

IN THE NEWS
Saddam Hussein sentenced to death

Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death by hanging for crimes against humanity.

The former Iraqi dictator was sentenced Sunday for his involvement in the killings of 148 people in the Shi'ite village of Dujail in 1982, ostensibly because of his suspicion that some city residents were planning to assassinate him. The verdict will be appealed.

Hamas condemned the sentence on Hussein, who during his reign funneled money to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers and attacked Israel with Scud missiles during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Zahar: Hostage at risk

The Palestinian Authority said Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip threatens the life of an Israeli soldier being held hostage.

"This aggression may claim the life of the Israeli soldier," Mahmoud Zahar, the Palestinian Authority foreign minister, told the Egyptian news agency MENA over the weekend. He was referring to Cpl. Gilad Shalit, who was seized by Gaza gunmen in a deadly June 25 cross-border raid.

Lieberman wants racial partitioning

An Israeli Cabinet minister called for the Jewish state and West Bank to be partitioned according to ethnicity.

Avigdor Lieberman of the right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu Party said in an interview Sunday that rather than evacuating Jewish settlements in the West Bank, Israel should keep them while ceding Israeli Arab communities to a future Palestinian state.

"I think separation between two nations is the best solution," Lieberman told Britain's Sunday Times.

"I want to provide an Israel that is a Jewish, Zionist country."

He invoked as a model the forcible 1974 separation of ethnic Turks and Greeks in Cyprus.

WORLD REPORT

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

Women's rights leaders outraged as conference on agunot canceled

By JACOB BERKMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish women's rights leaders are reeling after Israel's Sephardi chief rabbi canceled a conference of prominent rabbis that was to deal with the issue of women whose husbands refuse to give them divorce papers.

An agunah, which literally means a "chained" woman, is one whose husband refuses to give her a get, a document she needs under Jewish religious law for a divorce to be final. If she does not obtain a get but later remarries, any subsequent children she has are mamzers — or bastards — which carries a harsh stigma in religious circles, and limits who the offspring can marry.

According to halachah, a man cannot be coerced into giving his wife a get, and in some cases men have refused to give their wives gets for years, sometimes issuing the documents only in exchange for sizable ransoms.

The closed-door conference, arranged by Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar and the International Council of Jewish Women, would have been the first such forum for a large number of heads of beit dins, the local Jewish courts that oversee the get process, from around the world.

The conference was set for Nov. 7-8 in Jerusalem, and 27 of 56 rabbis invited to the conference had accepted the invitation. On Thursday, they were notified of its cancellation via fax from Rabbi Eliahu Ben-Dahan, director of Israel's rabbinical courts.

A fax obtained by JTA said Amar had decided to cancel the conference "due to

petitions that came to him both from Israel and outside of Israel requesting its cancellation."

Those close to the situation say most of the pressure came from Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, a 96-year-old Ashkenazi rabbi who many consider the most authoritative in the fervently Orthodox world. Elyashiv could not be reached for comment and Amar's office would not tell JTA who had pressured him to quash the event.

"It's clear that the ultra-Orthodox leaders in Israel have been pressuring him, and it was too much to bear," Sharon Shenhav of the International Council of Jewish Women, who worked closely with Amar over the past two years to plan the conference, told JTA. "Shamefully, at the last minute he canceled."

In recent days, several outside groups had been lobbying rabbis not to attend. One of the most outspoken was the Rabbinical Alliance of America, a fervently Orthodox group that claims to have 750 member rabbis, according to spokesman Rabbi Yehuda Levin. Levin left Nov. 2 for Israel to protest the agunah conference as well as the upcoming WorldPride gay pride march in Jerusalem, which also is in doubt due to threats of violence from the fervently Orthodox community.

Levin said he had contacted a number of the rabbis invited and had convinced several not to show up.

"There is no problem with agunah," he told JTA before the conference was canceled. "The reason they're doing this is because there is big pressure, a societal pressure of feminism, in which they paint the Orthodox

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**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

■ The conference of prominent rabbis was to deal with the issue of 'chained' women

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as archaic and out of touch and put the Orthodox on the defensive."

Holding the conference, he said, would have sent "the message to rabbis worldwide that we are under the thumb of the feminists."

Rabbi Leib Landesman, head of a Jewish court in Monsey, N.Y., was invited but declined to attend because he saw the conference as an exercise in futility.

None of the speakers was "anyone who can even make a small dent in the issue of agunah," he told JTA. "Those behind the convention mean well, but if there is a lack of astuteness — and it's quite evident that there's no one there that really counts — then you can't even make a slight dent."

Landesman called Amar a "guest speaker, or the guest of honor, which adds some legitimacy," but said the conference would have been run by "some people who want to score points or do what is called political correctness. But that's not going to solve the problem of agunah."

Landesman did not deny that the problem exists but said it was too complicated for a sweeping solution, and rather should be examined locally, on a case-by-case basis.

Agunah activists were shocked and disappointed by the cancellation.

Rivka Haut, an author who has helped agunot navigate the Jewish court system in the United States for the past 20 years, had been working with some of the rabbis who planned to attend to help them prepare their presentations.

"I was looking forward to this conference," said Haut, who has been working with 10 to 15 agunot, including some women who have been in that limbo for more than a decade. "Not that I thought they would end the agunah agony, but I did hope they would begin the process of deciding how to free as many women as possible."

The problem, she told JTA, is that some parts of the Jewish court system are corrupt and heavily weighted in men's favor, "but the Orthodox world lets the batei din continue with no monitoring and no accountability. We were hopeful that this conference would start the talking."

It's unclear what will happen next. Shenhav said she spent Thursday calling some of the rabbis who had agreed to come to Jerusalem to inform them of the cancellation.

"They were shocked and embarrassed and shamed," she said, noting that they hoped to speak with Amar amid "some hint that he might retreat." As of last Friday, however, Amar had not backtracked.

Some of the rabbis scheduled to attend already had arrived in Israel. It's possible that those rabbis will still meet, but without the sanction of the chief rabbinate or the religious court system.

Others were left in the lurch. Rabbi Yo-

sef Blau of New York's Yeshiva University, a long-time agunah-rights advocate, said last Friday that he would go to Jerusalem to see if some meetings could still take place.

"My wife said to me, 'Now you should certainly go,'" Blau said. "It would be a statement of support that shows that this is an important problem and people should be dealing with it. We shouldn't give in."

Blu Greenberg, a founding president of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alli-

ance, said a few random meetings in lieu of a conference with the chief rabbi would "not be satisfactory," but added that the cancellation could prove to be a blessing in disguise.

"I think we are at the next step already, which is that as a community we're going to express disappointment and let-down," she said. Although much of the community was not even aware of the conference, "they'll be aware now," she said. "That will serve as an important counterpressure."

"Until now, all of the pressure has come from the ultra-Orthodox," she said, but with the cancellation, "people of good will will take notice of this and will not be quiet."

JTA correspondent Dina Kraft contributed to this report from Tel Aviv.

'There is no problem with agunah. The reason they're doing this is because there is big pressure, a societal pressure of feminism.'

Rabbi Yehuda Levin
Rabbinical Alliance of America

Lebensborn children face past

NEW YORK (JTA) — The children of the Nazi Lebensborn program gathered publicly to deal with their past. Reuters reported that 35 offspring of the project, which involved homes started by Heinrich Himmler to create children modeled on Aryan ideals, met publicly Saturday in Germany.

Matthias Meissner, managing director of Lebensspuren, the group representing the progeny, said the purpose was to dispel some myths surrounding the project.

"The aim was to take the children out into the open, to encourage those affected to find out their origins — but also to show the outside world that the cliché of the stud-

farm with blond-haired, blue-eyed parents is not correct," Reuters quoted him as saying.

The centers were started around 1936 to boost the birthrate of SS members and care for illegitimate Aryan children, often offspring that German soldiers had with local women in occupied lands.

Those who entered were screened for good health and German lineage, but the homes were not the breeding farms previously thought.

Most estimates suggest that some 8,000 Lebensborn children were born in Germany, and up to 12,000 in Norway.



WORLD REPORT

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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.
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THIS WEEK**MONDAY**

■ Three vintners from the Judean Hills arrive in Washington for meetings with wine writers, sommeliers and wine distributors in an effort to get wines from this region near Jerusalem onto wine lists. They continue to New York on Wednesday.

TUESDAY

■ Americans go to the polls in congressional midterm elections and a number of gubernatorial races, including New York and California.

■ Dvorah Chen, the Israeli prosecutor who jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghout, joins a U.S. federal prosecutor and the former chief of Palestinian investigations in the FBI's counterterrorism unit to discuss the Israeli and American experiences of prosecuting terrorists. They speak at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where Chen is now a fellow.

■ The United Jewish Communities hosts top Israeli reporters and editors in Washington during the U.S. election season.

WEDNESDAY

■ In Washington, the Israel Project hosts top pollsters Stanley Greenberg and Neil Newhouse for a postmortem of the U.S. midterm elections.

■ In Washington, the Israel Policy Forum hosts a U.S. midterm election postmortem with Joshua Muravchik of the American Enterprise Institute; Mara Rudman of the Center for American Progress; and James Zogby, the president of the Arab American Institute.

■ In Los Angeles, Harvard Law professor Alan Dershowitz debates Hussein Ibish of the American Task Force on Palestine on "America, Israel and the Middle East: Can there be Reconciliation?"

THURSDAY

■ The Jewish Reconstructionist Federation holds its 41st convention through Sunday in Philadelphia.

■ Germany's Action Week Against Anti-Semitism, organized by the Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, marks the 68th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

■ The new Jewish community center in Munich is to be dedicated.

FRIDAY

■ A two-day conference will take place in Nevada on the terrorism threat. It will be sponsored by America's Truth Forum.

SUNDAY

■ The United Jewish Communities General Assembly opens in Los Angeles and runs through Wednesday.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert arrives in Washington.

Israel marks Rabin's death

By DAN BARON

TEL AVIV (JTA) — He has long been known abroad as an Israeli novelist. But this weekend David Grossman put fiction aside to become the voice of an Israel that is bruised, confused and yearning to see the horizon beyond the perennial war clouds.

Grossman delivered the central address at Saturday night's rally in memory of slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, speaking for a half-hour to a rapt crowd estimated at 100,000 people.

He brought with him not just an intellectual's gravitas but the sorrow of a bereaved parent: Grossman lost a son, Uri, in the final offensive of the summer war against Hezbollah, a war Grossman had urged the Olmert government to cut short.

But Grossman eschewed self-pity and called on Israelis to be mindful of a national dream of a Zionism bringing peace and progress — a dream that seems, to many, to be slipping away.

"One of the most disturbing feelings exacerbated by the recent war was the feeling that in these days there is no king in Israel, that our leadership — our political and military leadership — is vapid," he said.

"When was the last time that the prime minister advocated or implemented measures with the capacity for opening up a new horizon for Israelis, or a better future? When did he initiate a social, cultural project, inspired by a value, instead of just reacting frenetically to moves imposed on him by others?"

Speaking at the site of Rabin's assassination in 1995 by a far-right zealot opposed to his intended rapprochement with the Palestinians, Grossman painted a portrait of the late prime minister as a man who reluctantly engaged a historical enemy of Israel because he felt there was no alternative. Others, however, believe Rabin made a catastrophic mistake by empowering and even arming a Palestinian national movement that never took its peace commit-

ments seriously and remained committed to Israel's destruction.

Like Rabin, Grossman said, current Prime Minister Ehud Olmert should make a peace offer to the Palestinians, bypassing their hardline Hamas government. Israel also should not be deaf to diplomatic overtures from Syria, Grossman argued.

The remarks came as Israel waged a major military operation in the northern Gaza Strip aimed at stopping cross-border rocket fire by Palestinian terrorists. At least 40 Palestinians and an Israeli soldier have died.

"We have informed the world that

we do not intend to countenance continued Kassam rocket barrages against Sderot and other surrounding Israeli communities," Olmert said at Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting. "We will take the necessary measures to significantly diminish them and prevent terrorist operations. Thus

we have said, thus we are doing and thus we will continue to do."

Critics have accused Olmert of trying to look tough in Gaza to make up for the failings of the 34-day war in Lebanon, which was launched after Hezbollah abducted two Israeli soldiers and killed eight others in a cross-border raid. The war ended without achieving the soldiers' return.

"Israel flexed an enormous military muscle, but what was revealed behind it was its fragility and the limitations of its capability," Grossman said. "Simple human compassion has the power of a natural element, particularly in a situation of deadlock and hostility."

Grossman's rebuke hit its mark with at least one member of the Olmert government — Labor Minister without Portfolio Eitan Cabel, who was attending the rally alongside Vice Premier Shimon Peres and other political notables.

"I haven't heard a speech like that in years, and it is important to listen to it because it expresses the feelings of large sectors of our nation. Even though he spoke harshly, we mustn't dismiss him and we mustn't ignore him," Cabel told Ma'ariv. ■

One of the most disturbing feelings exacerbated by the recent war was the feeling that in these days there is no king in Israel.

David Grossman

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Annan wants to register barrier damage

Kofi Annan proposed a registry of damages to Palestinians caused by Israel's West Bank security barrier.

The proposal by the outgoing U.N. secretary-general derives from a 2004 ruling against the barrier, which cuts through portions of West Bank land, by the U.N.'s international court.

The registry would entail setting up a new office, Annan says, but would not be a "compensation commission or a claims-resolution facility, nor would it be a judicial or quasi-judicial body." The International Court of Justice ruling was not binding, raising questions about enforcement.

U.S. wants overflights stopped

U.S. officials reportedly asked Israel to stop combat aircraft overflights of Lebanon.

Elliott Abrams, the White House's deputy national security adviser, and David Welch, the State Department's top Middle East envoy, met Nov. 2 with Ehud Olmert ahead of the Israeli prime minister's Nov. 12-14 visit to Washington.

According to Ha'aretz, Abrams and Welch told Olmert that Israel's overflights, an aftereffect of Israel's war with Hezbollah this summer, are undermining Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's government.

Suit: Gun shop mishandled shooter

A gun shop did not adequately vet a white supremacist jailed for life after a shooting attack on a Jewish center in suburban Los Angeles, a lawsuit contends. The family of Joseph Iletto, a Philippine-born postal worker shot dead by Buford Furrow shortly after Furrow's 1999 attack on the North Valley Jewish Community Center in Granada Hills, Calif., filed a wrongful death suit Nov. 2 against the Loaner Too pawn shop in Seattle.

The family's lawyer, Mike Withey, contends that the shop failed to require Furrow to fill out a federal form that would have disqualified him from purchasing a pistol because he was a convicted felon who had spent time in a mental institution.

Three children, a receptionist and a teenage counselor were injured in Furrow's shooting attack on the center.

MIDDLE EAST

Serbian foreign minister in Israel

Serbia's foreign minister began a three-day visit to Israel. Vuk Draskovic, who arrived Saturday, was to meet with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, his deputy Shimon Peres and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. Bilateral relations and the future status of Kosovo will be key points of discussion.

Draskovic also is scheduled to meet with right-wing lawmaker Avigdor Lieberman, leader of Yisrael Beiteinu, which recently joined the governing coalition.

WORLD

Pope deplores Gaza violence

Pope Benedict XVI deplored the latest round of Israeli-Palestinian fighting in the Gaza Strip.

"It is with deep worry that I am following the news about the grave deterioration of the situation in Gaza and I want to express my closeness to the civilian populations who are suffering the consequences of acts of violence," the pope said Sunday in his weekly sermon at the Vatican.

Benedict called for the "enlightenment" of Israeli and Palestinian leaders, as well as of other Middle Eastern nations which might have a role in brokering peace.

Germany raps Israel over Lebanon

Germany criticized Israel for continuing surveillance flights over Lebanon. "That Israel is still trying to control the airspace over Lebanon despite the international presence of French, Italian and other soldiers runs contrary to every agreement," German Deputy Foreign Minister Gernot Erler said in a newspaper interview published Saturday.

He was referring to Israeli overflights that have continued in contravention of a U.N.-brokered truce that ended the war with Hezbollah on Aug. 14. Israel says it needs the flights to monitor continued arms smuggling to the Lebanese militia, which also is a violation of the cease-fire.

The tension has led some Western power brokers to suggest that the bolstered U.N. peacekeeper force in Lebanon, UNIFIL, could end up firing on Israeli aircraft in what would be billed as self-defense.

Latin Jews discuss bombing with Annan

Latin American Jewish leaders met last Friday with Kofi Annan in Uruguay to discuss the AMIA bombing investigation and other issues of concern to the region's Jews.

Ernesto Kramerian, president of Uruguay's Central Committee — an umbrella group for Uruguay's 16,000 Jews — told JTA he met with the U.N. secretary general for an hour, along with Jack Terpins, a Brazilian who is president of the Latin American Jewish Congress; Saul Gilvich, the congress' Uruguayan secretary general; and the presidents of Argentina's two leading Jewish entities, AMIA and DAIA. "We told him about our concerns," Kramerian said.

Among them was the lengthy report issued recently by Argentine investigators implicating Iranian ambassadors in Chile and Uruguay in the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, which killed 85 people and wounded more than 300. Citing the report, Kramerian said the Iranian diplomats boarded a Lufthansa flight to Frankfurt on July 17, 1994, the day before the truck bombing.

Iran's ambassador to Argentina had left the country a few days earlier. "That meant there was no Iranian ambassador in any South American capital.

"This was not a coincidence," Kramerian said, adding that "with Kofi Annan we did not go into all the details."

Kirchner urged to back AMIA progress

U.S. Jewish officials called on Argentina's president to back progress on the investigation of the 1994 bombing of Argentina's main Jewish center. Israel Singer, chairman of the World Jewish Congress' policy council, called Nov. 1 for Nestor Kirchner to express support for prosecutors' Oct. 25 decision to demand the arrest of eight Iranians, including former president Hashemi Rafsanjani, in connection with the 1994 AMIA bombing.

The attack killed 85 people and wounded some 300. Singer noted how significant the prosecutors' decision was to Argentina's fight against terrorism, according to a spokesman for Argentine Jewry's DAIA political umbrella group. Kirchner did not immediately respond.

The last phone call between Argentine government officials and American Jewish leaders — in September in New York — was seen as tense, due to the lack of progress in the case and the close relations between Argentina and Venezuela, which has become a leading backer of Iran's fiercely anti-Israel leadership.

Judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corral is expected to decide next week whether to back the prosecutors' call for the Iranians' arrest.