

IN THE NEWS

Dahlan criticizes Palestinian president

A Palestinian leader issued a rare public rebuke of Yasser Arafat. The Palestinian Authority president "now sits on the bodies and ruins of Palestinians at a time when they most need support," Mohammed Dahlan, the former chief of security in the Gaza Strip, was quoted as saying Sunday in a Kuwaiti newspaper.

Dahlan's comments come amid increasing chaos in the Palestinian Authority.

Israel high in Kerry book

Peace between Israel and its neighbors ranks high in John Kerry's new book.

The Democratic nominee and his running mate, John Edwards, on Monday published "Our Plan for America," and Israel features high in the first chapter. "We will ensure that under all circumstances Israel retains the qualitative edge for its national security and its right to self-defense," the book says.

The authors promise "genuine resolve and direct personal involvement to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," a dig at President Bush, whom Democrats have accused of neglecting Middle East peace efforts.

Former Hezbollah captive is cleared

An Israeli businessman held captive by Hezbollah was cleared of suspected security crimes.

Israel's Justice Ministry said Monday that Elhanan Tannenbaum, who was abducted by the Lebanese terrorist group while abroad in 2000 and was repatriated this January, had convinced Israeli officials that he committed no security offenses.

Media reports said Tannenbaum had been lured to Lebanon while trying to close an illicit deal in the United Arab Emirates, and that he was suspected of passing to Hezbollah state secrets gleaned from his service as an Israeli reserves officer.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

Slave labor fund from Germany makes final payments to survivors

By URIEL HEILMAN

NEW YORK (JTA)—Gisela Schlanger had tears running down her face as she described her plans for the payment she was to receive this week from Germany for her Holocaust-era slave labor.

"My aim after the Holocaust was to raise my children frum-Yiddish," she said, explaining that she strived to bring up a religious family committed to Jewish tradition.

"My children are talmidei chachamim" — Torah scholars, she said. "I have a very special grandson, a tzadik. The money I get I give him to buy sforim," or books of Judaica.

Each book will carry a memorial inscription for family members murdered by the Nazis, Schlanger said.

Schlanger spoke Monday at a Claims Conference news conference in New York called to announce new payments to Jewish slave laborers.

A survivor from Slovakia, Schlanger was one of 130,681 survivors from 62 countries who were sent payments of about \$3,000 this week by the Claims Conference.

The payout, totaling some \$401 million, represented the second and final installment of payments from a \$1.1 billion slave labor agreement with Germany.

It was the largest-ever single Holocaust payout in history, according to officials at the Claims Conference, which administers the Jewish portion of compensation payments from Germany to Nazi-era slave laborers.

The money comes from a \$5 billion fund paid for by the German government and 6,000 German businesses, only some of which benefited from Jewish slave labor. Most recipients are non-Jews.

"The payment carries a value that cannot be measured in dollars," said Aron Krell, 76, a Polish-born survivor.

"This money can never compensate me for the loss of my family, my childhood or even for all the work that I performed. No amount ever could," he said. "But I do feel some satisfaction from receiving payment, however symbolic, as a recognition by the German government and companies of the terrible wrongs they inflicted on us. We have waited a very long time for this acknowledgment, this apology."

As a volunteer for the Claims Conference, Krell has worked the phones helping Polish- and Yiddish-speaking survivors understand what they need to do to get their claims processed and assuaging their anxieties about when they will get paid.

Combined with the first payment, which was paid to claimants as soon as their claim of having been a forced laborer was verified and processed, ex-slave laborers received a total of about \$7,500.

The Claims Conference's news conference Monday brought to a close one of the conference's central tasks: finding survivors and verifying their accounts of forced labor by the Nazis.

"One of the biggest challenges we faced was documenting the cases of over a quarter of a million applications," said Gideon Taylor, the Claims Conference's executive vice president. "The program required the identification of every place where slave labor was performed during the Holocaust."

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the Claims Conference's work — aside from

Continued on page 2

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ *Ex-slave laborers get \$401 million from the Claims Conference*

Continued from page 1

providing some measure of compensation to survivors — was the historical facts about the Holocaust that the work helped bring to light, conference officials said.

“What it’s really about is the history,” Taylor said. “The legacy of today’s payment is documentation.”

Since the agreement to establish the slave labor fund was signed in 2000, researchers have been combing through more than 150 archives in 30 countries looking for data to verify survivors’ claims.

That research resulted in a wealth of new historical documentation. In some cases, it also yielded additional payments to survivors.

For example, just last month, newly unearthed documentation by the Claims Conference about 112 Nazi-era labor camps in Bulgaria convinced the German government to add Bulgaria to the list of countries for which former slave laborers could apply for compensation.

Earlier this year, 1,778 victims of Nazi medical experiments identified by the Claims Conference received one-time compensation payments from Germany of about \$5,400 each. Now, one of the researchers who worked on the project is writing a doctoral dissertation on the information the organization was able to uncover.

“There is a treasure trove of information here,” said Greg Schneider, the Claims Conference’s chief operating officer.

This week’s payout also meant that the job is over for many of the 200 or so historians, data processors, technology experts and claims processors who worked at the Claims Conference in New York collecting data, processing claims and administering payments.

Conference officials said that even as the organization is letting many employees go, it is hiring legal and financial experts for the group’s next big task: finding the rightful owners and heirs of Holocaust-era Swiss bank accounts.

The Claims Conference is helping locate the original owners of the Holocaust-era accounts covered by the landmark \$1.25 billion Swiss banks settlement, reached in 1998.

According to the settlement’s terms, once all the owners of Holocaust-era Swiss bank accounts are found and compensated, U.S. District Court Judge Edward Korman will decide how to distribute any remaining money.

The debate over how that unclaimed

money should be distributed has been intense, but a deal approved last week by the Swiss government may render the debate moot.

The agreement between the Claims Conference, the Swiss banks and the U.S. court administering the settlement will result in the publication of an additional 5,000 names of Holocaust-era Swiss account owners, allow the Claims Conference limited access to search certain bank records and check Jewish claimants against records of 4.1 million Swiss bank accounts.

It likely will find additional account holders and very well could use up all the money in the settlement.

Coincidentally, the project, which Claims Conference officials estimate will take 12 to 18 months, was slated to begin the same day the conference announced its conclusion of the slave-labor program.

“It’s symbolic of the Claims Conference view that the work is never complete,” Schneider said. “There is no way to resolve what happened.” ■

The Claims Conference shifts its focus from slave laborers to Swiss bank account holders.

Blaze destroys Siberia’s oldest shul

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — A fire ravaged the oldest synagogue in Siberia, leaving Irkutsk without one.

The former Soldiers Synagogue in Irkutsk, which was built in the provincial Siberian city in 1881 by retired Jewish soldiers of the czarist army, was practically devoured by fire late last month.

No one was hurt in the blaze, which tore through the two-story wooden building in this city of 675,000.

The synagogue’s outer walls were left standing, but much of what remained of the interior was severely damaged by water used to extinguish the flames.

The police and fire authorities ruled out arson as a potential cause of the fire. The city’s Jewish leaders agree with this assessment, though it was noted that no one was supposed to be in the building at the time it caught fire.

“It is too early to tell for sure what

caused the fire, but the arson version looks unfounded now and is not being discussed seriously,” Olga Sosna, president of the Irkutsk Jewish Community Center, told JTA.

The fire authorities said the blaze most likely resulted from either a short circuit or a small fire that grew out of control.

The building also housed a Jewish community center that included offices, a dining hall for elderly and needy Jews and space for other communal activities. Irkutsk is home to 7,000 to 10,000 Jews.

Because the synagogue was being prepared for a major renovation later in the year, its destruction is not likely to disrupt the day-to-day life of the local community.

In one bit of good luck, the synagogue’s rabbi had recently taken the congregation’s Torah scroll to Israel for repair and, as such, it was not harmed in the fire.

In accordance with Jewish law, a burial ceremony was scheduled for those religious books that were damaged by fire. ■

JTA WORLD REPORT

Howard E. Friedman
President

Mark J. Joffe
Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hosten
Editor

Michael S. Arnold
Managing Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein
Finance and Administration Director

Paula Simmonds
Marketing and Development Director

JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more 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 with permission.

Obama praised for bridging racial divide

By RON KAMPEAS

BOSTON (JTA) — Barack Obama spent a recent Sunday campaigning in black churches in suburban Chicago, explaining the Swahili origins of his first name, which means "Blessed."

His final stop was a Jewish center for the aged, where he told the same story — but added a note about the word's etymological relationship to its Hebrew counterpart, *baruch*.

"And he pronounced 'baruch' impeccably," marveled Rep. Janice Schakowsky (D-Ill.), who had spent the day with the man all but sure to become the third African American U.S. senator since Reconstruction.

Obama, whose keynote speech last week was arguably the highlight of this year's Democratic Party convention, did not come by the pronunciation by chance.

"His connection with the Jewish community was one he made early on," Schakowsky, who is Jewish, said at the convention.

Long before March, when the Illinois state senator achieved national prominence by trouncing a crowded field of rivals in the Democratic primary for one of Illinois' U.S. Senate seats, Obama and the Chicago Jewish community eagerly had sought each other out, with the goal of reforging the classic black-Jewish alliance of the 1960s.

"His role model is Martin Luther King Jr., who had excellent relations with the Jewish community," Alan Solow, a backer of Obama's from his first run for state senate eight years ago, told JTA in a phone interview. "He has reached out to the Jewish community, and the Jewish community has reached out to him."

Jewish backers say comparisons to King aren't overstated: They see Obama as healing a divide that has grown in recent decades because of disagreements on affirmative action and Israel.

"Obama has reached out, has shown up at Jewish community events, has expressed concern — including support for Israel — in a way that is reassuring," Jay Tcath, director of Chicago's Jewish Community Relations Council, said in a phone interview.

Signs of Obama's outreach include attending the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's Washington policy

conference in May. All congressional candidates get an automatic invitation to the AIPAC conference, but attendance — especially by those who aren't incumbents — is considered a serious commitment to the pro-Israel community.

Robert Schroyer, a leading Chicago Jewish philanthropist, said he decided to raise money for Obama after the candidate sought a meeting with him.

"We couldn't find any areas in which we disagreed," he said in a phone interview, saying they discussed abortion rights, gun control and Israel. "He knew quite a bit about the history of Israel."

Obama's foreign policy speech in June to Chicago's Council on Foreign Relations emphasized the U.S. alliance with Israel.

"Our first and immutable commitment must be to the security of Israel, our only true ally in the Middle East and the only democracy," said Obama, who has a degree in political science and international relations from Columbia University.

"The administration's failure to be consistently involved in helping Israel achieve peace with the Palestinians has been both wrong for our friendship with Israel, as well as badly damaging to our standing in the Arab world."

In a release this week, the Republican Jewish Coalition accused Obama of criticizing Israel's West Bank security barrier, citing a pre-primaries statement to the Chicago Jewish News.

However, Obama's full quote appears to direct criticism at the Bush administration, saying its alleged neglect of peace efforts created the circumstances for the building of the fence: "The creation of a wall dividing the two nations is yet another example of the neglect of this administration in brokering peace."

In follow-up comments, the RJC said that view was problematic as well.

"The failure of the peace process has zero to do with the Israelis and zero to do with the United States and has everything to do with Yasser Arafat," Matt Brooks, the group's executive director, told JTA. "It raises issues about Obama's

understandings of the complexities of the area."

It has not just been a case of Obama courting Illinois Jews — the reverse is true as well.

Obama's status as the first black president of the Harvard Law Review made him well known among the school's graduates, said Solow, himself a Harvard law alumnus.

After law school, Obama returned to Chicago in the early 1990s to launch a voter registration drive, and local Jewish graduates of Harvard law were quick to seek him out.

"So many people spoke extremely

highly of him," said Solow, who has headed a number of Chicago-area Jewish organizations.

What makes the Obama-Jewish connection especially heartening, Jewish leaders say, is that it's not just Jews who welcome the renewed relationship.

Obama's Jewish base excites other black leaders, among them Jesse Jackson, who during his own political career was perceived as exacerbating black-Jewish tensions.

After Obama's primary victory, when he won 53 percent of the vote in a field of seven candidates, Jackson made a point of noting Obama's appeal to Jewish voters.

The Republicans are not running a serious challenger to Obama, meaning he is all but certain to win the seat vacated by Peter Fitzgerald, a Republican.

Obama, 43, credits much of the breadth of his worldview to his parents: His father was a Kenyan goat herder, and his mother is white and from Kansas.

In his address, Obama addressed the issue of civil liberties in a post-Sept. 11 world.

"If there's an Arab American family being rounded up without benefit of an attorney or due process, that threatens my civil liberties," he said, prompting a group of Arab American delegates at the convention to jump up and cheer.

Back home in Chicago, Jews cheered that passage too, Tcath said.

"It was a safe expression of concern and support for that community," he said, one that Jews could easily endorse. ■

What makes the Obama-Jewish connection especially heartening is that it's not just Jews who welcome the relationship.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. to Israel: Freeze means freeze

Israel needs to abide by its commitment not to expand existing settlements, a State Department spokesman said. Adam Erel made the comment after being asked Monday to react to Israel's approval of 600 new housing units in the West Bank.

Politicians laud Annan

A bipartisan group of congressional representatives commended Kofi Annan for denouncing anti-Semitism.

In a letter organized by Reps. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and Christopher Smith (R-N.J.), the congressmen said the U.N. secretary-general's recent speech condemning anti-Semitism exemplifies "the kind of leadership and commitment which can advance the fight against anti-Semitism and all forms of intolerance."

The letter, which accumulated 74 signatures, urged further measures, including a General Assembly resolution condemning anti-Semitism and a review of textbooks used by U.N. agencies administering to the Palestinians.

U.S.: Arms to Jordan no threat

The U.S.-Jordan relationship is a strong one, but it never would cost Israel its qualitative defense edge, a State Department spokesman said.

Adam Erel said Monday that he could not confirm reports of missile sales to Jordan until the administration had notified Congress, but also noted, "we have a strong relationship with Jordan."

That should not worry Israel, Erel said. "We remain committed to Israel's qualitative military edge and will do nothing to degrade it," he said.

U.S. concerned about stranded Gazans

The United States has contacted Israel about the plight of 3,000 Palestinians stranded on the Egyptian side of the Gaza Strip border. "Since the situation arose, we have been in touch with senior officials from Israel, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority," Adam Erel, the State Department spokesman, said Monday.

"The burden and hardship being imposed upon Palestinians is problematic, and I think we are working with all the parties to help resolve it." Israel shut down the border on July 17 to stem the building of arms-smuggling tunnels.

Israel has offered to allow several hundred of the stranded Palestinians to pass through each day, but the Palestinian Authority rejected the idea, saying all should be allowed in. Israel accuses the Palestinian Authority of trying to exacerbate the situation for its propaganda value.

L.A. rabbi dies at 88

Rabbi Alfred Wolf, a leading Los Angeles rabbi, died Sunday at the age of 88. Wolf served as rabbi of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, the city's leading Reform synagogue, from 1949 to 1985.

MIDDLE EAST

Israeli Olympians get security fence

A security fence has been constructed around the compound that will house Israeli athletes at the Athens Olympic Games. The barrier will supplement the security precautions already taken by Greece for the rest of the athletes and Olympic officials who will descend upon Athens for the games, which begin Aug. 13.

Greek security personnel "have a very difficult job, but they are well prepared and everything is ready," Deputy Defense Minister

Yiannis Lambropoulos told the Jerusalem Post.

Greece is spending \$1.5 billion on its security effort for the Olympics. The athletes' residential site is protected by a double fence around the perimeter, police and military patrols, concrete barriers and dozens of cameras and sensors.

Gaza infiltration foiled

Israeli forces killed three Palestinian terrorists near a Gaza Strip settlement.

The Palestinians, armed with rifles and explosives, were spotted and fired on Monday as they tried to infiltrate Eiei Sinai. In the Gaza town of Khan Yunis, Israeli forces demolished three homes allegedly used as Palestinian sniper positions and exchanged fire with local gunmen.

Witnesses said an elderly Palestinian woman was killed in the clash.

Change for Shinui

The secular Israeli party Shinui said it would be willing to sit in a government with a fervently Orthodox party.

"We have to think in broader terms of agenda, about our contribution to the nation," Shinui leader Yosef "Tommy" Lapid told Israel Radio on Monday. He was explaining why he had decided to agree to a government that included United Torah Judaism, a predominantly Ashkenazi party that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has courted as a potential coalition partner.

WORLD

French Jewish youths beaten

Three Jewish youths were lightly injured when they were attacked in the French suburb of Lyon.

The youths, aged 16 to 18, were punched and kicked Sunday by a gang of about 15 young men, police said. Four of the attackers were arrested soon after the incident and remain in police custody. According to a police statement, the Jewish youths had suffered a similar, though less violent, attack a few days earlier.

Argentine governor insulted

The Jewish governor of the Argentine province of Tucuman was the target of anti-Semitic songs and graffiti.

The insults hurled at Jose Alperovich on July 30 were made during a protest organized by public employees who are battling for better salaries. The DAIA political umbrella group for the Argentine Jewish community expressed its anger over the incident.

"I believe the union protest for a salary increment is legitimate," said Jorge Kirszenbaum, a DAIA official. "But I guess the social protest loses value if it becomes a discriminatory and xenophobic expression."

Librarian alleged to have stolen books

The head of the Hebrew section of France's national library was arrested on suspicion of stealing hundreds of historic books and documents. Michel Garel, 56, who has headed the department for the past 20 years, initially denied all charges of aggravated theft, though he admitted to an investigating judge on Saturday that he had sold one of the works for \$300,000 at a public auction at Christie's after forging authentication certificates.

Garel's wife is being investigated as an accomplice since the couple is believed to have purchased an apartment with the money.

The national library collection contains hundreds of works including ancient Bibles, Talmuds and Torah fragments, and initially was commissioned by France's King Charles V in the 14th century.