



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 81, No. 208

Tuesday, November 11, 2003

86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Snag in prisoner deal?

Hezbollah reportedly is insisting that a prisoner swap with Israel include a man who killed four Israelis in 1979. But Israel says Samir Kuntar is not among the 400 Arab security prisoners who could be released as part of a deal, in which Israel would receive businessman Elhanan Tannenbaum and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers, all kidnapped by Hezbollah.

Israel insists it will not release prisoners who have committed deadly attacks. Israel's Cabinet narrowly approved the exchange deal Sunday.

Security forces probe baby food

Israel's Mossad and Shin Bet security services are investigating possible sabotage in the deaths of infants linked to kosher baby food.

A lack of Vitamin B1, or thiamine, in Remedia, a soy-based formula, is believed to be responsible for the deaths of three babies, even though the product lists B1 among the ingredients.

Two class-action lawsuits have been filed in Israel against the German food company Humana Milchunion, which is majority owned by the American H.J. Heinz Co.

Jewish ambulance services went out on Shabbat in Jewish neighborhoods in New York to warn families about the problem, and a baby who was fed the formula has been hospitalized in Boston.

Fights at Kristallnacht ceremony

Clashes erupted at a ceremony in Vienna commemorating the 65th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

Sunday night's clashes erupted after protesters at a commemorative event waved Palestinian flags and yelled anti-Israel slogans. The ceremony marked the night of Nov. 9-10, 1938, when Nazi-inspired rioters set synagogues and Jewish stores ablaze in Germany and Austria.

Israel makes Olympics gesture

Israel offered to help patrol Greek waters during next year's Olympics. Israel's offer includes boats that could help Greece prevent terrorists from entering the country during next summer's games in Athens, The Associated Press reported.

Israel is part of a seven-nation group advising Greece on security matters for the games, slated for Aug. 13-29, 2004.

In rare Jewish appearance, George Soros says Jews and Israel cause anti-Semitism

By Uriel Heilman

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's not often that George Soros, the billionaire financier and philanthropist, makes an appearance before a Jewish audience.

It's even rarer for him to use such an occasion to talk about Israel, Jews and his own role in effecting political change.

So when Soros stepped to the podium Nov. 5 to address those issues at a conference of the Jewish Funders Network, audience members were listening carefully.

Many were surprised by what they heard.

When asked about anti-Semitism in Europe, Soros, who is Jewish, said European anti-Semitism is the result of the policies of Israel and the United States.

"There is a resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe. The policies of the Bush administration and the Sharon administration contribute to that," Soros said. "It's not specifically anti-Semitism, but it does manifest itself in anti-Semitism as well. I'm critical of those policies."

"If we change that direction, then anti-Semitism also will diminish," he said. "I can't see how one could confront it directly."

That is a point made by Israel's most vociferous critics, whom some Jewish activists charge with using anti-Zionism as a guise for anti-Semitism.

The billionaire financier said he, too, bears some responsibility for the new anti-Semitism, citing last month's speech by Malaysia's outgoing prime minister, Mahathir Mohammad, who said, "Jews rule the world by proxy."

"I'm also very concerned about my own role because the new anti-Semitism holds that the Jews rule the world," said Soros, whose projects and funding have influenced governments and promoted various political causes around the world.

"As an unintended consequence of my actions," he said, "I also contribute to that image."

In the past, Mahathir has singled out Soros and other "Jewish financiers" for financial pressure that Mahathir said has harmed Malaysia's economy.

After the conference, some Jewish leaders who heard about the speech reacted angrily to Soros' remarks.

"Let's understand things clearly: Anti-Semitism is not caused by Jews; it's caused by anti-Semites," said Elan Steinberg, senior adviser at the World Jewish Congress. "One can certainly be critical of Bush policy or Sharon policy, but any deviation from the understanding of the real cause of anti-Semitism is not merely a disservice, but a historic lie."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, called Soros' comments "absolutely obscene."

"He buys into the stereotype," Foxman said. "It's a simplistic, counterproductive, biased and bigoted perception of what's out there. It's blaming the victim for all of Israel's and the Jewish people's ills."

Furthermore, Foxman said, "If he sees that his position of being who he is may contribute to the perception of anti-Semitism, what's his solution to himself — that he give up his money? That he close his mouth?"

Associates said Soros' appearance Nov. 5 was the first they could ever recall in which the billionaire, a Hungarian-born U.S. Jew who escaped the Holocaust by fleeing to London as a child, had spoken in front of a Jewish group or attended a Jewish function.

The one-day meeting on funding in Israel, which took place at the Harvard Club in

MIDEAST FOCUS

A last meal

A Palestinian suicide bomber who blew up a Haifa restaurant last month ate there before exploding. Details of the Oct. 4 attack at Maxim restaurant by Islamic Jihad bomber Hanadi Jaradat were released Monday as the Haifa District Court indicted an Israeli Arab who drove Jaradat to the restaurant.

The terrorist told the driver that she wanted to visit her father in a Hadera hospital, but on the way redirected him to Maxim's, where the two ate lunch, the driver's lawyer told Israel Radio. The woman paid and then detonated a bomb belt she was wearing under her clothes, killing 23 diners and injuring scores of others, including the driver. The driver is pleading innocent to charges of aiding the attack.

Palestinian blasts U.S. policy

The Bush administration is a "fascist" government motivated by hatred of Arabs, a key Palestinian official charged. Speaking to the Saudi daily Al-Jazeera on Sunday, the Palestinian Authority's national security adviser, Jibril Rajoub, called on the Arab world to "mobilize all energies and capabilities" to "face the American aggression" in Iraq. Palestinian officials told the Jerusalem Post that Rajoub's comments embarrassed the Palestinian Authority, which is trying to mend fences with the United States.

Israel to compete with Suez?

Israel will build a railroad linking Ashdod and Eilat that could compete with the Suez Canal, Benjamin Netanyahu said. Speaking at an investment conference in Tel Aviv, the Israeli finance minister said the railroad would allow Israel to transfer goods from Eilat, its southern port, to Europe.

Netanyahu also pledged that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government would privatize all government-owned companies except those in the defense sector.



Daily News Bulletin

Howard E. Friedman, *President*

Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*

Lisa Hostein, *Editor*

Michael S. Arnold, *Managing Editor*

Lenore A. Silverstein, *Finance and Administration Director*

Paula Simmonds, *Marketing and Development Director*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

New York, was limited mostly to representatives of Jewish philanthropic foundations.

After Soros' speech, Michael Steinhardt, the real-estate magnate and Jewish philanthropist who arranged for Soros to address the group, said in an interview that Soros' views do not reflect those of most Jewish millionaires or philanthropists.

He also pointed out that this was Soros' first speech to a Jewish audience.

Steinhardt approached the lectern and interrupted Soros immediately after his remarks on anti-Semitism.

"George Soros does not think Jews should be hated any more than they deserve to be," Steinhardt said by way of clarification, eliciting chuckles from the audience.

Steinhardt then gave the lectern back to Soros, who said he had something to add to his remarks on the issue of anti-Semitism. Soros then paused to ask if there were any journalists in the room.

When he learned that there were, Soros withheld further comment.

Mark Charendoff, president of the group that hosted the conference, said he was pleased overall with the Soros event.

"We found him to be enormously frank, candid and generous with his time," Charendoff said. "I would be delighted if Mr. Soros would bring his passion, his brilliance and his resources to a range of different causes that are important to the Jewish community."

Charendoff is not alone.

Regardless of what they think of his politics, most Jewish activists likely would welcome Soros' participation in the world of Jewish philanthropy.

Though he's ranked as the 28th richest person in the United States by Forbes magazine — with a fortune valued at \$7 billion — Soros has given relatively little money to Jewish causes.

Soros' first known funding of a Jewish group came in 1997, when his Open Society Institute's Emma Lazarus Fund gave \$1.3 million to the Council of Jewish Federations, and when Soros gave another \$1.3 million to the Jewish Fund for Justice, an anti-poverty group.

As much as Jews may not like what Soros has to say — at the Nov. 5 meeting, he called for "regime change" in the United States and talked of funding projects in "Palestine," among other political initiatives — they are eager to get Soros involved in giving to Jewish causes.

"In many ways, this was an introduction for Soros," Charendoff said. "He remarked to me how impressed he was with the quality of the people he met. We can only hope that this was a beginning of an engagement with the Jewish funding world."

Soros said he has not given much to Jewish or Israel-related causes because Jews take care of their own, so that his financial clout is better directed elsewhere.

Steinhardt tried to correct him on that point, saying the field of Jewish giving is not as crowded as Soros thinks.

"Even if we were a crowded field," Steinhardt told Soros, "I'm sure we could make room for you."

During his speech, Soros announced that he would support the "Geneva accord," an unofficial Middle East peace plan proposed by two out-of-office politicians, Israel's Yossi Beilin and Palestinian Yasser Abed Rabbo.

That plan envisions two states along pre-1967 borders and a shared Jerusalem, and is vague on the demand that Palestinian refugees from 1948 be allowed to return to Israel.

It was not clear whether Soros' support of the plan would involve funding. Beilin's office did not return a call seeking comment. □

Arafat diverts money to private account

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Yasser Arafat reportedly has diverted \$800 million in Palestinian aid money to a private account for his family in Paris.

CBS' "60 Minutes" program reported Sunday that the Palestinian Authority president gives \$100,000 a month in Palestinian aid money to his wife and daughter, both of whom live in Paris.

P.A. Finance Minister Salam Fayyad, a fiscal reformer, reportedly assisted CBS in the report. □

JEWISH WORLD

Italians mixed on Jews

More than two-thirds of Italians believe Israel has a right to exist, though more than half have little sympathy for it. But 22 percent of those surveyed in a new poll say Jews aren't "real Italians" and 51 percent said Jews have a different mentality than Italians.

Zyklon B firm files for bankruptcy

The company that produced the gas used at Nazi death camps filed for bankruptcy.

During World War II, an IG Farben subsidiary produced Zyklon B gas, which was used in Nazi gas chambers. The pre-World War II chemical company also built a plant on the outskirts of the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland to produce artificial rubber and synthetic gasoline, mostly using slave laborers from Auschwitz.

Study: Don't cut circumcision

Circumcision has significant health benefits for both men and women, a new Australian study says. Circumcision protects men from HIV and lowers the chance of cervical cancer in their partners, researchers at Melbourne University said.

Following a report from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians — which said there was little benefit, but a chance of harm, in circumcision — the rate fell to 10 percent of males born in Australia.

In the United States, the American Academy of Pediatrics found the procedure's potential health benefits are "not significant enough" to recommend the routine circumcision of newborns.

Arrests in Czech desecration

Czech police recently arrested two youths for allegedly painting Nazi symbols on a memorial commemorating victims of a Nazi death march.

Police said they made the arrests after finding an SS symbol, a swastika and a Star of David scrawled on the monument in the town of Krupka.

Bowling for Jerusalem

Bowlers raised \$40,000 in New York in memory of an American-born doctor killed in a Jerusalem terrorist attack Sept. 9.

About 250 bowlers turned out Sunday in Manhattan for the second annual Bowl-a-thon for Israel, with proceeds going to the new emergency room at Jerusalem's Shaare Zedek hospital, dedicated in memory of Dr. David Applebaum. Applebaum, who was killed along with his daughter and five others in the bombing at Jerusalem's Cafe Hillel, was director of emergency services at Shaare Zedek.

Bowl-a-thon organizer Elie Haller said donations to the cause can still be made at the event's Web site, www.bowl4israel.org.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Discovery of pornography roils Prague's troubled Jewish school

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — Prague's only Jewish school has been plunged into crisis following the discovery of hard-core pornography hidden on the school's Internet server.

Police are investigating the find, which involves sexually explicit images downloaded from as far back as December. The material was found some weeks ago by the school's new Web site administrator.

An unnamed senior teacher recently was fired following the discovery at the Lauder Jewish community school, which houses both a high school and an elementary school in a single building. But the move sparked an angry reaction from the school's teachers, who claim that their colleague had nothing to do with the material.

More than 20 teachers of the school's teaching staff of 28 went on strike last week to protest the dismissal, claiming that a Web site administrator previously connected to the school had claimed responsibility for the pornography.

The protesters are calling on the school principal, Vera Dvorakova, to resign.

"We are protesting because the teacher who was dismissed was not responsible for the material that was on the server," teacher Katerina Dejmalova said. "We want Mrs. Dvorakova to resign and a new principal to be appointed."

Dvorakova was not available for comment.

The issue has made it to the highest levels of Prague's Jewish community, which founded the school in 1997. Senior Jewish community representatives voted earlier last week not to remove Dvorakova from the school, which is partly funded by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation.

The teachers, who say they have the support of the vast majority of pupils, agreed to halt their strike temporarily after learning that George Ban, vice president and CEO of the Lauder foundation, will visit Prague this week to try to resolve the crisis.

This is the second major crisis to engulf the school in recent months. Last April, dozens of students, teachers and parents demonstrated outside the Jewish community's headquarters in a heated dispute over the selection of Dvorakova as principal.

The demonstrators claimed that the city's Jewish leaders had imposed their own choice of principal, and suggested that the selection process had not been handled fairly. They also called for "stability" at the school, which has had four principals since the start of the school session last year.

Jewish community insiders say the disputes at the school reflect a wider crisis in the community leadership.

"There has been a lot of division in the community this past year," said one senior community member who spoke on condition of anonymity. "This issue of the pornography in the school is only going to make matters worse."

In a statement released two weeks ago, the foundation said it took the matter very seriously.

"Though it has not been proved that pornography data in the school computer net reached children or students, the foundation considers the very existence of these data at the school extremely seriously," the statement said. "The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation supports steps preventing school youth" from accessing "damaging visual materials, and measures aimed at the identification of offenders."

Prague Jewish Community chairman Tomas Jelinek said Dvorakova had acted in the students' best interests. Though there was no direct evidence that the dismissed teacher had accessed the pornographic material, he had been held responsible as a senior member of the staff, Jelinek said.

"Mrs. Dvorakova acted according to Czech laws and sought appropriate legal and expert advice," he said.

Jelinek said it was unfortunate that the teachers had decided to go on strike over the dismissal, saying the pupils "should not be held ransom" by the teachers.

"On the other hand," he continued, "the Lauder School can be praised for their bravery in acting so strongly against this dangerous material. This school cares about its kids." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

After long journey, Torah curtain returns to its German Jewish roots

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — For a Torah curtain, it certainly has come a long way.

Almost exactly 65 years to the day after Kristallnacht, the curtain, or parochet — which once belonged to a congregation of German Jewish exiles in New York — now covers the Torah ark in one of Germany's newest synagogues.

It is a poignant sign of Jewish revival in a country that, not too long ago, symbolized the death of European Jewry.

On Nov. 15, a Reform congregation in Munich, Congregation Beth Shalom, will formally dedicate its new quarters. The green velvet curtain with gold letters will find its permanent home there.

"We will have a celebratory service," said Jan Muehlstein, president of the congregation and of the Union of Progressive Jews in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The arrival of the Torah curtain, which once graced a New York synagogue of Jewish emigres from Munich, is heralded almost universally as a good sign. And it is especially fitting that it is to be dedicated just after the commemoration of the pogrom in Germany that presaged the Holocaust.

On Nov. 9-10 1938, hundreds of synagogues were destroyed across Germany and Austria in a night called Kristallnacht, or night of broken glass.

Today, Jewish life in Germany is growing again.

New synagogues have been built across the country to accommodate a population that has tripled to more than 100,000 in the last 12 years, with the arrival of Jews from the former Soviet Union. New synagogues need Torahs. And Torahs need arks — and pointers and covers and curtains.

The discovery of this curtain, say some, is a sign of destiny.

Berlin Jewish artist Anna Adam happened upon it by coincidence last summer at a flea market in Berlin.

Adam had been scouring the market for material for her latest project when a stall with old Communist flags caught her eye.

She inspected the stall more closely, and among the heavy red silk banners printed with Lenin's visage, she saw a musty, dusty green curtain with Hebrew embroidery.

Adam asked the Russian saleswoman what it was. "They said, 'Oh, it's something Jewish probably.' I thought perhaps it was stolen from Eastern Europe."

Adam contacted Rabbi Walter Rothschild and his wife, Jacqueline, who live in Berlin. When they arrived at the market, the stand was closed.

"But next morning the stand was back again," she said, and the Torah curtain was there, too.

Rothschild, who works at Beth Shalom and another Reform synagogue in the city of Koeln, took one look at the inscription, and "my first thought was it had been stolen," said Rothschild, whose parents emigrated from Germany to England before he was born.

The label said it was from Congregation Beth Hillel in New York City, "dedicated in memory of a revered rebbetzin," Rothschild said. He resolved to find that congregation.

"It was one of those things you have to rescue," he said in an interview. "At any rate, it had to be returned to Jewish hands."

Adam bargained down the price.

Jacqueline Rothschild brought the curtain home and repaired it. Walter Rothschild researched the curtain's past, finding that Congregation Beth Hillel had been dissolved three years ago, its accouterments distributed among members and other synagogues.

The congregation had been founded in 1939, the year after Kristallnacht. Most of its founding members came from Munich.

According to former member Erich Bloch, who described the congregation's history in the Aufbau newspaper in August 2002, the first High Holiday services in 1940 were presided over by the former chief rabbi of Munich, Leo Baerwald, and held in a local movie theater. A large group of Jews from Nuremberg joined the congregation with their rabbi, Isaak Heilbrun, in 1941.

In 1948, the congregation dedicated its own sanctuary. In 1957, they held their first memorial service for Kristallnacht.

A vibrant Jewish congregation thus grew, proud of its German roots but grateful to the country that took them in.

"We had a lot of members," recalled New Yorker Fay Blank, 71, in a telephone interview. Her husband, William, 86, is a former president of the synagogue. "Men and women never sat together," she said. "And later we got a very Orthodox rabbi and they built a mechitzah," a barrier separating men and women.

German identity was very strong among the congregants, said Blank, who comes from Lucerne, Switzerland. Her husband is from Fuerth, Germany.

"The rabbi gave sermons one week in German, the next week in English," she said. They sang German "nigunim," or Jewish melodies, and while they had an organ, they used it only for weddings and not on the Sabbath.

The members did not talk too much about what happened in Germany during the war, she said. "The people were so busy. They had started a new life in this country and they all made it," she said. "German Jews are very ambitious."

Eventually, the generation of founders left New York or died. The congregation grew smaller. It became difficult to get a minyan together. The final Sabbath service was held on April 1, 2000.

Then, Congregation Beth Hillel became part of Congregation Mount Sinai, where the memorial plates for deceased members of the congregation now are on display.

"That gives people a good feeling," said Blank, who helped pack up the congregation's German-Hebrew prayer books, some 100 years old, and sent them, together with tallitot, to a Chabad-Lubavitch congregation in Munich.

Some members reclaimed certain synagogue effects that they had given on loan — including a wall hanging that had come from Munich. Other items were sent to museums.

"We were so happy that things went to places where they had a value to someone," Blank said. She said she was troubled to hear that the Torah curtain ended up at a Berlin flea market.

It remains a mystery how it got there.

Adam said she is "not really surprised" that it crossed her path.

"Things like that happen to me all the time," she said. "I am always on the search for things and always find Jewish themes in the society in places where I don't expect to find them." Now that the curtain is "back to its roots, I find that very nice. To me it is important that it now has a function and is not in a flea market."

The curtain now hangs at Congregation Beth Shalom. Blank says she can live with that.

"If it is there and being used, that is marvelous," she said. "What should we do, go and see how it got there? That doesn't make much sense. Maybe we would never know the truth." □