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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2004

## IN THE NEWS

### Court rejects Jewish bias claim

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear a case from a Jewish man who says he was discriminated against in seeking a military security clearance.

Without comment, the court chose not to hear the case Monday involving David Tenenbaum, who sued various government agencies in 1998 after his ties to Israel were investigated.

Government officials said Tenenbaum, who had his house searched on the Sabbath, inadvertently passed information to Israeli military officials.

Tenenbaum's lawyer denies the charge.

### Arab states launch task force

A coalition of Arab states has launched a coalition to keep money away from terrorists.

The Middle East-North Africa Financial Action Task Force was created Monday in Bahrain by 14 Arab states. U.S. officials are praising the move.

### Jewish school raided in Caracas

A Jewish school in Caracas, Venezuela was raided by security officials, causing panic among children and parents.

Local and international Jewish groups expressed outrage over the way the investigation was conducted during the Monday morning raid.

Police were reportedly searching the school of 1,500 children for arms, based on accusations that Israeli intelligence was connected with the recent assassination of federal prosecutor Danilo Anderson.

"We do not question the official investigations," said a statement by Daniel Slimak and John Davidescu, president and general-secretary of the Confederation of Israelite Associations of Venezuela. But they expressed alarm over the manner of the raid.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Dispute over kosher meat plant raises alarms among some Jews

By PETER EPHROSS

**N**EW YORK (JTA) — It's not every day that people affiliated with a strident animal-rights group talk turkey with those who oversee kosher slaughter.

But that's exactly what happened this week, when an unpaid adviser to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals discussed allegations of improper slaughtering practices at an Iowa kosher plant with the head of the Orthodox Union's kashrut division.

Tuesday's late-afternoon talks involving Aaron Gross, a doctoral student at Harvard, and Rabbi Menachem Genack were the latest development in a story that has placed the slaughter practices at Agriprocessors Inc. in Pottsville, Iowa, under question.

They also came one day after the animal-rights group, known as PETA, filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The complaint alleges that the plant is violating Jewish law by not instantly killing the animals, and therefore is violating U.S. laws of slaughter, which allow for Jewish ritual slaughter.

The telephone discussion between PETA and the Orthodox Union ended in an impasse, participants said.

The controversy — which has alarmed some Orthodox institutions — is being seen as the most widely publicized dispute over kosher slaughter in the United States in a decade.

At issue is an undercover video taken by PETA-affiliated individuals over a seven-

week period between July and September of this year that shows animals being slaughtered at the Agriprocessors plant, which processes meat for the Rubashkin/Aaron's Best label.

One of the plant's supervisors is the Orthodox Union, a major supervisor of kosher food in the United States.

In the gory video, one slaughterer cuts a cow's throat, resulting in extensive bleeding, while another takes the trachea out.

Other clips show cows running around and looking alive after the killing is presumably completed.

"This not how shechitah is supposed to be done," Tal Ronen, a spokesman for the Norfolk, Va.-based PETA, said, using the Hebrew term for ritual slaughter.

"If it's done correctly, the animal is supposed to be dead in 30 seconds to one minute."

Orthodox officials, while admitting the video isn't pretty, don't agree, saying that reflexive movements by animals after they are slaughtered are not uncommon.

"We thought it was in consonance with the halachah," the O.U.'s Genack said after viewing the video.

PETA first raised the issue with Agriprocessors last June after being tipped off to allegations of improper procedures inside the plant.

In an exchange of letters, PETA raised objections and asked that an expert on slaughter be allowed in to witness the process.

Agriprocessors responded through its at-

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BEHIND  
THE  
HEADLINES

## ■ *An animal-rights group is after a kosher slaughtering plant*

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torney, Nathan Lewin, who said he asked for more specifics.

PETA said it followed up with that request, but Lewin said he never received the second letter.

PETA says that after they did not get a response from Lewin, they pursued the undercover investigation.

On Monday, PETA filed a complaint with the USDA, complaining that government regulations were not being followed at Agriprocessors. It sought suspension of the plant's license and possible criminal proceedings.

PETA's letter to the USDA details what it calls violations of the 1902 Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act. The letter claims that by violating halachic procedures, the company is violating the legislation, under which animals can be killed according to Jewish law.

Steven Cohen, a spokesman for the USDA, confirmed the government agency had received the PETA letter but said it was waiting to review the video before deciding how to handle the complaint.

Genack said he had discussed the issue with USDA officials, and is confident that government guidelines are being followed satisfactorily.

For its part, Agriprocessors released a statement this week saying it follows the practices set out by its kosher supervisors.

"Agriprocessors does not control anything that happens in the kosher ritual

processes. We adhere strictly to the instructions given to us by the rabbinic authorities and will continue to do so," the statement said.

"As we always have, we will also continue to follow the strict guidelines set out by both federal and Jewish law for the humane treatment of animals during the slaughter process."

One expert in slaughtering practices who says she has visited 30 kosher slaughtering plants said that from what she can tell from the video, the practices at Agriprocessors are poor.

"I've never seen trachea removal before," Temple Grandin, an associate professor of animal science at Colorado State University, said in a telephone interview.

"Nobody else cuts out the trachea, and they're doing it while the animal is still conscious," said Grandin, who was the expert PETA had wanted to have access to the plant.

O.U. officials say that the animal is unconscious after the throat is slit.

Some Orthodox officials called PETA's campaign an attack on shechitah more generally and part of a history of anti-Semitic canards.

"Shechitah often comes under attack by elements that are unsavory, and in general PETA is not an organization that commands our great respect," said Rabbi Avi Shafran, a spokesman for Agudath Israel of America, a fervently Orthodox organization.

He and others noted that the Nazis publicized photographs of Jews performing ritual slaughter practices as part of their campaign to inflame sentiment against Jews.

"We'll put them on the wall with Hitler," Nathan Lewin, an Orthodox Jew and a lawyer for Agriprocessors, said, referring to PETA. He added: "The PETA folks might not like eggs, but they have eggs all over their face."

Lewin, citing a 1997 judgment in which ABC was ordered to pay \$5.5 million to the supermarket chain Food Lion following an investigative piece that

alleged food safety violations, suggested that PETA could be subject to legal action.

PETA is known for its aggressive tactics in promoting its animal-rights agenda. The group generated controversy last year when it compared the meat industry to the Holocaust.

In another one of its more controversial campaigns, it displayed ads a few years ago with the phrase "Got prostate cancer?" and showing Rudolph Giuliani, the then-New York City mayor who had been recently diagnosed with the disease.

The billboards also

included the line: "Drinking milk contributes to prostate cancer."

But in this case, PETA is presenting a more moderate face.

Those affiliated with PETA said the group is not going after kosher slaughter, but just those practices under way at Agriprocessors. Further, they say, PETA says it is sensitive to issues of anti-Semitism.

"PETA has gone out of its way" to avoid anti-Semitism, and agrees that shechitah, when properly practiced, is a "better procedure than general meat industry practices," Gross said.

Gross, a doctoral student in religious studies at Harvard who describes himself as a liberal but active Jew — and is a member of the Jewish Vegetarians of North America's advisory committee — said he became involved in the issue after the exchange of letters with Lewin failed.

Kosher consumers extend across the Jewish community, but the issue generated an immediate response among those active in the Orthodox community.

Participants at the Agudath Israel of America's annual convention voted unanimously Sunday to condemn PETA's attack.

When Rabbi David Zwiebel, an Agudath official, announced at the conclusion of the conference that this issue was going to hit The New York Times, "you could hear the murmurings," Shafran said. "The hands just shot up for the vote. It was unanimous with gusto." ■

**'PETA is not an organization that commands our great respect.'**

**Avi Shafran**

Agudath Israel of America

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# Bush seeks European aid in Middle East

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Signifying a change from President Bush's first term, top foreign policy officials in the Bush administration are aggressively courting European nations to play a more active role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

At the same time, JTA has learned, the officials are actively reaching out to American Jewish officials to assure them that President Bush's new proactive posture in the Middle East will not diminish his closeness to Israel.

Bush has made it clear that he sees a new opportunity to push for peace now that he has weathered re-election and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat has passed from the scene.

Bush wants Palestinian Authority elections, slated for Jan. 9, to go smoothly, and is nudging the sides back toward direct talks.

Getting Europe on board would pay dividends because the Europeans are believed to be capable of influencing the Palestinians. Additionally, Bush, who plans a tour of European capitals in February, is seeking European help in pulling Iraq back from the brink of chaos.

Elliott Abrams, the top Middle East official on the National Security Council, has met at least twice since Election Day with European ambassadors to discuss the peace process.

Participants described the meetings as unusually open and warm; Abrams was more willing than ever to listen to European concerns about Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's policies, they said. It was a sharp reversal from the coolness marking U.S.-European differences over global warming, trade and the Iraq war.

Last week, Bush notably singled out Germany, France and Britain to thank them for their work in persuading Iran to suspend its nuclear enrichment, though the administration reportedly remains deeply skeptical of the agreement's chances of success. In addition, the first foreign leader Bush met after his election was British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The new U.S.-European warmth is consistent with renewed European engagement in the Middle East, as the German and Spanish foreign ministers prepare to launch regional tours.

"There's a confluence of interests that has come with the passing of Yasser Ara-

fat," said Lewis Roth, assistant executive director of Americans for Peace Now. "The bottom line is that the Bush administration needs the Europeans for a number of projects in the Middle East and the Europeans realize they can't go it alone on Israel-Palestine without the U.S."

Bush staffers suggest that what the president sees as a clear mandate for his foreign policy after his re-election informs his new confidence with the Europeans.

Significantly, the push is coming not from outgoing Secretary of State Colin Powell — whose State Department was left out of the loop on the Abrams meetings — but from Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser and his nominee to succeed Powell.

Rice has said that European officials — facing a swelling Islamist threat on their own continent — are coming around to Bush's view that democracies face a "global war" on terrorism.

Bush ordered Abrams, Rice and other staffers to read Israeli Cabinet minister Natan Sharansky's just-published "The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror." Sharansky's thesis, that only free societies guarantee regional and global security, hews closely to Bush's own strategy in Iraq, with the Palestinians and elsewhere.

Rice and others have taken to borrowing phrases from the book, speaking of the "stabilizing influence of democracy."

Bush's new European emphasis does not mean the administration is backtracking in its support for Israel, Rice assured a group of top U.S. Jewish officials Monday. Bush would not pay a "price" to the Europeans of distancing the United States from Israel, she said.

"I hope that everyone understands by now that you don't extract a price from this president," Rice said, according to notes taken by a participant. "The things he has always stood for relative to Israel's security and a settlement that is fair and just, he absolutely stands by those commitments."

Still, Rice emphasized once again that Bush expects results from Israel.

"Israel also has responsibilities and the administration will expect Israel to abide

by its responsibilities," the participant quoted Rice as telling the 14 leaders of organizations, including the Reform movement, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the Israel Policy Forum, the Orthodox Union and the Anti-Defamation League. Other participants confirmed the content of Rice's remarks.

Israel's responsibilities under the U.S.-led "road map" peace plan — which Rice said was still on track — include a settlement freeze, a key European demand.

In the short term, Bush wants Palestinian elections that will ensure a smooth transition of power to the likeliest successor to Arafat, Mahmoud Abbas, who is favored by Israel and the United States as a relative moderate.

"With Arafat's demise, we'll have a chance to see if the democratic process can proceed among the Palestinians," Rice was quoted as saying.

Sharon already has responded, pledging to keep roads open and access to polls free on Jan. 9, and suggesting he is open to allowing the 230,000 Palestinians in eastern Jerusalem to vote.

Sharon also has backpedaled from demands that the Palestinians end violence before peace talks can resume. Sharon now calls for an end to Palestinian incitement against Israel, and Abbas soon echoed the call.

Rice also said the Bush administration wants Israel to proceed with its planned removal of settlements from the Gaza Strip and a portion of the West Bank by the end of next year. She made sure the Jewish officials understood that the withdrawal was consistent with the road map, and in fact would accelerate the plan.

"It creates the impetus to move on to greater and faster achievements," Rice was quoted as saying. Bush administration officials were offended in September when Sharon's top adviser, Dov Weisglass, said the pullout would place Palestinian statehood — and the road map — in "formaldehyde" until the Palestinians undertake the thorough governmental and security reforms they have pledged to carry out under the road map.

**President Bush ordered top foreign policy advisers to read Natan Sharansky's new book on democracy.**

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MIDEAST

#### Larsen pushes peace

A U.N. envoy urged Israel to act on Syrian peace overtures. Terje Roed-Larsen, the United Nations envoy to the Middle East, briefed the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Tuesday after securing an offer from Syrian President Bashar Assad to resume peace talks without preconditions.

"My position, as I told the committee, is that there is a genuine hand of peace being stretched out from Damascus," Larsen said at a news conference. "It should be grabbed quickly."

Israeli officials have ruled out any resumption of talks that stalled in 2000 until Syria stops sponsoring Palestinian terrorist groups and the Lebanese militia Hezbollah.

#### AIDS on the rise in Israel

There are hundreds of new AIDS cases every year in Israel. According to Health Ministry figures released Tuesday ahead of World AIDS Day, 341 Israelis were diagnosed as HIV positive in 2004, among them 96 newborns who contracted the virus from their mothers during pregnancy.

The total number of AIDS sufferers in Israel is around 4,300. While health officials say most are gay men or intravenous drug users, the incidence of AIDS also is on the rise among heterosexuals, especially teenagers.

#### Violin incident dismissed

The Israeli army vindicated troops who were present when a Palestinian man began to play his violin at a West Bank checkpoint.

The head of the Israel Defense Forces' central command, Maj. Gen. Moshe Kaplinski, said Tuesday that the Palestinian who began to play his violin for a few seconds at a checkpoint last week was not coerced but did so of his own volition to show soldiers that the instrument was not a bomb.

An Israeli watchdog group filmed the incident, which was shown on national media and evoked, for some pundits, images of the Holocaust.

Musical instruments have been used in previous terrorist attacks: On Tuesday, an Israeli military court handed down a life sentence to a Palestinian who gave an explosives-packed guitar to the suicide bomber who struck at a Jerusalem Sbarro restaurant in 2001.

#### Barak storms the stage

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak tried to take over a Labor Party meeting, causing an uproar.

At a session of Labor's Central Committee in Tel Aviv on Tuesday, Barak, who recently announced his return to politics after a hiatus of almost four years, grabbed the microphone from party official Moshe Shahal and demanded that the upcoming primary be conducted by secret ballot.

A shocked Shahal accused Barak of turning the meeting into "a show of force the likes of which civilized people cannot forgive."

The Central Committee decided to reconvene Dec. 12 to decide on a date for the primary, in which Barak hopes to beat Shimon Peres for the party leadership.

### WORLD

#### French group wants Hezbollah TV banned

France's public broadcasting authority asked a court to allow it to ban transmission of Hezbollah's satellite TV station.

In a statement Monday, the CSA authority said it wanted Hezbollah's Al-Manar channel forced off the airways after it viewed anti-Semitic comments on a recent program produced by the channel.

The comments, originally broadcast on a Nov. 23 news program, accused Jews of willfully spreading diseases such as AIDS among Arabs and Muslims, the statement said, and represented a threat to public order as well as a breach of the agreement signed between the authority and Al-Manar on Nov. 19.

#### Prague audit finds lapses

An audit of the Prague Jewish community found that poor property management may have cost the community millions of dollars over the years.

The audit by Ernst & Young was ordered by the community's leader, Tomas Jelinek, who began his second term in spring 2004 promising greater economic transparency and an improvement of the community's overall financial practices.

The audit is accompanied by a statement approved by Ernst & Young claiming that in the past two years there were 16 instances in which community rules were violated by its own leaders or representatives at its real estate management firm in the areas of tenders, gift recording and the circulation of official documents.

Jelinek told JTA that his intention in publicizing the audit was not to point fingers but to move forward and institute reliable and responsible financial behavior.

Members of Prague's Jewish community voted Jelinek out early in November, but he rejected the vote.

### NORTH AMERICA

#### Red Crossing the Atlantic

Red Cross officials are meeting in Israel with counterparts from Magen David Adom.

The delegation from the American Red Cross in Greater New York will exchange information with leaders of the Israeli organization on responding to emergencies.

"The Israelis are experts in leading-edge technology in disaster response, and we can learn from their expertise," said Terry Bischoff, the American group's CEO.

"We bring experience in dealing with the psychological aspects of trauma and ways to help families after a tragedy, which will be very helpful to the leadership of Magen David Adom."

The American Red Cross group, which will visit a kibbutz, was expected to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Israelis marking the beginning of a new partnership.

#### Jewish mag gets Braille edition

A Jewish youth magazine has been adapted for blind and visually impaired students.

The Jewish Braille Institute of America has created a Braille edition of BabagaNewz, a classroom magazine promoting Jewish values.

The impetus for the project came from a Hebrew school teacher in Kansas City who thought a visually impaired student in her sixth-grade class would enjoy reading the magazine with his sighted classmates.

"Thanks to the efforts of one school administrator and the staff at the JBI Library, the articles in BabagaNewz can now be enjoyed by visually impaired students around the country," said the magazine's publisher, Michael Foilb.