



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Arab states must lift the economic boycott of Israel in order to reap the fruits of a proposed Middle East regional development bank, an international conference in Washington agreed. Saudi Arabia was one of dozens of countries that signed on to the agreement. [Page 2]

■ Two Israeli soldiers were lightly wounded in the Gaza Strip when an explosive device went off as they were on their way to their post near the Kissufim crossing. A spokesperson for the Gaza Settlers Council said the incident was not the first at that particular army post, which has soldiers posted there only during the day.

■ Coretta Scott King joined representatives of the World Jewish Congress to mark what would have been her late husband's 65th birthday. Martin Luther King was remembered as a champion of rights for all people, not just his own. [Page 2]

■ Finance Minister Avraham Shohat announced an economic plan to slash the government budget by over \$233 million and to boost the net wages of all Israeli workers. The plan comes in response to fears that workers would see a decline in their wages as a result of a new health tax that took affect this month. Meanwhile, the Bank of Israel predicted a slow-down of economic growth in Israel this year. It also predicted unemployment would rise. [Page 4]

■ Former Israel Defense Force Chief of Staff Ehud Barak is arriving in Washington this week to attend the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies for three months. Barak, whose term as army chief ended last week, received a scholarship to the school's program in strategic studies. Barak is expected to continue attending talks in Washington that are bringing together Israeli and Syrian diplomats and military officials. Last week, Barak denied reports that he will be appointed defense minister.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Russian Jews remain cautious amid conflagration in Chechnya

By Lisa Glazer

MOSCOW, Jan. 11 (JTA) — Russian Jews are responding cautiously as the war in the breakaway republic of Chechnya claims an increasing number of lives.

Jews here are warily observing the country's shifting political climate and expressing fears about the future of democracy.

At the same time, however, most of the organized Jewish community has not taken an official side in the conflict.

"The clear Jewish answer is absent," said Roman Spektor, the vice president of the Vaad, the federation of Jewish institutions in Russia.

Except for signing a statement issued by the Congress of National Minorities last month expressing concern about the use of violence in Chechnya, "as an organized Jewish group, we have not participated," Spektor said.

Still, Spektor said that as private individuals, he and other Jewish activists have taken part in anti-war gatherings and ceaselessly discussed the political implications of the military operation.

"I can only express my personal viewpoint, that the Chechnya war is a very real example of the anti-democratic trend in Russia," he said.

"It is a mirror reflecting who is in power now," he said.

Spektor said that as the country's nationalist, militarist impulses come to the fore, President Boris Yeltsin is losing support from long-time democratic allies, while winning backing from extremists such as the ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

"We have a new public atmosphere, and in the shadows we also see anti-Semitism," he said.

Zinovy Kogan, the spiritual leader of Moscow's reform synagogue, Hineini, said, "I share the mood of the members of the community that the war in Chechnya is a tragedy.

'No distinct Jewish voice in the anti-war movement'

"Like any religious person, I think the conflict should be dealt with through words," he said. "However, there is no distinct Jewish voice in the anti-war movement because this is a common problem for all Russians."

He added that he is involved in a new committee bringing together Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist religious leaders, but none of them have yet discussed making any statement about the war.

Vladimir Shapiro, a sociologist who studies Russia's Jewish community at the Academy of Sciences, added, "I support the opinion of those who say we are seeing a movement towards a totalitarian regime.

"The present leadership is ready to use force without paying attention to human life or international norms," he said.

Yet he said he did not foresee an immediate link between more authoritarian leadership and the loss of new-found freedom for Jews.

One observer, Rabbi Berel Lazar of the Chabad Lubavitch community, saw some encouraging signs within the strife.

"Yeltsin is bowing down to pressure from the nationalists, but most people are against the war and in favor of democracy," he said. Public protests and uncensored media coverage is a sign, he noted, that elements of democracy are still alive in Russia.

Only one Jewish group, the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, an American Jewish human rights group, has publicly joined forces with Russian human rights organizations such as Memorial to excoriate the Russian government's actions in Chechnya.

"Part of making Russia a place where Jews can feel comfortable, at least temporarily, is building a Russia that is democratic and supportive of Jewish rights," explained Maureen Greenwood, who works in the organization's Moscow office. "Russia is now committing massive human rights violations and we felt it was important to speak out," she said.

The Union of Councils has also provided financial support for Jewish refugees from Grozny.

At least 30 refugees have already arrived in Israel with the help of the

Because of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Jan. 16.

Jewish Agency for Israel. And others are reportedly on the way.

Only about 10 or 20 Jewish families remain stranded in Grozny, while most of the community has escaped to Nalchik, a city in a nearby republic, according to Chaim Chesler, who oversees the Jewish Agency's work in the former Soviet Union.

Other Jewish groups may be reluctant to become publicly involved for a number of reasons, according to observers.

Some believe that developing a Jewish voice within politics could spark anti-Semitism.

Others fear that political action could spur disunity within the Jewish community or divert attention from Jewish issues.

In addition, many Jews, unless they are being directly affected by the conflict, are hesitant about officially condemning a government under which they have received unprecedented freedoms. □

Participation in Mideast bank will depend on ending boycott

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Jan. 11 (JTA) — Arab states must lift the economic boycott of Israel in order to reap the fruits of a proposed Middle East regional development bank.

During a two-day meeting here, representatives from 39 countries and international organizations reached a preliminary agreement to hammer out the lingering differences on the bank's logistics.

"The boycott is being dismantled," Secretary of State Warren Christopher said to the conference delegates. "I feel that the region will once again become economically whole."

"There was no dissent" that member nations must lift all levels of the economic boycott against Israel, said conference co-chair Joan Spero, under secretary of state for economic, business and agricultural affairs.

The talks come on the heels of the landmark Casablanca Middle East Economic Summit held last November where the same participants agreed to pursue the possibility of establishing a regional development bank.

The bank would serve as a "catalyst and a deal maker in the region," Spero said, adding it would "demonstrate strong support for the peace process."

After the latest round of talks here, officials agreed to set up a task force to delve into specific funding and eligibility issues.

Saudi Arabia was one of at least nine Arab nations that agreed to the boycott language, according to State Department officials.

At the beginning of the conference, State Department officials privately lashed out at the Saudis for not indicating in advance whether they would send a representative.

In the end, the Saudis were represented and signed onto the effort, officials said.

The task force is scheduled to begin monthly meetings in March with the goal of submitting a proposal before the second regional economic conference slated for October in Amman, Jordan.

"Everyone is open to a bank, but they want to see what it will look like," Spero said.

At the conference, Israeli officials joined forces with the Palestine Liberation Organization, Egypt and Jordan in an effort to win support for the bank.

The four proposed a joint plan that drew praise from their American hosts, who are strongly supporting the bank.

While planners need to resolve many important issues such as who will fund the bank, the co-chair of the Israeli delegation said there is a "very high probability" that there will ultimately be a bank. □

Coretta King joins WJC leaders to mark late husband's birthday

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Jan. 11 (JTA) — Coretta Scott King joined representatives of the World Jewish Congress this week to mark what would have been her late husband's 65th birthday.

At Tuesday's ceremony, Martin Luther King Jr. was remembered as a champion of rights for all people, not just his own.

King was remembered for speaking out often on behalf of Jews who were trapped in the former Soviet Union and against anti-Semitism wherever it was found, even among members of the black community.

His widow and Evelyn Sommer, chairman of the American section of the WJC, both recalled that just 10 days before he was assassinated on April 4, 1968, King addressed the members of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly at their annual convention, held that year in New York.

"We cannot be victims of the notion that you can substitute one tyranny for another," he told the assembled rabbis, who included his friend Abraham Joshua Heschel. "For the black man to struggle for equality and then turn around and be anti-Semitic is not only an irrational course, but an immoral course."

Mrs. King expanded on the theme in her remarks this week. "Anti-Semitism is as vile and contemptible as racism. Anyone who supports it, including African Americans, does a disservice to his people, his country and his God," said King.

"Martin said it on many occasions, not just when he was speaking to the Rabbinical Assembly."

WJC presented Mrs. King with a proclamation titled "His Dream is Ours."

It stated: "Dr. King demonstrated a deep sensitivity for Jewish concerns and tradition. And Jews had a profound appreciation for Dr. King's moral leadership, which was consonant with the teachings of our tradition.

"Who can forget the scene of Jews marching arm in arm with Dr. King and his associates, or the sacrifices made by Jews in the struggle for civil rights?" it said.

After accepting the proclamation, Mrs. King said, "None of the other recognitions I have received on his behalf has been more significant or moving than your recognizing his birthday as your own holiday.

"This is a powerful testament to the solidarity we share in the struggle for human rights," said his widow, who has worked to spread King's teachings of non-violent struggle for civil rights since his murder.

In presenting the proclamation, Rabbi Marc Schneier, chairman of WJC's Intergroup Relations Committee, noted that the observance of King's birthday next Monday falls this year on the same day as Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish holiday celebrating trees.

"Dr. King planted seeds that bore fruit not only in our generation, but (will continue to) in generations to come," said Schneier.

According to Sommer, the various sections of WJC around the globe, including Europe, Africa and Asia, will all be marking the day as a communal remembrance. In addition, WJC has joined with the Israeli government and the United Negro College Fund in launching a program in which students from historically black colleges go to study at Israeli universities for a semester. □

NEWS ANALYSIS:**Midterm crisis threatens Labor despite political, economic coups**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 11 (JTA) — Two-and-a-half years into its current term, the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is being buffeted by waves of unpopularity that threaten to paralyze it until the next elections.

Worse still for Rabin, growing discontent may wreck the governing coalition altogether and force him to resign prematurely.

The polls show drastic slippage both in Rabin's personal standing and in public support for his Labor Party, the leading force in the governing coalition.

The media have thrown a harsh spotlight on the polls and have added reams of analysis and commentary to them. As a result, some Laborites argue, they have succeeded in exacerbating and accelerating the downward trend in the government's popularity.

A radio report last weekend, for example, which asserted that Labor and the Palestine Liberation Organization held illegal consultations before the last elections on how to influence Israeli Arab voting has caused a major furor.

The Likud opposition demanded a commission of inquiry, and Labor and PLO figures vigorously denied the allegations of collusion.

Ironically, the report cited a book on the peace process that was published — and reported on — three months ago, without causing a ripple. The book was written by Palestinian negotiator Mahmoud Abbas. Initial reports were carried by a major Arab newspaper and by the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Clearly, the sense of ill-fortune pervading the media's coverage of the government at this time gave the story a new lease of life and contributed to its attaining the dimensions of a major political uproar.

But even the most diehard Laborites can hardly deny that a genuine feeling of disappointment pervades wide sections of the general public: disappointment both with the general state of the nation and with the government's performance.

Is current malaise merely midterm blues?

It is an atmosphere that has taken hold of Israel's public with remarkable speed, just as a widespread euphoria swept the country in the wake of the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian accord of September 1993.

Indeed, it is this very volatility of public opinion that gives the government ministers and their Knesset colleagues grounds for hope that the present crisis, though prolonged, will prove transient.

They hope that all the current malaise is nothing more than a case of midterm blues that has so far refused to go away, but eventually will.

Political observers here generally point to the ongoing terrorist attacks, both in the territories and inside Israel proper, as the single major cause of the government's decline in popularity.

In a way, this is surprising. No one, not even the most sanguine and ardent advocates of the peace agreement with the PLO, deluded themselves into believing that the implementation of this agreement would not be fraught with violence.

The same media wags who now point to the terror as a reflection of the Rabin government's failure all predicted in the aftermath of the signing of the self-rule accord that terrorism would rise as Islamic fundamentalists and other rejectionists made a final, desperate effort to hold

back the dawn of peaceful relations between the two nations.

Nor did the lamentable inadequacies of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's autonomous administration in the Gaza Strip and West Bank Jericho enclave come as a surprise to Israeli experts or to the wider public who follow their prognostications.

Many Israeli Arabists had long underscored the difficulties the PLO would face in transforming themselves from exiles in Tunisia to responsible leaders in Gaza.

What, then, is causing Rabin's fall from grace in the public's mind? Sources with access to the prime minister offer different theories:

- Some say that despite the somber predictions of an upsurge in terror and violence, Rabin is finding the steady toll of deaths and injuries hard to take.

The rightist opposition makes a point of recording each new death on placards outside the prime minister's residences in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv — a repeat of leftist opposition tactics during the Lebanon War in the early 1980s. According to this interpretation, the TV-watching public has sensed the prime minister's waning self-confidence, and he, in turn, has sensed the ebbing of public confidence in him.

- Others cite Rabin's scarcely veiled impatience — some say contempt — with most of his Cabinet colleagues. This sustained mood on the part of the premier has seeped through the entire Cabinet — and is causing deep and widespread depression, and even disaffection, in the ministerial ranks.

- A variation of this interpretation sees Rabin profoundly frustrated by the public's lack of appreciation of the improvement in its collective economic condition.

Macro-economic indicators — especially unemployment and industrial growth — show a healthy economy. Yet many ordinary citizens complain that their disposable income is, if anything, shrinking.

Negotiations moving faster than believed

Can Rabin pull through and face Likud challenger Benjamin Netanyahu in direct elections, the first in Israel's history, in June 1996? Some of his closest aides are counseling him to shake up the Cabinet, sack certain ministers, shuffle others, and bring in fresh blood to fill key posts. But Rabin, ever one for political infighting, is balking at this advice.

Rather, the prime minister, backed strongly by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, seems to have resolved that his best option is to press ahead with the peace process, despite the present obstacles and the criticism and controversy it has already engendered.

Informed sources say that negotiations both on the Syrian track and on the Palestinian track are proceeding at a much faster pace than the media and public know.

Rabin and Arafat are scheduled to meet alone next week for talks on the Israeli army's redeployment from major Palestinian population centers in the West Bank. Both leaders hope to keep the details secret.

At the same time, Israeli and Syrian military officers and diplomats are also expected to meet again soon in Washington.

Ultimately, though, this recipe for domestic political recovery through diplomatic successes depends on the other side at least as much as on Rabin and Peres themselves.

The weakness of the Palestinian Authority is a fact of regional life that could yet thwart even the most forthcoming Israeli policy positions on the Palestinian track.

And Syria's Hafez Assad, master of procrastination, may prove simply incapable of making the conceptual leap toward peace with the "Zionist entity." □

Marking anniversary of Jackson-Vanik, activists say much work left to be done

By Lawrence Rifkin

JERUSALEM, Jan. 11 (JTA) — Activists marking the anniversary of U.S. legislation that helped open the emigration gates for Soviet Jewry say there is still much work to be done for those in the former Soviet republics, as well as for those who left.

Some 500 former refuseniks, Prisoners of Zion and Western activists were gathered in Jerusalem this week to mark 20 years since the Jackson-Vanik Amendment was signed into law on Jan. 10, 1975, as part of the Trade Reform Act.

Sponsored in the Senate by Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) and in the House by Charles Vanik (D-Ohio), the amendment made the granting of most-favored-nation trade status conditional on policies of free emigration.

Participants at the three-day conference agreed that the amendment, which was mostly the work of Jackson, was an important landmark, if not the turning point, in the struggle for Soviet Jewry.

It came as the Nixon and then Ford administrations were seeking detente with the Soviet Union. And it put the muscle of American law behind the efforts of a number of grass-roots organizations seeking to keep the issue of free emigration alive.

Activists say it was Jackson-Vanik which made the Soviets backtrack on crippling taxes designed to keep Jews from leaving.

Natan Sharansky, perhaps the most famous Prisoner of Zion and chairman of the conference, was jailed in the 1970s after being convicted of high treason and anti-Soviet activities.

At the conference this week, Sharansky said the charge of high treason was for helping fellow dissidents communicate with Jackson. "One of my interrogators claimed that the Jackson-Vanik Amendment had cost the Soviet Union \$20 billion, and rhetorically asked me, 'Do you think you can pass this amendment and not suffer?'"

'You don't abandon your soldiers'

Organizers say the gathering was not only an opportunity to commemorate the efforts of a friend of Israel and the Jewish people, but also to discuss the lessons learned from Jackson-Vanik and whether they can be applied to present and future issues.

Glenn Richter, head of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, said Jackson-Vanik taught young activists how to lobby Congress, and alluded to one area in which this knowledge could be put to further use.

"There are presently 56 instances in the [former Soviet Union] where Soviet Jewish citizens are being denied the right to emigrate because they had access to state secrets," Richter said. "We learned from Israel that you don't abandon your soldiers on the battlefield."

Susan Green, of the New York Coalition for Soviet Jewry, said a by-product of the collapse of the Soviet Union is anarchy in some of the republics. She warned that some people in those republics believe that the only way to restore order is to go back to old repressive ways, and that the ones who suffered from repression most were the Jews.

"We must hope for the best, but be prepared for the worst," Green said. It is estimated that some 2 million Jews remain in the former Soviet Union.

Elena Bonner, widow of dissident physicist Andre Sakharov, used the plenum to call for world condemnation of Russian attacks in Chechnya, the breakaway republic currently embroiled in an armed rebellion against Moscow.

Other participants talked of the approximately 800,000 Soviet Jews who have emigrated to Israel. More

than a half-million have arrived in the past five years, and their absorption has been problematic.

"Our real challenge now is to absorb the Soviet Jews here," said Amos Eran, who as a diplomat at Israel's Embassy in Washington 20 years ago, became a close friend of Jackson.

While former refusenik Yuli Edelstein believes most of the recent arrivals have put their logistical problems behind them, he doubts they have become an integral part of Israeli society. "This is true not only for the most recent arrivals," Edelstein said, "but also for some of those who came in the 1970s."

Sharansky criticized Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for failing, in his address to the conference, to acknowledge the difficulties faced by Soviet immigrants.

Soviet immigrants helped Rabin and his Labor Party win the 1992 elections, and reports here say these voters, who now make up the largest single ethnic community in Israel, could very well remove Rabin and Labor from power in 1996.

Much of the conference was taken up by tributes to Jackson, who died in 1983 at the age of 71.

Eran called the Jackson-Vanik amendment "a central part of his personality and agenda."

Eran related how Jackson had visited the Buchenwald concentration camp shortly after its liberation in 1945. "I'm going to do whatever I can to ensure that this won't happen again," he said Jackson had told him.

Other speakers emphasized that Jackson was very pro-Israel, supporting financial aid and helping to circumvent senators who were not as friendly and who chaired critical committees during legislation efforts which were important for the Jewish state.

Richard Perle, a Jackson aide who went on to become an assistant secretary of defense under President Reagan, spoke of Jackson with great emotion during a coffee break. "He was warm and generous. He treated me like a son. For Scoop, no issue was too small."

Before the participants headed for the dedication of a city square named in Jackson's memory, Sharansky closed the conference by saying that the senator from Washington was a true Zionist. "Maybe," added Sharansky, "he was even a secret Jew." □

Minister proposes budget cuts along with an increase in wages

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Jan. 11 (JTA) — Finance Minister Avraham Shohat has announced an economic plan to slash the government budget by over \$233 million and to boost the net wages of all Israeli workers.

The plan comes in response to fears that workers would see a decline in their wages as a result of a new health tax that took affect this month.

Shohat said 90 percent of the country's wage earners would see an increase in their net salaries next month. He said the cuts in the budget would come in part from reduced income taxes for working women. He also said the budget cuts would not affect services to citizens.

Opposition members dismissed the reforms, saying they were not serious.

In other economic news, economic growth in Israel will be slower in 1995 than it was last year, according to an internal document prepared by the research department at the Bank of Israel. While the economy expanded by 7 percent in 1994, officials at the bank estimate that growth in 1995 will be in the 4.5 to 5 percent range.

Citing the slowdown in overall growth, bank officials also predicted that unemployment would rise in 1995 to 8.2 percent from 7.6 percent in 1994. □