding and methodical and organized," she says. "You have to try everything." And she warns that, although the Internet is a boon for genealogists, it does not replace old-fashioned legwork. "The Internet is not going to produce your family tree for you," the no-nonsense genealogist says. "There is no substitute for doing your own research." □

THE 2001 JEWISH OLYMPICS

Unafraid, Russian athletes excited to compete at the Maccabiah*By Lev Gorodetsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — Masha Mazina, an Olympic gold medal winner in fencing and a member of the Russian team for next week's Maccabiah Games, is surprised that many Western athletes have decided not to compete in the Games for safety reasons.

"I don't think there is a really serious danger," Mazina told JTA, reflecting the general mood on the 120-member Russian Maccabi team. "Besides, I have never been to Israel," she added.

Mazina, 36, won her gold at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Slim and dark-haired, she first took up fencing at the age of 12. She also plays tennis and billiards and is an artist, but fencing is her passion.

The sport is "exciting and you have to think all the time. After the excitement of the duel, you don't even feel how physically exhausting it has been," she says.

Masha became an active member of the Moscow Maccabi club when it was first formally organized in 1995.

Another Olympic fencer, Sergei Sharikov, signed on to the Maccabiah effort more recently.

Sharikov, 27, won two gold medals in saber-fencing in Sydney, and he has been coaching the Russian fencing team for the Maccabiah.

The first Maccabi groups appeared in Moscow in the beginning of the 1990s.

But it was only after the Russian Jewish Congress, which was formed in 1995, pitched in that the club was really able to get off the ground, says Sergei Tankelevitch, head of the Moscow branch of Maccabi.

According to Tankelevitch, more than 700 Muscovites of different ages are enrolled in the local Maccabi club, plus 12 working coaches.

"Our female table tennis team has won the Cup of Russia," he boasts.

But he also says the club had to disband its highly successful male soccer team because of a lack of funding.

Jewish sport clubs began to grow like mushrooms in Europe after Max Nordau's speech at the 1898 Zionist Congress, when he called on Jews to pay more attention to sports as a way of building national self-esteem and self-confidence.

By the summer of 1917, there were already 125 Maccabi clubs across Russia, including some in the remote Ural and Siberia regions.

Under the Soviet regime, the Maccabi movement lay dead until Mikhail Gorbachev became the USSR's leader.

The first Maccabi groups in the region appeared in 1989 in Lithuania, but it's St. Petersburg that now has become the center of the Maccabi movement in the former Soviet Union.

Tight on funds, Russian officials say they have negotiated down the price for each Maccabiah athlete, with some of the cost subsidized by Maccabiah organizations in other countries.

Yet even the reduced price has proven prohibitive for other former Soviet Union countries, such as Ukraine, which is not sending a team.

The Russian team is prepared to go to Israel, seemingly unafraid of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence that has prompted some Western athletes to cancel their participation and

has sparked reports that the Maccabiah marathon event has been canceled.

"I can't understand what they are talking about," Irina Koval, a European champion in the female 24-hour marathon running event, says of nervous Western athletes.

"Israel is my land and nobody will persuade me that I have to be scared to go there." □

Palestinians gunners rake West Bank roads, injuring four*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The cease-fire that wasn't is even more in tatters following a series of shooting attacks on Israeli drivers that injured four people, including three members of a single family.

Palestinian sources said two Palestinian security officials were killed and four wounded in subsequent clashes with Israeli troops Thursday.

Reacting to the attacks, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told reporters traveling with him to Italy, where he was due to meet with government leaders, that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat is not observing the U.S.-mediated cease-fire announced last month.

In the latest violence, an Israeli was critically wounded when shots were fired Thursday afternoon at his car in the vicinity of Kiryat Arba, near Hebron. Reports said gunmen opened fire from a passing car.

Earlier, an Israeli infant and her family were wounded when gunmen fired on their car near the settlement of Har Bracha, near Nablus.

The father sustained moderate injuries, and the mother and daughter were lightly hurt.

Reports quoted witnesses as saying the gunmen were wearing clothing resembling Israeli army uniforms.

In all the cases, the gunmen appeared to be aiming for the Israelis' heads.

Following the attack, Israel Defense Force troops seized a hilltop in Palestinian-controlled territory that overlooks the road leading to the settlement.

The IDF said the move was a "temporary measure" for security reasons.

In Hebron, Jewish settlers scuffled with Palestinians in the market until police separated the two sides.

There were armed clashes between IDF troops and Palestinian gunmen in the Nablus area Thursday, during which the army fired tank shells.

Amid the ongoing violence, Cabinet minister Dalia Itzik on Thursday denied a report in the London-based Foreign Report that Israel's army chief of staff recently presented the Security Cabinet with a plan for a wide-scale military operation to destroy the Palestinian Authority.

Speaking on Israel Radio, Itzik added that right-wing Cabinet ministers have been upping the pressure on Sharon to reconsider the government's policy of restraint.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres also dismissed the London report as the product of a "fertile imagination."

Meanwhile, Peres' office said there was no basis to reports that he may meet with Arafat during talks he is scheduled to hold in Cairo on Sunday. □