



# Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Payments made from Swiss fund

The first payments to Holocaust victims were made from a historic 1998 settlement in which Swiss banks agreed to pay \$1.25 billion to settle all claims surrounding Switzerland's handling of Holocaust victims' assets.

The Claims Conference began making payments Thursday to 35,000 Jewish slave laborers in 36 countries, with each survivor receiving \$1,000.

The group expects to pay a total of some 160,000 Jewish former laborers around the world.

The payments are in addition to those that are being made by a nearly \$5 billion German slave-labor fund.

### Israel to keep targeting militants

Top Israeli officials defended their policy of targeting Palestinian militants, following international condemnation of a helicopter attack earlier this week that killed eight Palestinians, including two Hamas officials and two children.

The United States asked Israel to stop its attacks on suspected Palestinian militants.

But Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told Secretary of State Colin Powell during a telephone call Wednesday that he intends to continue the policy of killing suspected militants as part of the Jewish state's right to self-defense.

On Thursday, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Israel has no choice but to attack militants before they were able to carry out suicide bombings or other attacks against Israelis.

"We are the only country that is now experiencing a type of terror that doesn't happen" anywhere else in the world, he said.

He also said the United States and other nations would not have criticized the helicopter attack if two Palestinian children had not been inadvertently killed in the operation.

### Israel's chief rabbi on hit list

A Shi'ite cleric in Lebanon offered a \$1 million reward for killing Israel's Ashkenazic chief rabbi.

The move came after Yisrael Meir Lau backed Israel's policy of targeting Palestinian militants.

Lau is one of dozens of Israeli political leaders, military officers and rank-and-file activists who are now on Arab militants' hit lists.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### As far as Jewish past goes, reconciliation is the word in Spain

By Ben G. Frank

GIRONA, Spain (JTA) — "Sepharad is your home."

Those soothing, welcoming words were pleasant to hear, especially from a non-Jewish Spanish official, the head of tourism in the small town of Castello d'Empuries in Catalonia in Spain's northeastern corner.

"Spain is your home," the official had said, using the Hebrew word "Sepharad," a symbolic reminder that 500 years of exile had not dimmed the memory of Spain's Jewish past.

An hour's drive from Castello d'Empuries lies the bustling, hilly town of Girona, where the cathedral bells toll the hour in a manner reminiscent of a Hemingway or Orwell novel. At the same time, near the cathedral walls — and in the open courtyard of a recently opened Jewish study center and Jewish museum on the site of a 13th-century synagogue — a panel of Catalan journalists, writers, professors and an Israeli consul discusses "Poetry, Literature and Hebrew Letters in the 20th Century."

A few towns away, in the medieval village of Besalu — which appears to have stepped out of the pages of King Arthur and his Knights of the Roundtable — hundreds of tourists walk each day down a flight of dark and damp steps to what may be the only ancient mikveh in Spain. Unused now, the bath once served a ritual function in a country that during the Middle Ages contained several hundred thousand Jews, half of all world Jewry.

In Besalu, the Spanish guides explain the purpose of the Jewish ritual bath and tell the story of what most Jews already know as "The Golden Age of Spain." It is of that age, especially in small towns, that the Jewish experience, presence and places of worship are being revived and restored.

About 14,000 Jews, mostly in Madrid or Barcelona, still call Spain home. There are no Jews, however, in Castello d'Empuries, Girona, or Besalu.

Spain is no exception to the European phenomenon whereby non-Jews care for and preserve Jewish sites. Driven and organized in most cases by non-Jews — and financed by municipalities, the central government in Madrid and even the European Union — the rediscovery includes not only uncovering a mikveh or locating a synagogue, but also discovering former Jewish homes by detecting the carved doorpost niches where mezuzahs once hung; collecting and preserving tombstones; or saving and restoring 500-year-old Hebrew parchments.

Officials hope that restoring Jewish sites will attract Jewish and non-Jewish travelers interested in learning about Spain's Jewish past.

But that is not the only reason for the country's interest and expenditure in rediscovering its Jewish past.

Spain still is struggling to understand its own history, including recent fascist decades, its bloody civil war of the 1930s, the terror of the medieval Inquisition, the Jewish expulsion of 1492 and the battles with the Moors.

In other words, reconciliation is the word in 21st-century Spain.

In booklets and documents, Spanish officials point out that "their history would be incomplete without the history of the Jewish community."

"The expulsion," these pronouncements say, "could not choke the deep roots which they" — the Jews — "left behind in our towns and cities and which are being duly invoked and praised in this country."

To that end, 10 Spanish municipalities recently formed a network that declared that

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Terror bombing prevented

Israeli forces defused a bomb found Thursday in a bag a Palestinian youth was carrying on an Egged bus on its way from Jerusalem to the northern community of Kiryat Shmona. A bomb squad safely detonated the device after the youth raised the suspicions of the driver, who threw him off the bus.

Israeli security forces later nabbed a Palestinian militant believed involved in the foiled bus bombing and whisked him away by helicopter — only to find that they had gotten the wrong man. The suspect was later returned by helicopter to the spot near Jenin where he was grabbed.

### Palestinian sentenced to death

A Palestinian security court sentenced a 50-year-old Nablus man to death for helping Israel target a Palestinian militant. The sentence handed down Thursday against Ahmed Abu Aisha was the latest in a crackdown by the Palestinian Authority on people suspected of helping Israel track down terrorists.

### Draftees won't serve with women

Some 100 Orthodox draftees signed a petition saying they will not serve in the Israel Defense Force alongside women. Leftist politicians lashed out at rabbis backing the move, charging they are trying to use religious coercion at a time when the Israel Defense Force is trying to achieve sexual equality.

The controversy erupted after Israeli military officials dissolved the Women's Corps and merged it into the General Staff — a move aimed at eliminating gender discrimination in the IDF.

### Netanyahu nephew: No IDF for me

A nephew of former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked Israel's Supreme Court for conscientious objector status. Yonatan Ben-Artzi, a teen-ager facing the draft like all Israeli 18-year-olds, said Wednesday he is opposed to all armies.



## Daily News Bulletin

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the "Jewish legacy constitutes one of the basic pillars of their history and a characteristic element of their heritage."

Barcelona and Madrid soon will be added to the network.

The organization is known as "Red de Juderias de Espana — Camino de Sefarad," or "The Network of Jewries of Spain — Paths of Sepharad," and is known popularly as the "Red Network."

Members of this chain include some of the most beautiful and historical towns in Iberia, each one almost a museum in its own right, infused with Old World charm and dedicated to uncovering its Jewish past.

Mere mention of the names of these towns — Caceres, Cordoba, Girona, Hervas, Oviedo, Ribadavia, Segovia, Toledo, Tortosa, Tudela — recalls the former life in the Juderias, or Jewish neighborhoods, throughout Spain.

These networks have uncovered gravestones, a mikveh, Hebrew letters inscribed in church walls, former sites of synagogues, and hundreds of Jewish streets. They have erected plaques and statues to Jews who thrived here and contributed much to Spain as teachers, writers and poets, among them Maimonides, Nachmanides and Judah Halevi.

But this digging into the Jewish past is not limited to relics or museum displays. Concerts of Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish songs draw large audiences.

For example, in Hervas, in western Spain, a lecture on "Jewish Urbanistic Heritage," is held. In Toledo, in the El Transisto Synagogue, a dramatized reading of the "Songs of Songs" takes place. Training courses on "The Jewish Inheritance in the Network of Jewries" are conducted.

In terms of Jewish history and Jewish preservation, Girona is the crown jewel. At the top of its list of accomplishments and goals is the rebuilding of its Jewish quarter, or Call, which means an urban area inhabited by Jews.

With its labyrinth of alleyways and narrow passages, visitors feel the presence of a former Jewish community in one of Europe's best-preserved Jewish quarters. Located in the heart of the town's historical center, the narrow, cobblestoned street once was the main thoroughfare of the Jewish quarter, and was known in the 14th century as "Carrer Major del Call."

Girona was the first kabbalistic center in Spain and eventually became the most important kabbalistic and philosophical center of Western Europe. Known also as "the Mother Town of Israel," it was home to the great 12th-century sage Nachmanides, or Rabbi Moses Ben Nachman. Known by the acronym Ramban, he was the most outstanding kabbalist and talmudic authority of his day. Bonastruc ca Porta is Catalan for Nachmanides.

In 1263, Ramban represented the Crown's Jewish communities in the historic Barcelona Disputation with the convert from Judaism, the Dominican Pau Cristia — and won.

It is in the Call's streets that Nachmanides walked and prayed. There, the Municipality of Girona and other agencies and institutions created the Bonastruc ca Porta Center, whose director is the energetic Assumpcio Hosta i Rebes, historian and administrator of the "Red Network."

Under her guidance, the Museum of the History of the Jews of Catalonia, and a research facility called the Nachmanides Institute for Sephardic and Kabbalistic Studies were established. Assumpcio reports that 150,000 visitors toured the museum in 2000.

The City of Girona itself has contributed more than \$1 million to the restoration and the establishment of the museum. Funds have been received from the Spanish government, the European Union and The American Friends of the Girona Museum, which is based in New York.

The institute, which provides residences on the premises for scholars and historians, seeks funds to enlarge its library, its research facilities, its museum collection, its restorations, its public Hebrew classes and its forums and seminars.

Near Girona, on a windswept hillock in the town of Portbou at the French border, is the grave of and memorial to Walter Benjamin, the 20th-century German Jewish philosopher, writer and art reviewer who committed suicide in 1940 when he wrongly thought he would be returned to the Nazis in Vichy France.

He wrote that "it is more arduous to honor the memory of the nameless than that of the renowned."

Some might say that the work now being done in Spain, away from the beaten path, goes a long way toward honoring those nameless Jews exiled in 1492. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### U.N. to release video findings

The findings of a U.N. probe into the world body's handling of a videotape taken by peacekeepers the day after the abduction of three Israeli soldiers in October will be made public on Friday, the chief U.N. spokesman said.

The United Nations was left red-faced after first denying, and then acknowledging, the video's existence after repeated requests by Israel for any information in U.N. hands concerning the kidnapping.

### S. Africa Jews slam U.N. forum

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies criticized attempts to single out Israel for condemnation at the upcoming World Conference Against Racism, slated to start Aug. 31 in Durban, South Africa.

In a statement, the board condemned the "hypocrisy" implicit in the call for Israel to be labeled racist being made by countries that are themselves "guilty of blatant racial discrimination against religious minorities as well as being violators of accepted human rights within their borders."

The board also said the conference should "not be allowed to degenerate into a forum in which the enemies of Israel and the Jewish people can use their numerical preponderance to smear and isolate the Jewish state."

### Canada moves against Nazi

The Canadian Jewish Congress endorsed a decision by the nation's Cabinet to denaturalize a former interpreter for a Nazi unit that murdered thousands of Jews during World War II.

Denaturalization would likely be a prelude to deportation for Helmut Oberlander, a 77-year-old Ontario resident accused of lying about his wartime activities when he entered Canada after the war.

### Italian scientist honored

Scientist Rita Levi Montalcini, 92, who fled prewar Italy to escape fascist anti-Semitism and went on to win a Nobel Prize, was named a life senator for her scientific and social work.

She is only the second woman to be named a life senator, one of the highest honors bestowed by Italy. Born into a Jewish family in northeastern Italy in 1909, she won the Nobel Prize for medicine along with American Stanley Cohen in 1986.

### Colombia urged to find suspects

The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on the government of Colombia for help in determining the whereabouts of 11 suspected war criminals who emigrated there after World War II. The 11 are believed to have served in Nazi-era Lithuanian police units that persecuted and murdered Jews.

## Prague Jewish leaders may sue over charges of theft found in travel guide

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — Jewish leaders here are considering legal action over a book published in the United States claiming that huge sums of money "disappeared" from the Jewish community's coffers over a period of several years.

The allegation — which appears in the 1999 book "The Great Jewish Cities of Central and Eastern Europe: A Travel Guide and Resource Book to Prague, Warsaw, Cracow & Budapest" — was dismissed by the Prague Jewish community, which said its reputation was being damaged.

The book's author, New York-based writer Eli Valley, worked in Prague's community for several years organizing cultural and religious events until 1997.

In the book, he argued that Prague had become one of the wealthiest Jewish communities in Europe through money received from restituted properties and tourist revenues. He also wrote, "The enormous amount of capital flowing into the community has created unprecedented opportunities for corruption and mismanagement."

"It is an open secret in the Jewish Community that millions of Czech crowns disappear every year. The question remains as to how many individuals are involved in the 'disappearance.'"

One million Czech crowns is currently worth about \$25,000.

The chairman of the Prague Jewish Community, Tomas Jelinek, said that although the book was published two years ago, it had only recently been brought to his attention by a visitor from the United States. "We are now taking legal advice," Jelinek said.

"The statements in this book are untrue and are damaging the reputation of the Prague Jewish Community and its attempts to build an independent and strong Jewish community in Central Europe."

Jelinek said the community's finances have long been handled in a transparent manner. Since the fall of communism in 1989, the Prague Jewish Community "has always had democratic institutions in terms of checks and balances, such as an elected parliament and supervisory board, which were able to examine the financial management of the community," he said.

Jelinek also took issue with another statement in the book — that the Prague Jewish leadership had refused to open its financial records to the public.

"As the activities of the Prague Jewish Community have expanded over the past few years, it has required a more professional approach to its business," Jelinek said. "This is why this year, for the first time, we arranged an independent audit that was positive."

A further comment in the book that "unfathomable amounts of cash are disappearing while scores of Czech Holocaust survivors subsist in poverty" was also dismissed by Jelinek, who argued that the Prague Jewish Community had developed "very extensive projects" for survivors, including a day care center for the elderly, an old people's home and a home care service.

Valley, the son of a New York rabbi, expressed surprise that the community was contemplating legal action. "I have never heard anything but positive feedback about my book from Czech Jewry," he said.

Given the possibility of legal action, he refused further comment. □

## Pope, Arafat meet in Vatican

ROME (JTA) — Pope John Paul told Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat that Israel and the Palestinian Authority have to find a way to break the cycle of violence.

A Vatican statement issued after Thursday's 25-minute meeting said the pope lashed out at the "unheard-of violence, which continues to mow down victims, above all among the civilian and unarmed population."

The pope also said negotiations "with the help of the international community" were the only way to provide hope for peace. The Vatican statement made no reference to Arafat's call for international monitors. □

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

### Seniors go to see Chagall's art — and learn about Jews and Germany

By Michelle Dardashti

NEW YORK (JTA) — Albert Mozell and his wife, Bina, recently visited the Jewish Museum here to see an exhibition of paintings by Marc Chagall — but they got a lot more than just an organized tour.

When Germany's consul general in New York, Bernhard von der Planitz, rose to speak, the Mozells — and approximately 40 other New York seniors — realized that their visit was part of an attempt to improve German-Jewish relations.

"I've been to other things like this," audience member Raye Walker said. "When you pay only \$5 for something that's supposed to cost \$20, you get these types of things."

The seniors' trip was one of six coordinated recently for Jews — ranging from Holocaust survivors to Russian immigrants to teen-agers — by the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York and Germany's Dresdner Bank.

The bank is one of the participants in a multibillion-dollar German compensation fund for the more than 1 million Nazi-era slave and forced laborers.

Dresdner Bank is the primary sponsor of the exhibit, "Marc Chagall: Early Works From the Russian Collections," which features many paintings being shown for the first time in the United States.

A U.S. veteran of World War II, Mozell has conflicted feelings regarding Germany.

He has no desire to return there himself, but does not discourage Jews from visiting the country.

"It's not for me because the memories are still there, but the world can't go on feeling the way I do about Germany," Mozell said.

It's precisely this sentiment that motivates Harriet Mandel, director of the JCRC's commission on Israel and international concerns, whose relatives survived the Holocaust.

"We have been grappling with the consequences of the relationship between the Jewish community and Germany for over six decades," Mandel said.

Despite reservations earlier in her life, she now realizes that "it is in the best interests of the Jewish community to engage" in order to move beyond the Holocaust.

Von der Planitz, the diplomat, agreed.

The consul general said he is "filled with pride that Jews are coming back to live in Germany" — and that its special relationship with Israel "forms a cornerstone" of Germany's foreign policy.

During a question-and-answer session after von der Planitz's speech, one senior, Charlotte Rick, asked him what his government is doing to combat anti-Semitism in Germany today.

Von der Planitz responded that Germany is doing all it can, including prosecuting Holocaust deniers.

Rick shrugged and nodded, seeming partly satisfied with his answer.

"There is something very empowering about Jews sitting and having a dialogue over coffee with the German consul general and asking questions like, 'What are you doing about anti-Semitism, about nay-sayers?' " said Wendy Levinson, director of Jewish

programs for the Education Alliance at the 14th St. Y, where some of the seniors are members.

Susan Stern, a professor at the University of Frankfurt and an expert on modern Germany, also addressed the crowd.

Though Dresdner Bank's Nazi-era record is far from clean, she remarked, "at least they are up front in saying, Yes, we have an awful history, but we are doing something about it."

But Karen Laureano-Rikardsen, a spokeswoman for Dresdner Bank, downplayed the Jewish nature of the event, as well as the bank's sponsorship of an exhibit on display at New York's Yeshiva University Museum, emphasizing that Dresdner sponsors efforts for several communities in the New York area.

Despite her statement, however, the seniors had their own opinions about the bank's objectives.

"It's P.R., no question," Edith Ring said. "However, if it's to our benefit, who cares?"

After the refreshments and speeches, the seniors eventually got to tour the exhibit, which runs through Oct. 14.

By the end of the day, many in the group said their personal views about Germany's past and present hadn't changed.

"I thank the bank, but I still am dead-set against Germany, and I don't think they have changed their ways," Belle Lewitz said.

But many felt more positive about the future of German-Jewish relations. "I'm glad I came today," Rick said. "It's what we do with the young people now — you have to be hopeful sometimes. Besides, you can't have hate in your heart all the time. It makes you ugly." □

### Germany's Jewish Museum to get postage stamp of approval

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — German officials plan to issue a postage stamp to mark the September opening of Berlin's Jewish Museum.

In an announcement Tuesday, Germany's finance minister, Hans Eichel, called the upcoming occasion "worthy of a special stamp."

The museum will house a permanent exhibit focusing on 2,000 years of German-Jewish history.

It will display works of art, objects of everyday life, documents and multimedia presentations.

It is slated to have its opening gala Sept. 9.

The abstract design on the stamp depicts the new museum building of architect Daniel Libeskind.

The building, which represents a broken star of David, is covered in gray zinc panels pierced by jagged windows.

Libeskind has described it as both a "tortuous line" and "an emblem of hope."

Since the building opened to great critical acclaim in February 1999, it has drawn some 350,000 visitors — even though no exhibits were yet on display.

The stamp was chosen by a jury from 10 entries and will go on sale Sept. 5.

The stamp has yet to be unveiled.

But one person who has seen the stamp told JTA it has the effect of "lightning, in the emotional sense. I knew about the museum before, but the stamp made me think about" what the museum's creators are trying to accomplish.

"It is not just a museum. It is a work of art." □