



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Presidential hopeful Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) ousted unpaid adviser Ed Rollins from his campaign as a result of a slur Rollins made against two Jewish politicians, according to a source in the Dole campaign. Rollins, speaking last week at a fund-raiser for California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, referred to California Reps. Howard Berman and Henry Waxman, both Democrats, as "those two Hymie boys."**

■ **Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat reaffirmed their commitment to meet a July 1 deadline for reaching agreement on the next stage of Palestinian self-rule. After holding a surprise meeting in Morocco, the two issued a statement indicating that by July 1, agreement would be reached on "the redeployment of the [Israeli] army, security arrangements, elections and the transfer of authority" in the West Bank. [Page 2]**

■ **Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, speaking during Jerusalem Day festivities marking 28 years since the city's reunification, declared that the city would remain united. "There aren't and won't be two Jerusalems," Rabin said. "It is ours and will remain ours."**

■ **Residents of the Golan Heights met with President Ezer Weizman to voice their anxieties over a possible Israeli pullout from the area. The area's residents became alarmed when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said last week that one Golan settlement might be dismantled in the first stage of an Israeli withdrawal from the area as part of an overall peace agreement with Syria. [Page 2]**

■ **A Paraguayan judge agreed to extradite six Lebanese men and a Brazilian woman to Argentina in connection with anti-Jewish terror bombings there. At least some of the suspects are believed to belong to the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement.**

■ **Israeli troops operating north of the security zone in southern Lebanon killed four members of the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement in a clash. There were no Israeli casualties.**

FAR FROM MOSCOW (Part 1 of 4)

Emigration signals paradox for autonomous Jewish region

By David Landau

BIROBIDZHAN, Russia (JTA) — Birobidzhan, an area in Russia established more than 60 years ago as the Jewish Autonomous Region, today epitomizes the paradox of renewed Jewish life in the former Soviet Union.

Along with the freedom to practice Judaism openly has come a sharp increase in the number of Jews making aliyah to Israel.

"Now that the Jewish autonomy has real meaning," says Birobidzhan's mayor, Vladimir Bolotnov, "people are leaving."

A destination for Jewish immigration since 1928 and officially designated the Jewish Autonomous Region by Stalin in 1934, Birobidzhan was long touted by the Soviet authorities as an example of flourishing Jewish life in the Soviet Union.

Yiddish, along with Russian, has been the official language in the 14,000-square-mile region.

A Yiddish newspaper, *Der Birobidzhaner Shtern*, or *Star*, appears daily. The sign over the railway station is in Yiddish. The main street of the town of 85,000 is named after famed Yiddish writer Sholom Aleichem, whose bust adorns the city library and museum.

In practice, though, the Yiddish language all but died in Birobidzhan, the name for both the city and the region, after Stalin's bloody purge of the region's first leaders in the late 1930's and his edict banning the teaching of Yiddish throughout the Soviet Union in 1949. Even after Stalin's death, the edict was never reversed.

The Jewish population, some 10 percent to 15 percent of the more than 2 million inhabitants, actually lived no differently from other Soviet Jews in the days before former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's sweeping liberalization of the country.

Birobidzhan's Jews were cut off from Israel and the Jewish world, forbidden to engage in their religion or culture and were constantly subjected to the Communist Party's virulently anti-Zionist line.

Profound changes for Birobidzhan's Jews

The only difference was that in Birobidzhan, this propaganda line was delivered in Yiddish as well as in Russian.

Birobidzhan was always cited by the Soviet government as proof that it was not engaged in systematic repression of Jewish religious practice and Zionist sentiment.

But the facade could never sustain close inspection — which explained the almost blanket ban on all foreign visitors to Birobidzhan, a ban that remained in force until the end of the 1980s.

With the gradual easing of restrictions under Gorbachev and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, however, living conditions for Birobidzhan's Jews changed profoundly.

Some of these changes were reflected in the pages of the *Shtern*.

In the past, the paper never uttered a word of Jewish content in its densely packed pages of Communist propaganda. In addition, the Yiddish employed by the paper was carefully neutered of all its Hebrew content and associations.

But much of that is now changed, as could be seen in this year's April 15 issue, when the paper devoted the top of its front page to Passover greetings from the governor of the region and from the Russian president's personal representative in Birobidzhan, Josef Nyechin, who is the scion of a well-known Jewish Birobidzhan family.

There have been other, equally dramatic changes.

Israeli visitors, as well as Jewish books, teaching aids and Passover matzot, began arriving here in 1989.

In the city library's Yiddish reading-room, Chabad Chasidic tracts now jostle for shelf space with Stalin's "On Leninism."

Hebrew, Yiddish and Jewish tradition are taught in Jewish schools to young people and adults who previously knew nothing of their faith and heritage.

The region's government, working in tandem with Israeli and

Diaspora Jewish organizations, is actively supporting and funding Jewish cultural programs.

Nyechin's sister, Anna, runs a government school where Yiddish, modern Hebrew and Israeli folk dancing are now optional subjects available to all students, Jews and non-Jews alike.

But now that Jewish autonomy is emerging as a reality after decades of a cynical sham, the area's residents are finding that their community can flourish only as long as there are Jews in Birobidzhan to enjoy and promote it.

Hundreds of families already have made aliyah to Israel, mainly to Ma'alot, Carmiel and Upper Nazareth in the Galilee. Hundreds more are actively planning to leave.

"They only go for economic reasons," says Bolotnov, the non-Jewish mayor who has visited Israel, where his town has as its sister city the Jewish-Arab city of Ma'alot.

"In our country, the time has come when each person can choose what he wants," says Bolotnov.

"I am not prepared to influence them to stay," he adds, "but, for those who do stay, we will help provide them with all they need to pursue their culture, their festivals and studies."

Some in Birobidzhan express resentment at the impact aliyah may have on the survival of their community.

Opponents of aliyah include regional officials whose status and livelihood are tied to the well-being of the Jewish Autonomous Region. Opponents also include Jews who are not contemplating aliyah for various personal or family reasons.

One Yiddish teacher at a Sunday school criticized a Jewish Agency program that encourages teen-agers to complete their high school studies in Israel.

The Jewish Agency representative in the area "wants to do away with Birobidzhan," says the teacher.

"But not everyone can leave," the teacher added. "We have to have culture for those who stay."

Another teacher in the school, who learned Hebrew at seminars in Israel and in Moscow, says she would like to make aliyah, but her husband, a gifted musician, fears that he may not find work in his field in Israel. To boost his income in Birobidzhan, he plays nightly at a local restaurant.

However, the couple are sending their eldest son to study in the high school program. They know that if the boy is successfully absorbed into Israeli life, the pull on them to move may one day be irresistible. □

Peres and Arafat reaffirm July 1 deadline commitment

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 29 (JTA) — During a surprise meeting held in Morocco over the weekend, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat reaffirmed their commitment to meet a July 1 deadline for reaching agreement on the next stage of Palestinian self-rule.

The declaration was made in a joint statement issued in the Moroccan capital of Rabat by Peres and Arafat, after four hours of discussions late Saturday night at the royal palace. The talks were mediated by Morocco's King Hassan II.

In the statement, the two said that by July 1, agreement would be reached on "the redeployment of the [Israeli] army, security arrangements, elections and the transfer of authority" in the West Bank.

An Arafat spokesman said Israel also "agreed to facilitate the transfer of goods and people across the border."

Israel has placed limits on the passage of goods from the Palestinian autonomy into Israel as a result of a recent series of terror attacks launched against Israelis by Islamic fundamentalist opponents of the peace process.

On Monday, after negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, a terminal for the passage of goods between Egypt and the autonomy opened at Rafah, located in the southern Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, in Cairo, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators convened Monday for another round of talks focusing on the transfer of control from Israel to the Palestinian Authority of more than eight areas of civilian responsibility.

Among the areas discussed were fuel, gas, trade, industry, postal services and insurance.

Relatedly, Israel Radio reported this week that senior Palestinian security officials toured the West Bank town of Jenin to survey the area in light of an Israel Defense Force withdrawal under the so-called "Jenin First" plan.

According to recent reports, the Israeli army will first redeploy from Jenin as part of a larger pullback from Arab population centers in the West Bank. □

Weizman, residents meet to discuss future of Golan

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, May 29 (JTA) — Reacting to recent statements by Israeli leaders about the future of the Golan Heights if peace is reached with Syria, Golan residents met with President Ezer Weizman to voice their anxieties over a possible Israeli pullout from the area.

Golan residents became alarmed when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said last week that one Golan settlement might be dismantled in the first stage of an Israeli withdrawal from the area as part of an overall peace agreement with Syria.

In addition, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres sparked public debate when he reportedly told King Hassan II of Morocco over the weekend that the Golan was "Syrian territory."

Peres later clarified his comments, which were reported in the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, by noting that all he meant was that Israel is currently on the Golan for security, not ideological, reasons.

Meanwhile, Rabin softened his stand Monday, telling the Labor Party Caucus that any withdrawal from the Golan would first be put to the people in a national referendum, a pledge he has made in the past.

The comments from Rabin and Peres created anxiety among Golan residents.

Some 11,000 Israelis now live on the Golan Heights, which was captured from Syria in 1967.

At Kibbutz El Rom, located near the Syrian border, residents described feeling tense and resentful that "we have to hear about these things in the media, and not directly from the government," as one resident told Israel Radio.

After their talks with Weizman, members of the Golan Resident's Council said they felt reassured that there was someone listening to them in the president's residence.

In another development, the Supreme Court on Monday ordered the resident's council to stop giving money to a public campaign aimed at getting Israelis to oppose a return of the Golan to Syria.

The temporary restraining order was handed down at the request of the Peace Now movement, which objects to municipal funds being used for political purposes.

The Golan regional council was given 15 days to explain why it is funding the campaign. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

T-shirts blowing on clotheslines focus attention on rape in Israel

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — There are T-shirts hanging on clotheslines across Israel these days that differ from the usual assortment seen on cords crisscrossing behind apartment buildings and villas.

These T-shirts, part of The Israel Clothesline Project, were created by women who have been raped, sexually abused or otherwise assaulted by their husbands, boyfriends and family members.

They are being displayed in a variety of venues — from the Knesset to a university to a concert hall — to raise consciousness about the damage done to women by assault.

On one T-shirt, hands cut from black cloth cover the face of a golden-haired woman who is standing next to a bed. The artist's feelings are emphatic: "You invaded my personal space. Jerry, I hate you!" it reads in Hebrew.

Another creator drew a heart and then tore a hole out of its center, along with a large male figure holding a stick over a smaller, female image.

Her words are drawn on it like a poem, each Hebrew clause given its own line: "We're the punching bag of our father, our brother, our uncle, our neighbor, anyone who wants to hit us." Two of the T-shirts have Arabic written on them, one is in Spanish, a few are in English and most are in Hebrew.

Daily average of 12 reported assaults

Nili Nimrod, the organizer of The Israel Clothesline Project, is devoted to bringing public attention to the issue of violence against women.

She described the project during a recent visit here. While in the United States, she attended a rally in Washington protesting cuts in government funding to programs serving women.

The rally included the display of many of the 260 clothesline projects from across the United States. Israel was the only foreign country to participate, Nimrod said.

As director of Israel's Association of Rape Crisis Centers, Nimrod also lobbies for legislation beneficial to women, runs educational seminars and fund raises for her projects.

Seven centers, from Eilat to Haifa, are part of the association. Israel's newest rape crisis center, in Kiryat Shmona, is in the process of joining, she said.

A ninth center, tailored to the needs of fervently Orthodox women and based at Jerusalem's Shaarei Tzedek hospital, does not belong because it obtained rabbinic permission to be a resource for these women on the condition that the founders not join any organization that is connected with non-religious women, Nimrod said.

The first hanging of Israel's 115 T-shirts took place in the Knesset in November and attracted the attention of the country's parliamentarians.

Soon after, it was displayed at Tzavta, a popular Tel Aviv concert hall, and at Bar Ilan University, which serves primarily Orthodox students, during a week devoted to assault awareness.

Nimrod said she plans to take the project into the middle of Israel's public spaces, where it will be seen by Israelis from all walks of life.

About 5,000 victims of rape, incest and other types of sexual assault — an average of 12 women each day — reported the assaults to the Israeli police and rape crisis centers last year, Nimrod said.

An estimated 80 to 90 percent of victims do not report their assault, said Nimrod, which means that be-

tween 60 and 120 women are sexually assaulted each day in Israel. "And this is supposed to be 'The Holy Land,'" she said sardonically.

Several characteristics of sexual assault are unique to Israeli society and culture, Nimrod said. Harassment and minor assaults are common on crowded public transportation, just as they are in Japan, she said.

And in fervently Orthodox or Arab cultures, "sexual assault is most likely to come from family members, doctors and teachers," she said.

"Date rape is less likely," since people in those cultures do not generally spend time with members of the opposite sex without a chaperon, she said. "They are also closed, traditional societies" in which women and children may not feel the right to speak up about being sexually assaulted, she said. "How aware are they that these things are inappropriate?"

Another uniquely Israeli aspect of the problem is the large proportion of incest that takes place in families who survived the Holocaust, she said.

In Holocaust survivor families there is often "a sacred quality" to such secrets, she said.

"Incest is the personal Shoah," she said, using the unique Hebrew term for the Holocaust.

She said there has been an increasing openness over the last few years for Israelis to consider the issue of sexual assault. Support groups for survivors of rape and incest began four years ago in Tel Aviv and in Haifa two years ago.

Five years ago, the Tel Aviv Rape Crisis Center initiated a hot line for male victims of sexual assault. In 1994, the hot line received more than 300 calls from men who were usually assaulted as children or teens, Nimrod said.

Eighty percent of the time their assailants were male; the female assailants are usually mothers or aunts, she said.

Aided by the staff and volunteers of rape crisis centers, Nimrod has begun conducting seminars on sexual harassment and assault at high schools and Israel Defense Force bases.

Schools call 'if something happens'

With the Ministry of Education, she is preparing a handbook on the topic for use by teachers. About 200 schools invited her staff to give seminars last year, but schools generally only call "if something happens," said Nimrod.

Although there has been a seminar on the topic for women in the army's basic training for the last five years, a pilot program about issues of sexual harassment and assault is about to be launched for both genders as part of the training course for officers.

"Until recently, crisis intervention was the emphasis but now we consider prevention just as important," Nimrod said.

Funding, however, is a problem, she said. The association's annual budget runs about \$70,000, she said, nearly all of which is raised from non-Israeli foundations, including U.S.-Israel: Women to Women and the New Israel Fund.

The rape crisis centers themselves range from tiny Ra'anana's \$10,000 budget, which funds a single, one-third-time worker who fielded more than 500 calls last year, to those in Tel Aviv and Haifa, which have budgets of about \$250,000 each.

About 6 percent of the money comes from Israel's national government, and another 12 percent from the local municipalities, said Nimrod. In contrast, she said, similar American services receive, on average, about 65 percent of their funding from government sources. □

Latest report on immigrants reduces number of non-Jews

By Uriel Masad

TEL AVIV, May 29 (JTA) — An ongoing debate within Israeli society about non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union took a new turn last week with the release of the latest figures by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

Contrary to a report published last month, which said more than 20 percent of the 530,000 olim, or new immigrants, who came from the former Soviet Union between 1990 and 1993 were non-Jews — the new report put the figure at less than 10 percent.

The new report is based on updated data from the Interior Ministry, which had issued the earlier report.

The earlier report had caused an uproar in Israel.

Although some had used the numbers to bolster support for a new system allowing for secular marriages and burials, Orthodox Knesset members and rabbis had countered by demanding a change in the Law of Return that would restrict the immigration of non-Jews to the Jewish state.

In an interview on Israel Radio, Yair Tsaban, minister of immigrant absorption, explained the discrepancy between the two reports, saying that only those olim who can prove their Jewish lineage beyond any doubt are registered as Jews by the Interior Ministry.

The rest are registered as either "other," referring to a Christian or Muslim background, or as "unknown."

A sizeable number of olim have difficulties proving their Jewishness, he said, either because they did not lead a Jewish life or because they have no documents or witnesses to testify to their Jewish lineage.

Tsaban said that in the previous report, the two categories — "other" and "unknown" — were added up and presented as non-Jews, which explains the higher figure.

Some non-Jews may be 'scared away'

The new report, based on the latest data, shows that many of those who were initially registered as unknown had since managed to prove their Jewishness.

Tsaban expressed concern over the declining number of non-Jews among the olim from the former Soviet Union during 1994.

"This may sound paradoxical, but I am concerned, as there are mixed marriages all over the world, and the message we should be sending is that our doors are open to all of them," he said on Israel Television.

"We don't want to keep the mixed marriages away; on the contrary, we want to bring them closer to us," he said.

"But I'm afraid that what happened here last year with burials, the horror stories of non-Jews who could not find burial grounds, and similar incidents, scared away the olim of mixed marriages from coming here," he said.

Tsaban also called on Israel's chief rabbis to do their utmost to help absorb the new olim.

He said the Orthodox community should stop objecting to civil marriages, at least for those who are prevented from getting married under Jewish law.

He also stressed that conversion to Judaism should be made readily available to anyone who wishes to convert, and that more flexible solutions should be found for providing circumcisions and secular burials to those who are not Jewish.

He concluded the television interview by welcoming the non-Jewish immigrants, adding that their "children will be raised here as good Jews and Israeli society will only benefit from them." □

Questions on whereabouts of Alois Brunner resurface

By Marta S. Halpert

VIENNA, May 29 (JTA) — Questions regarding the whereabouts of Alois Brunner have surfaced again.

Brunner served during World War II as personal secretary to Adolf Eichmann, Hitler's chief aide.

The person whom Eichmann once described as his "best man" orchestrated the deaths of some 128,000 Jews from Austria, Greece, France and Slovakia during the war years.

In an issue earlier this year of the German news-magazine Focus, Brunner's picture appeared as part of a list of Interpol's 12 most-wanted people.

According to the magazine, which quoted information from the Interpol center in Lyon, France, the former SS officer who was previously believed to be living undisturbed in Damascus, Syria, had obtained an Austrian passport under an assumed name and then moved to Argentina.

As far back as 1992, diplomats in Syria maintained that Brunner was dead.

A similar assessment was made by French lawyer and Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld.

If Brunner is alive, he would be 83.

After the appearance of the report in Focus, an Austrian diplomat in Cairo said the Austrian authorities had checked all passport applications since 1991 and had found no one who fit Brunner's age or other personal characteristics.

In April, the Spanish newspaper El Pais also published the Interpol most-wanted list, but claimed that Brunner was traveling on a German passport.

Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal, reacting to the Focus story, said in an interview that he was certain Brunner was still living somewhere in the Middle East.

He discounted reports that Brunner had obtained a false Austrian passport, saying, "Brunner's nationality was always registered as German, so he could neither obtain an old nor a new Austrian passport."

In the meantime, Karl Ollinger, a member of Austrian Parliament for the Green-Alternative Party, has filed a parliamentary request to Austrian Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schussel to learn whether Brunner had recently obtained an Austrian passport. □

Jewish bus in Moscow target of arson attack

By Alexandra J. Wall

NEW YORK, May 29 (JTA) — A school bus belonging to Gan Chama, a Jewish elementary school in Moscow, recently was the target of an arson attack.

Police are looking for suspects, but it has not yet been determined whether the crime was anti-Semitic in nature.

Hillel Zaltzman, president of the Chama organization in New York, said the bus had Jewish slogans and symbols painted on it.

He hinted that the attack probably was a hate crime.

"I don't believe that the police will do too much," Zaltzman said.

Gan Chama is said to be the first joint venture between Moscow's Jewish community and the Russian educational authority.

Some 150 children attend the school.

Chama also runs a Jewish community center and a soup kitchen in Moscow, among other programs, Zaltzman said. □