



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ A group of refugees from war-torn Chechnya arrived in Israel on a special flight organized by the Jewish Agency. A total of 103 Chechen Jews have been rescued since the outbreak of war with Russia. [Page 3]

■ Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin told a high-level American Jewish delegation that President Boris Yeltsin is committed to building a Holocaust museum in Moscow. The meeting with Chernomyrdin capped a mission to the former Soviet Union by representatives of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. [Page 3]

■ Israeli and Palestinian negotiators reached agreement in Cairo on some terms for holding elections in the territories. At separate meetings in Tel Aviv, negotiators discussed the transfer of additional areas of government in the West Bank to the Palestinians. [Page 4]

■ About 300 Palestinians protested Israel's plan to expropriate Arab-owned land in eastern Jerusalem. The demonstrations in Gaza included Palestinians from pro- and anti-peace factions. The protests came as the U.N. Security Council concluded a debate about the land issue. [Page 4]

■ The trial of a key leader of the neo-Nazi movement in Germany began in Berlin amid heavy security. Arnulf Priem faces charges in connection with 15 crimes. [Page 2]

■ Belgian Jewish leaders warned the Jewish community against voting for right-wing parties in the upcoming elections. The appeal came as opinion polls predicted important electoral gains for the Flemish Bloc, the anti-immigrant, extreme-right Flemish party. [Page 4]

■ McDonalds announced plans to open three kosher restaurants in Israel by the end of the summer. The fast-food chain already has 10 non-kosher franchises. The company said the new facilities would not serve dairy products and would not be open on the Sabbath.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Turmoil in community marks debate over U.S. Embassy move

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, May 16 (JTA) — Although publicly supportive of congressional initiatives to begin building a U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem next year, many in the organized Jewish community are privately frustrated that their stance could damage the fledgling peace process.

Although some major organizations expressed immediate approval of moving the embassy from Tel Aviv, others voiced a more tepid response — followed by very carefully worded statements.

The varied reactions signaled the struggles many pro-Israel activists have gone through in the past week since presidential hopeful and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) unveiled his legislation last week at the annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby.

Dole and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) introduced the Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Implementation Act into their respective houses of Congress last week.

The measure is likely to pass both houses easily, but not necessarily before Congress recesses in August. The bill would force the State Department to begin building an embassy in the capital city of Jerusalem next year. The ambassador would have to move in no later than 1999.

In a flurry of activity over the past week, Jewish organizations have staked out their positions on the bill.

Several powerful groups, including AIPAC, were quick to go on record supporting the initiative but others, such as the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, were more cautious.

Negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis troubled

Most Jewish groups support the idea of the U.S. Embassy being located in a unified Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty.

Some, however, echoing the position of both the Israeli government and the Clinton administration, are concerned that such a move could undermine already troubled peace negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Under the Declaration of Principles signed in September 1993, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed to put off the issue of Jerusalem until the final-status talks, which are scheduled to begin next year and end in 1999.

The reluctance of many normally vocal activists to speak on the record about the organized community's grappling with the issue is telling.

"Our grass roots and policy say we have to support the bill, but they can't say how strongly," said one activist who requested anonymity.

Another activist said, "We can't oppose the bill, but sometimes silence speaks volumes. The last thing we want is to give the PLO an excuse to walk away from the table."

For its part, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee not only publicly supported the move, it also instructed its delegates to push actively for the bill during Capitol Hill visits last week.

"The question of if the U.S. moves its embassy is for the U.S. to decide," said Neal Sher, AIPAC's executive director.

"We believe it should not have a negative impact on the peace process."

"The only bill out there is the Dole bill and we're supporting it," Sher said.

Unlike AIPAC, NJCRAC, an umbrella group of local community relations councils and national Jewish organizations, did not endorse the Dole bill.

"We support the goal of the legislation," NJCRAC said in a deliberately worded statement agreed to after three conference calls last week.

"We also support the Middle East peace process and reconciliation between Israel and her Arab neighbors," the statement said.

In its press release accompanying the statement, NJCRAC further stated, "The umbrella body also cautioned the congressional leadership

against engaging in a debate now on the timing of such a move."

Member agencies and local community relations councils were urged to share the statement with their members of Congress.

But unlike some issues, they were not asked to lobby aggressively on behalf of the initiative.

Supporters of the embassy move lashed out at NJCRAC for not supporting the bill.

"It's outrageous. If they went to their membership and asked what they think about it, they might all be out of their jobs," said one activist who requested anonymity.

But NJCRAC stood by its statement.

"We are perfectly confident that we went through as full a consultative process as possible," said Martin Raffel, NJCRAC's associate executive vice chairman.

Dole's move, which forces the relocation of the embassy by cutting off State Department funds if it does not comply, caught many in the Jewish community and in Congress by surprise.

Dole's bill comes on the heels of a congressional letter to Secretary of State Warren Christopher sponsored by Sens. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) and Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.).

That letter called on the administration to begin plans to move the embassy by the end of the final-status talks. The letter asked the secretary to report back to Congress on steps he was taking to implement the move.

"We were working with the State Department to formulate a proper and acceptable response when the issue was hijacked by Dole," said one congressional aide who opposes the bill.

Israeli officials, though privately concerned about the timing of the initiative, echoed Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's statement that the issue is an American political dispute and that Jerusalem is the eternal, undivided capital of Israel.

Israeli officials said they plan to take no action on the Dole bill as it makes its way through Congress.

The Clinton administration has vehemently opposed the move and early on lobbied to keep Democrats from co-sponsoring the initiative.

'Serious damage at a delicate time'

Christopher said moving the embassy would do "serious damage" at "a very delicate time" in the peace process.

This week, White House spokesman Michael McCurry predicted that moving the embassy would "severely disrupt the peace process."

"It's a bad idea. It's a bad idea because it is taking what is one of the most sensitive issues in the peace process and pronouncing a U.S. view summarily as the parties themselves are grappling with that issue under the terms of the Declaration of Principles," McCurry told reporters.

However, supporters argue that Israel has the right to declare its own capital. Further, they say, the embassy would be built in western Jerusalem, which is undisputed Israeli land. The Palestinians claim eastern Jerusalem as the capital of an eventual state.

In an example of how many Jewish organizations are grappling with support for moving the embassy while at the same time fearing that an endorsement of the move could upset the peace process, the American Jewish Committee has decided to avoid public comments on the legislation.

Although supportive of the NJCRAC statement, AJCommittee officials said they would not enter the fray.

In contrast, American Jewish Congress, which has been one of the most vocal supporters of the peace process,

surprised many observers by endorsing the legislation immediately after it was introduced.

"We are confident that this legislation does not have an adverse impact on the peace process, that it should not and that it will not," AJCongress President David Kahn and Executive Director Phil Baum wrote in a letter to members of Congress. Only days later, Baum was called on to defend the AJCongress letter by angry members.

By "maintaining that there is nothing in the proposal inimical to the peace process," the group "wanted to preclude the argument that adoption of this measure implied that the U.S. Congress had given up on or intended to compromise the peace process," Baum said.

Other Jewish groups were more predictable in their responses. On the right of the communal spectrum, the Zionist Organization of America and Americans for a Safe Israel lined up in support of the bill. On the left, Americans for Peace Now and Project Nishma immediately opposed it.

B'nai B'rith International, the Anti-Defamation League and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America also supported the legislation.

"There can be no reasonable defense for the American government's continual refusal to relocate" the embassy, the Orthodox Union said in a statement.

The Conference of Presidents, whose leaders are on a mission to the former Soviet Union, have issued no formal statement.

But Lester Pollack, outgoing chairman of the umbrella organization, said last week, "I imagine the community would support" Dole's initiative. □

Trial of top neo-Nazi leader begins under heavy security

By Gil Sedan

BONN, May 16 (JTA) — The trial of one of the key leaders of the neo-Nazi movement in Germany began this week in Berlin under heavy security measures.

Arnulf Priem, 47, was charged with 15 crimes, among them the establishment of an armed group.

This was not the first time Priem has had a conflict with the law. In the 1980s, he was observed by security services for playing in the neo-Nazi rock band The Vandals.

But most recently, Priem, who is unemployed, reputedly served as a leader of the outlawed Deutsche Alternative organization and other similar neo-Nazi groups.

He was arrested Aug. 13, 1994, after a group of 25 neo-Nazis reportedly assembled on the roof of his Berlin apartment.

With iron bars and stones, the neo-Nazis attacked journalists who had gathered in front of the building, reports said. The neo-Nazis had suspected the journalists to be part of an anti-fascist demonstration.

When police searched Priem's residence, they said they found gas bombs, explosives, gas pistols and an array of Nazi articles and documents that included uniforms, SS hats and curtains made from a flag bearing a swastika.

Other charges against Priem include illegal possession of arms and ammunition, possession of illegal symbols, endorsement of neo-Nazi demonstrations as a "process of self purification" and organization of a gathering to attack public institutions with fire.

In court Tuesday, Priem said the wording of his endorsement of neo-Nazi demonstrations was not intended and that it was made in a "euphoric mood."

He denied charges that he had planned to attack the journalists with gas bombs, saying he did not even know how to use them. He said the Nazi symbols in his apartment were "collectors' items." □

**Bleary-eyed and confused,
Chechens find safety in Israel**

By Uriel Masad

LOD, Israel, May 16 (JTA) — A group of 52 refugees from war-torn Chechnya arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport this week on a special flight organized by the Jewish Agency and funded by the Joint Israel Appeal of Great Britain.

The passengers — a group that includes 19 children and several people injured in the fighting — file off the plane from Mineralny-Vody on Tuesday, bleary-eyed and confused, unsure of how to react to the barrage of flashing lights and television crews that await them.

Obediently, they follow the instructions of Israeli Absorption Ministry officials as they carry their meager hand luggage.

An elderly woman is wheeled in on a wheelchair. Another is weighed down by a plastic bucket with its lid tightly shut. Some hold pink carnations in their hands; others are wearing new white and blue hats of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The children clutch small, unopened plastic bags filled with sweets, looking around with curiosity.

The arrival of this group brings to 103 the total number of Chechen Jews who fled the war and were brought to Israel by the Jewish Agency.

According to Chaim Chesler, head of the Jewish Agency delegation in the former Soviet Union, some 50 Jews are still in Grozny, and efforts are being made to establish contact with them in order to bring them out.

For Tuesday's arrivals, the flight took less than three hours, but the wait took almost five months.

These refugees escaped the shattered Chechen capital of Grozny shortly after the Russian army invaded the breakaway North Caucasus region in December to crush a three-year-old independence campaign.

But they were unable to leave the country because they did not have the appropriate documents.

'We left very early in the morning'

Sergei Shipulin, a psychologist from Grozny, arrived with his wife and two adult children. He speaks a halting English, but is nervous and needs the help of a translator.

"We left Grozny on December 13, 1994. The Russians were already attacking the town," he says. "We left very early in the morning."

Shipulin says his family fled to Dagestan, a nearby republic in the Caucasus Mountains, where they lived as refugees along with some other 90,000 Chechen refugees.

They were unable to work, but had no papers so were also unable to leave, he says.

After three weeks of living as refugees, the Shipulin family found Jewish Agency officials who took care of them. They were put up in a hotel, received some clothes and waited for their papers to be put in order.

Now that he has arrived in Israel, Shipulin says he wants to live in Lod and work in his profession. He says he hopes his son can continue his higher education in computers.

Another refugee, Asya Raskin, sits down on a bench to rest. She was injured in the fighting, but speaks about it without emotion. Her teen-age daughter Lisa, clad in jeans, listens.

"The bombing of Grozny started in December," she says. "On December 25, our house received a direct hit, and I was wounded by flying glass and debris."

She motions to her back, then pulls up her dress and shows some wound marks on her thigh. "We were evacuated to Nazran, and stayed there for 21 days. But

then they wouldn't let us leave because we were Jews," she says.

"Other Chechens helped us escape to Piatigorsky, and there we found the Jewish Agency. We have relatives in Israel, from Grozny, and we'll go to them first," Raskin says.

As the journalists move away, Lisa Raskin asks for a telephone. She is shown to a free phone, where she makes a call to her cousin as she looks out at the sunny runway. Before switching to Russian, her first word to her cousin is "Shalom." □

**Russian leaders back idea
for Moscow Holocaust museum**

By Alexander Lesser

MOSCOW, May 16 (JTA) — Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin told a high-level American Jewish delegation here that President Boris Yeltsin is committed to building a Holocaust museum in the Russian capital, according to Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Chernomyrdin's statement is believed to mark the first time that the Russian president has backed the erection of a Holocaust museum on Soviet soil, where Hitler claimed many of his victims.

Russian Jews have long called for the establishment of such a museum. Chernomyrdin pledged that the Russian government would help find a site in Moscow and render "assistance" to Russia's Holocaust museum, though he did not mention financial assistance, said Hoenlein, who participated in the meeting.

The hour-long meeting with Chernomyrdin marked the high point of a four-day visit to Russia and Belarus by the eight-member delegation, organized jointly by the Conference of Presidents and the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

In an unusual move, Chernomyrdin sought to highlight the meeting by inviting a Russian television crew to film the gathering for broadcast on the local evening news. Traditionally, Russian leaders' contacts with foreign Jewish organizations have been downplayed in the local media.

In an interview here, Hoenlein expressed pleasure at Chernomyrdin's decision to let a Russian spotlight fall on the delegation. "It shows the Russian leadership feels secure," despite evidence of anti-Semitism, he said.

In addition to Chernomyrdin, the group met Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and Vladimir Lukin, a former Russian ambassador to Washington and now a parliamentary leader.

Kozyrev said despite current difficulties between the United States and Russia, particularly over the Russia-Iran nuclear reactor deal, the relationship was maturing and becoming more stable.

He cited as evidence the co-sponsorship of the Middle East peace process as an *unsung success story*, adding that he had reason to hope that peace between Israel and Syria was not far off.

Lukin told the delegation about the hardships of Russian life and U.S.-Russian differences in a blunt manner described by Hoenlein as "friendly, but firm."

There were two common themes in all the meetings with Russian leaders — "the desire for foreign investment and concern over Russia's international image," said Mark Levin, NCSJ's executive director.

As the group departed for the Moscow airport to return to the United States on Tuesday, Hoenlein said he was impressed by the "high level of coordination" among agencies active on Jewish concerns in Russia. □

Talks on elections proceed in spite of furor over land*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, May 16 (JTA) — Though locked in a feud over Israel's plans to expropriate Arab-owned land in eastern Jerusalem, Palestinian and Israeli negotiators are moving forward with their talks on the next phase of Palestinian self-rule.

Meeting this week in Cairo, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed that Palestinians would control security during elections in the territories.

Israel Television, quoting a member of the Palestinian team, said the two sides have already agreed on eligibility for candidacy and international supervision of the elections.

But the two sides remain divided on whether polling booths would be set up in eastern Jerusalem, and whether eastern Jerusalem residents could run for election.

The head of the Palestinian negotiating team, Saeb Erekat, said he was pessimistic that the two sides could conclude an agreement by the agreed target date of July 1.

He was especially pessimistic about an Israeli withdrawal from West Bank towns, which is being negotiated in separate discussions.

The second phase of self-rule was supposed to include a redeployment of Israeli troops on the eve of elections. "I did not see any intention to reach an agreement," Erekat said.

The head of the Israeli team, Foreign Ministry legal adviser Yoel Zinger, did not comment.

The talks came as Palestinian protesters demonstrated in Gaza against Israel's decision to expropriate land in eastern Jerusalem. The plan to expropriate nearly 140 acres, some of it Arab-owned, for housing and a police station, was approved by the Israeli Cabinet on Sunday.

The move prompted an international outcry, including a debate in the U.N. Security Council.

About 300 protesters from pro- and anti-peace factions took part, including PLO leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction, the Marxist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the fundamentalist Islamic Jihad.

The protesters carried Palestinian flags and banners calling for the removal of Jewish settlements from Gaza and condemning the expropriations.

'Responsibility for all the spheres'

Meanwhile, in Tel Aviv, another group of Israeli and Palestinian negotiators discussed transferring additional areas of government in the West Bank to the Palestinians, even before the elections.

Israel agreed to transfer control over labor affairs, one of five areas up for discussion Tuesday. The other four were trade and industry, insurance, postage and energy.

The Palestinian official in charge of civil affairs, Jamil Tarifi, called on Israel to hand over responsibility for all areas of administration. "We would like to assume responsibility for all of the spheres," he told reporters.

The PLO took over control of health, education, welfare, taxation and tourism earlier this year.

The additional five areas to be transferred to the PLO, known as "early empowerment," was due to have taken place sooner. But Israel delayed the transfer due to a number of concerns, primarily about terrorism.

The head of the Israeli team, Civil Administration head Brig. Gen. Oren Shahor, said he hoped to reach an accord within weeks. "Our aim is that by July 1, perhaps earlier, we will finish transferring these authorities," he told reporters.

Talks will resume next week in Cairo. □

Belgian Jews issued warning about extremist candidates*By Joseph Kopel*

BRUSSELS, May 16 (JTA) — As some 7.2 million Belgians prepare to vote for members of their federal and regional parliaments in elections Sunday, the umbrella organization representing Belgian Jewry has issued a warning to the community about the vote.

In what it termed an "Appeal to Belgian Jews," the Coordination Committee of Belgian Jewish Organizations said, "Extremist parties are running in these elections. If they would come to power or share it, it may endanger our fundamental freedoms. We must combat the parties calling for exclusion and racism, even in a disguised form."

The group called on the Jewish community to vote for "democratic parties in order to stop fascism."

The appeal came as opinion polls predicted important electoral gains for the Flemish Bloc, the anti-immigrant, extreme-right Flemish party.

According to one recently published poll, support for the Flemish Bloc has risen strongly, with the poll suggesting that it may get as much as 12.8 percent of the vote in Sunday's elections. This would make the Flemish Bloc the fourth largest party in Belgium's Flanders region, after the Christian Democrat, Liberal and Socialist parties.

Support for the extreme-right nationalist party has grown in Flanders after political scandals hit the Socialist Party, a member of the center-left governing coalition. In the French-speaking part of Belgium, another extreme-right party, the National Front, is running, but is not expected to match the Flemish Bloc's showing. □

Report: German cops brutalize foreigners in growing numbers*By Gil Sedan*

BONN, May 16 (JTA) — A new report by Amnesty International has pointed to a growing trend of German police brutality directed at foreigners living in Germany.

The organization checked complaints filed against the German police from January 1992 to March 1995, and found that Berlin police officers were responsible for more than half of the cases of maltreatment.

The report, publicized Tuesday, said the organization was "concerned" by a growing number of "beating, stepping and other forms of violence" that had caused damaged teeth, bleeding and broken bones.

A group of police officers concerned about abuses welcomed the report, calling it "the tip of the iceberg."

Further, foreigners who were subject to police mistreatment were prevented during their period of arraignment from contacting relatives, or to see a doctor, the report found. Police refused to accept complaints by the victims on their maltreatment.

In at least two cases, the injuries were so severe that the treatment amounted to torture, Amnesty said.

Even in cases in which official legal proceedings had been launched against police officers, only one in 20 ended with a sentence against the officer in question, according to the report.

"The identical testimonies and the regularity of the complaints led us to the consequence that it was not a matter of single events," Michael Butler of the international secretariat of Amnesty International said at a news conference Tuesday in Bonn. He said the findings were "particularly alarming" in the face of the growing number of anti-foreigner and racist incidents that have plagued Germany since its reunification in 1990. □