



Daily News Bulletin

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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Gaza Strip closure renewed

Israel renewed a full closure on the Gaza Strip. Sunday night's move, spurred by security warnings, came 24 hours after Israel lifted a closure on the territories as a gesture coinciding with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's visit to the region.

Palestinians killed in Gaza

Israeli troops killed two armed Palestinians planting a bomb in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli army said the two were planting the device near a tunnel used by Palestinians to smuggle weapons into the southern part of the strip.

Palestinians said an 18-year-old also was killed by Israeli fire during exchanges of fire in Khan Yunis.

Lawmakers back 'road map'

Several lawmakers have signed a letter to President Bush in support of the "road map" toward Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The letter, circulated by Rep. Lois Capps (D-Calif.) and signed by 20 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, applauds the release of the plan and expresses hope that Palestinian reforms will lead to Middle East peace.

ADL appeals privacy ruling

The Anti-Defamation League is appealing after a U.S. court upheld a \$9.75 million jury award against the group.

Last month's ruling upheld a 2000 decision against the group's Mountain States chapter and its director for violating the Federal Wiretap Act and defaming a Colorado couple publicly accused of anti-Semitism. The Quigleys had been feuding with Mitchell and Candace Aronson, Jewish neighbors who in 1994 asked the ADL to intervene in the dispute.

The regional ADL office held a news conference in support of the Aronsons, who said the Quigleys were conducting a vicious anti-Semitic campaign to force them from the neighborhood.

The Aronsons secretly had taped cordless phone conversations made by the Quigleys, who talked about putting fake oven doors on the Aronson home, a reference to the Holocaust; dousing their children in gasoline; and burning crosses on the Aronsons' lawn. The Quigleys said the comments were made in jest.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Jews weigh in as French Muslims challenge law on church and state

By Philip Carmel

PARIS (JTA) — When French Chief Rabbi Joseph Sitruk wrote recently to President Jacques Chirac expressing his continued support for the secular values of the French Republic, he was doing no more than following a tradition his predecessors have practiced for the last 200 years.

Going back to the French Revolution, those secular principles have been fiercely supported by the Jewish community. In more recent times, nothing has so embodied them as the country's 1905 law guaranteeing the strict separation of church and state.

Now some see the law as antiquated — because, they say, it has failed to meet the demands of faith groups whose history in France is somewhat more recent than that of the Jewish community.

Many French Muslims, for example, believe the law does not meet their needs, while attempts by the government to adapt to the country's new demographic realities have been regarded as undermining the foundations of the 1905 law.

Controversial in its day, the law was passed during a period of conflict between the Catholic Church and the Third Republic, and since then has set the tone in firmly restricting religion to the private domain. Vigorously opposed at its inception by Pope Pius X and by the French Catholic episcopacy, the law was welcomed by the country's minority Protestant and Jewish faiths, who saw it as the protector of their own freedom of conscience and religious practice.

Such support from the Jewish community has continued until today, with French Jews regularly prefixing statements with *plaudits* for the secular nature of the state.

But while churches and synagogues — and their various secondary institutions such as schools — predate the law, some Muslims claim they lack many of the basic facilities to enable them to practice their faith. Moreover, they say, the French state should fill in the gap by providing and funding those facilities.

Both the support and the funding of religious institutions strike at the heart of the 1905 law, however.

There is a chronic shortage of mosques in inner city areas, the Muslim community says, leaving many Muslims to pray in rundown basements and garages.

The question remains whether the state or local municipalities should fund the construction of mosques, a move which would be illegal under the 1905 law.

In addition, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy is interested in involving the state in another area seen as problematic within French Islam — namely, the fact that around 80 percent of Muslim religious leaders in France do not speak French, and as many as two thirds of them are not citizens. This provides fertile ground for the growth of extremist views in the community, Sarkozy believes.

Moreover, it has led him to call for some form of state backing for training imams, something clearly incompatible with the law.

Sarkozy is still unsure exactly how to square the circle.

"We don't need a new law to create an institute for French imams," Sarkozy said, while offering Muslims another alternative.

"A rabbinical institute exists, and that is financed by the Jewish religious community," he said. "The republic will not finance imams. As to financing mosques, there is a need to explore possible agreements between religious and cultural associations."

According to Rabbi Gilles Bernheim, who heads the Torah and Society department

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel releases prisoners

Israel has released approximately 100 Palestinian prisoners.

The prisoners are being released as part of confidence-building measures before an expected meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas.

Officials in Jerusalem said the prisoners released were those whose terms were almost over and who were not involved in terrorism.

Israel, Palestinians talk security

Israel and the Palestinians have resumed security talks. Maj. Gen. Amos Gilad, coordinator of Israeli activities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, reportedly met over the weekend with Palestinian officials, including the minister for security affairs, Mohammed Dahlan, Israel Radio reported.

Egypt still backing Arafat

Yasser Arafat is "the leader of the Palestinian people," Egypt's foreign minister told U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell. Ahmed Maher said Monday that Egypt will continue to deal with the Palestinian Authority president. The United States refuses to deal with Arafat, and deals instead with the P.A.'s prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas.

Israeli attorney to face charges

Israel's attorney general will press charges against an attorney who leaked a document relating to a scandal linked to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The charges relate to a \$1.5 million loan Sharon's sons received from a South African businessman. Liora Glatt-Berkovich, an attorney in the Tel Aviv Prosecutor's Office who leaked the document shortly before Israel's national elections in January, said she acted out of ideological and moral reasons.

of the Paris Consistoire, the umbrella body for religious Jews, questioning the financing of mosques could threaten free religious expression.

Bernheim, the rabbi of Paris' central Synagogue de la Victoire, said placing the state in a position where it might fund religious institutions would make it difficult to prevent the state from influencing the religious direction of those bodies.

Moreover, Bernheim asked, if the state began funding Muslim places of worship, "wouldn't Islamists of a more extreme nature start financing other social and cultural activities?" In fact, he said, Sarkozy already has opened the door to Saudi funding of Muslim institutions in France.

"Do we seriously believe that the Saudi fundamentalists will provide financial support without asking for anything in return?" he asked.

Recognizing the need to better integrate France's 5 million Muslims into the general society, Sarkozy recently set up the Council for French Muslims — with the implied quid pro quo that recognition and acceptance on the part of the Muslims would go hand in hand with state support for Muslim institutions.

Sarkozy has denied that his support for the council threatens the 1958 secular constitution of the Fifth Republic, which built upon the principles of the 1905 law.

"The 1905 law said that the republic guaranteed freedom for all religions, and there is no question of touching it," Sarkozy told the popular daily, *Le Parisien*.

"We must not have a sectarian vision of the secular nature of the state, which should not be seen as the enemy of religion. Rather, by working with leaders from all the religions, we can make those principles into a living reality," he said.

Conditioned by its own history, France has tended to interpret its secular constitution much more radically than countries such as the United States.

For example, the 1905 law proscribes state funding and support for religion, but even outward displays of religious identification have been considered threatens to the values of the republic.

Such ideas are shared by Jewish religious leaders. Sitruk explained in his letter to Chirac that while he didn't consider the wearing of a yarmulke as an "ostentatious" religious sign, he accepted that Jewish children need not wear a yarmulke while attending state schools.

Paradoxically, Sitruk is generally regarded as being on the conservative wing of Orthodox Judaism, though he did tell Chirac that he preferred to remove his own yarmulke while voting. However, Sitruk was critical of the tendency of state schools to ignore some of the more basic needs of Jewish students, for example by scheduling examinations on Jewish festivals.

The chief rabbi's view, accepted without a murmur by the Jewish community, has contrasted sharply with demands by certain Muslim leaders that state schools allow Muslim girls to wear head coverings in class.

The law traditionally has accepted "nonostentatious" insignia in schools — such as crosses and Stars of David — which are used in a nonproselytizing manner. But many teachers and school directors have objected to Muslim girls arriving at school with their heads covered.

Moreover, teachers at a school in Lyon recently went on strike when their school director allowed Muslim girls to cover their heads.

The debate around the head covering also has led to claims that the 1905 law is insufficient to deal with a new situation in which the Islamic scarf is regarded as more "ostentatious" than the more traditional insignia worn in schools.

France's Constitutional Court ruled that head coverings could be allowed. But Education Minister Luc Ferry said he opposed it in state schools, while other leading politicians have called for legislation to formally ban it.

Last week, former Education Minister Jack Lang of the Socialist Party said he would table legislation in the National Assembly to ban "all exterior signs of religious affiliation within the school framework."

The ban would affect all religions, Lang said, and would "explicitly target the kipah and the cross, as well as the Muslim scarf."

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin would not say whether he would support the proposed bill, but he made his position clear. "Teachers have no Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or Muslim students in their class. First and foremost, they have French youngsters who are all part of a republican school," Raffarin said. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Harvard center investigates donor

Harvard's divinity school may return a \$2.5 million gift from the president of the United Arab Emirates with ties to a controversial Arab think tank.

The executive director of the Zayed Center for Coordination and Follow-up once denounced Jews as the "enemies of all nations."

In addition, the Web site for the center, which is described as a "fulfillment of the vision" of Sheik Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, features a list of speakers including a Holocaust denier and one who alleges that the United States was behind the Sept. 11 attacks.

A spokesman for the school said a researcher recently had investigated the ties, but the spokesman declined to discuss the researcher's findings, according to newspaper reports from Boston.

French rabbi scandal deepens

A member of a Paris synagogue whose rabbi is accused of staging his own stabbing last January wrote a threatening letter to the rabbi shortly after the incident, police believe.

The man, whose identity has not been divulged, was arrested and appeared in court last week, the *Le Monde* daily reported Monday. Gabriel Farhi, the rabbi of Paris' Liberal Synagogue, was treated for knife wounds following an alleged stabbing outside his synagogue on Jan. 3. Around two weeks later, he received a threatening letter regretting "that the job had not been completed."

Bias attack in Germany?

A German man says several men attacked him on a bus in central Berlin earlier this month because he was wearing a Star of David pendant.

Police spokesperson Martin Kobbe told JTA that the victim, 56, who was brought to a hospital and released, is not Jewish. The man is not filing a complaint, Kobbe said.

Israelis monitor soccer racism

A new campaign hopes to crack down on racism at Israeli soccer games. The New Israel Fund program uses Jewish and Arab volunteers to monitor racist incitement at Israeli matches. At the end of each week's games, an official report on racism in the stands is published.

N.Y. federation helps needy

The UJA-Federation of New York launched a program to help Jews hurt by the economic downswing.

The federation allocated \$500,000 to help families pay for Jewish needs, including day school and yeshiva tuition. Money also will go for a job development program to help unemployed Jews find jobs.

European legislator has new plan to resolve issues of looted artwork

By Jonathan Fisk

BRUSSELS (JTA) — A member of the European Parliament is proposing that governments across the Continent adopt common laws and standards to solve the problem of Nazi-looted art.

The proposal is being drafted by Willy De Clercq, a former deputy prime minister of Belgium, who also suggests setting up a special tribunal to resolve disputes over looted art.

"My action might come across as being unexpected, but it's time that we deal with this issue, once and for all," De Clercq told JTA.

If so, it would be the first time that looted art has been addressed at the E.U. level.

De Clercq's proposal comes as Jewish leaders are rethinking their efforts on art restitution.

"Sadly, the general performance in the field of art recovery has been the least effective of all restitution," said Rabbi Israel Singer, chairman of the World Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Restitution Organization and the Claims Conference.

Singer said the WJC, WJRO and the Claims Conference are reassessing their "entire program" on the subject.

The problem of looted art has been placed on the agenda of the WJC's next executive meeting, scheduled to begin May 18.

Singer said he was eager to work with De Clercq to create a uniform standard for both old and new members of the European Union.

In most European countries, courts decide disputes relating to stolen goods during the Nazi period.

"The key problem is that different laws are applied in different countries," said Charles Goldstein of the Commission for Art Recovery, a U.S.-based organization that has pressed European governments to find a common solution.

"If a property was stolen in Budapest, dropped in Austria or taken to Russia, then the claimant's request depends on the law of the country where it was found," he explained. "The E.U. can change this by creating common machinery for dispute resolution."

But De Clercq's draft is only a first step in the long decision-making process. Before the initiative can become reality, the project must be approved by the European Parliament. Then both the E.U.'s executive body and the majority of governments must adopt it.

Thousands of major artworks still have gaps in their provenance that are traceable to the wartime period. Some of them circulate in museum collections.

As a result, individual claimants, museums and art dealers still face a bewildering array of legal problems to recover their property.

When the European Union adds 10 new countries next year, the problem likely will become even more complex and complicated.

According to De Clercq, around 170 cases are pending today in courts across Europe, including Russia.

All face the same legal problems and a cumbersome procedure. "Every time, you need to establish the origin of a work of art," he explained. "You must then assess how to account for the legal gap in ownership."

But that's not the end of the story: It's then necessary to identify the "good faith" purchaser and assess his or her rights.

Experts have explored several possible solutions.

For example, governments could open their archives — and some are pressing the idea of creating an international database that would facilitate research and provide a way for victims to list lost items.

Asked if he has encountered opposition to his ideas, De Clercq said other members of the Parliament haven't expressed much interest in the topic.

"I am particularly surprised at the lack of response from the Jewish communities, who have not reacted to my proposal," he said — although he admitted that the project might still be too new to have attracted much attention. □

As Israel celebrates its 55th anniversary, JTA has asked prominent Israelis from across the political spectrum to discuss the challenges facing the Jewish state. This is the fourth in the series.

CHALLENGES AT 55

As gaps widen in Israeli society, it's time to instill some pluralism

By Alice Shalvi

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The major overall challenge we face today is that of returning to the ideals of a democratic pluralistic Jewish state that found their expression in the noble words of Israel's Declaration of Independence.

What its authors envisaged was a state in which all citizens would enjoy equality of status and rights, regardless of race, religion or sex.

Unfortunately, not only has this idyllic condition never yet been attained; on the contrary, it seems to be even further from reality as economic and social gaps widen, hostility between different ethnic groups increases and new fissures appear — for example, between “native” Israelis and foreign workers, Jewish citizens and non-Jewish immigrants, haves and have-nots.

The need to educate all Israeli citizens and residents in the basic principles of democracy and pluralism, in the Jewish tradition of “love your neighbor as yourself,” is paramount.

The challenge is to find appropriate means of inculcating these principles.

Development of formal and informal frameworks, as well as development of a cadre of leaders who will, both by precept and example, help to put good intentions into effect — these are vital to our future.

Given the current dismal state of our economy, another challenge is how to restore the ideal of “avodah ivrit,” Jewish labor, which used to be the pride of the yishuv, as Israel's pre-state society is known.

This means structural change in the economy — decent wages and working conditions for all, development of public projects that will provide employment (as the WPA did in the United States in the 1930s), good vocational training and re-training — and a greater degree of social justice in determining the salary levels of senior executives and government employees in the public sector.

Economic prosperity will not be restored until we make significant cuts in expenditures on military equipment, on settlements across the Green Line and on the construction of by-pass roads and tunnels that serve the settler population and increasingly deface what is left of Israel's “green and pleasant land.”

In other words, the peace process must be jump-started again, based on a readiness to make major sacrifices.

We also have to relate urgently and seriously to the increased pollution of our soil, our water and our air.

There is much to do, and time is short. We have to band together to ensure that the next 55 years see progress, rather than regression.

We need honest, dedicated, selfless leadership — and we need far more women in positions of decision-making and policy determination. We need an end to male domination based on military prowess.

As for the Jewishness of the Jewish state: We need equal status and rights for all streams of Judaism and an increase in Jewish

education, even for those who are not religiously observant.

Those are the challenges. Now, to work! □

Alice Shalvi, a feminist activist and educator, was born in Germany in 1926 and educated in England from 1934 to 1949. She has lived and worked in Jerusalem ever since.

High-tech lawsuit could become new version of David vs. Goliath

By Buzzy Gordon

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Two Israelis who invented a wireless game technology hope they'll become a high-tech version of David battling a computing Goliath.

Michael Kagan and Ian Solomon immigrated to Israel from England in the 1970s, eventually becoming business partners in the early 1990s.

Their latest company, Peer-to-Peer Systems, is suing Palm Inc., the Silicon Valley personal digital assistant giant, and AOL-backed Cybiko Inc., which has developed an operating system for its own brand of mobile handheld devices, for patent infringement.

Peer-to-Peer filed suit in U.S. District Court in Delaware this January alleging that Palm's use of its PDAs and clone PDAs for multiple-player games, played wirelessly and interactively on two or more devices, directly infringes a 1995 technology that Kagan and Solomon patented in 1997.

Peer-to-Peer also claims that Palm's promotion of multiplayer games in selling its PDAs and clone PDAs induces patent infringement.

“Unfortunately, the general feeling of many large corporations vis-a-vis individual inventors is that the latter do not have the resources to protect their patents,” Kagan says. “These companies often decide simply to infringe the patent — perhaps inadvertently at first, but later deliberately — in order to avoid paying anything at all to the rightful owners of the technology.”

Peer-to-Peer's attorney, Stephen Sulzer, said the Israeli company took action after settlement talks with Palm broke down.

“Peer-to-Peer maintains a policy of vigorously enforcing its intellectual property rights against infringers,” Sulzer said.

Palm has not responded publicly to the lawsuit, but spokeswoman Marlene Somsak said the lawsuit is “without merit, and we will defend against it vigorously.”

For Kagan and Solomon, it's been a long road from Britain to the U.S. courts.

After opening a small Jerusalem office in the early 1990s, they began collaborating with Yissum, the commercial arm of the Hebrew University's prolific research departments.

While working on bringing other peoples' inventions to market, Kagan and Solomon began to tinker with their own idea: a device and platform allowing multiple users to communicate with each other wirelessly and simultaneously. The technology could have a number of uses, from playing games to simulations used in corporate training programs.

In April 1997, the U.S. Patent Office granted Kagan and Solomon a patent for the technology that allows multiple players to play computer games by wireless networking on devices such as play-station consoles.

Their company licenses its technology to producers and vendors of PDAs, handheld computers, cell phones and wireless gaming devices. □